


INCLUSION OR EXCLUSION?
A CHRISTIAN ETHICAL INVESTIGATION INTO BIBLICAL
PERSPECTIVES ON HOMOSEXUALITY.

by

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The crest of the University of Stellenbosch is centered behind the text. It features a shield with a blue and gold design, topped by a red and white crest. The shield is flanked by two red lions.

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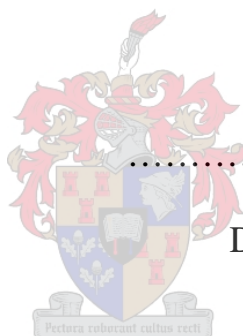
DECEMBER 2006

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part being submitted at any University for a degree.

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Signature



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Date

ABSTRACT

The debate on homosexuality has become increasingly painful and divisive between people of the Christian faith. A very relevant question is asked; *are homosexual people included in the ecclesial community?*

The aim of my research paper is to propose a way forward for the inclusion of homosexual people in the ecclesial community. Inclusion, however, does not imply legitimization of wrongs.

Conceptual clarifications are given in the definition of words such as; *ekklesia*, ethics and homosexuality.

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is used as an interpretive framework to illustrate that "evidence from four sources: scripture, tradition, reason and experience" is necessary when seeking guidance on complex moral issues.

The role of scripture in ethics, specifically with regard to the homosexuality debate is mentioned while the different interpretations of scriptures are discussed. Two dominant opposing approaches are identified, namely the conservative-traditional approach and the liberal approach.

The ethic of inclusion and the hermeneutic of hospitality is introduced. It is argued that inclusion and hospitality constitute the thrust of the ethics of the bible and the church through the ages. The point is made that the debate on homosexuality should take this broader ethic of inclusion and hospitality of the bible into consideration. One of the implications is that even though

dissensus exist among Christians on the meaning of the biblical texts that deal directly with homosexuality, consensus should exist that the broader biblical message, as well as the witness of the long church history, is one of inclusion and hospitality.

Heterosexual Christians are challenged to function with love, embrace and recognition of the full membership of homosexual brothers and sisters. The same challenge of love and embrace are directed to homosexual members of the body of Christ.



OPSOMMING

Die debat oor homoseksualiteit veroorsaak verdeeldheid tussen gelowiges en het toenemend pynvol begin word. 'n Baie belangrike vraag word gevra; *word homoseksuele mense ingesluit in die gemeenskap van die gelowiges?*

Die doel van hierdie navorsingstuk is om 'n rigting aan te wys wat homoseksuele gelowiges deelmaak en insluit in die kerk. Deelmaking beteken nie dat dit wat verkeerd is, nou wettig verklaar word nie.

Woorde soos *ekklesia*, etiek en homoseksualiteit word gedefinieer om die begrippe te verduidelik.

Wesley se viersydige metode van skrifuitleg word gebruik om komplekse aangeleenthede te vertolk. Hierdie metode word as noodsaaklik bestempel veral wanneer leiding benodig word rondom morele aangeleenthede.

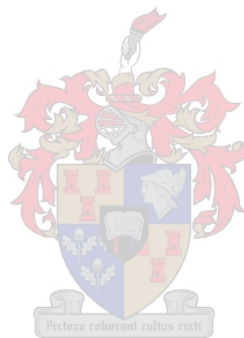
Twee oorheersende, teenoorgestelde posisies van skrifuitleg word geïdentifiseer, naamlik die *konserwatiewe-tradisionele* vertolking en die *liberale* vertolking.

Die etiek en skrifverklaring van gasvryheid word voorgestel. Die argument word aangevoer dat gasvryheid die kern van etiek is wat deur die jare in die bybel en in die kerk saamgestel is.

Alhoewel gelowiges nie saamstem met die verskeie skrifverklarings nie, behoort hulle saam te stem oor die wyer boodskap in die bybel, naamlik dat

die getuigenis van die lang kerk geskiedenis een is van deelname en gasvryheid.

Heteroseksuele Christene word uitgedaag om in liefde op te tree, om die homoseksuele gelowige te omhels en ten volle te aanvaar as mede lidmate in die gemeenskap van die gelowiges. Homoseksuele Christene word uitgedaag om met dieselfde liefde hulle heteroseksuele broer en suster te omhels.



KEYWORDS AND PHRASES

1. Homosexuality
2. Church – *ekklesia*
3. Ecclesial community
4. Ethics
5. Hospitality
6. Inclusion
7. Biblical perspectives
8. Conservative-traditional approach
9. Liberal approach
10. Inclusion of homosexual people in the ecclesial community



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1. BACKGROUND

“Homosexuality is compared to a fishbone caught in the church’s throat that the church can neither eject nor swallow entirely.”¹

Homosexuality is a very controversial issue in the twenty-first Century. The debate about homosexuality threatens to tear the church apart. Homosexuality has become a contentious issue to the churches as they wrestle with their identity and place in modern - post modern societies. This issue has become increasingly painful and divisive to people of the Christian faith who are on different sides of the debate. Bates very appropriately entitles this issue, the church at war. The battle is ostensibly over homosexuality but in reality it is about the status, interpretation and different exegetical conclusions of the bible. Bates sets out his agenda:

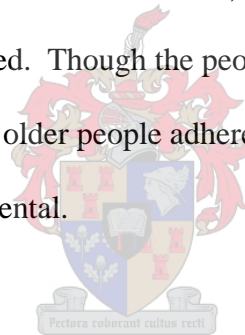
A book written for Anglicans and others interested in the church and its fate, in an attempt to explain how and why it has come to its present pass, threatened by the most serious split in its modern history over an issue that many people regard as being of, at best, secondary importance.²

In a community of believers a person of a homosexual sexual orientation finds it extremely difficult to be authentic in fear of being rejected. As an ordained Methodist minister of two vastly different societies (congregations), I find it

¹ Nugent, p7

² Bates, p1

extremely difficult to promote inclusion to one of the societies who consists of a generation of people who have lived their lives, to the point of having reached their goals in their careers, family and social lives. They are retired people who in fact boast that they do not need God for their daily bread. They are well provided for financially, their children are married and they have children, who at this young age show no inclinations of being attracted to the same sex. Homosexuality to them is unacceptable and an abomination to God and the minister should reinforce that. The texts regarding homosexuality are prescriptive to them and all believers should adhere, submit and obey them. If the minister would even remotely begin to think of including people of a different sexual orientation, threats of withholding their tithes and leaving the church are posed. Though the people in this congregation are older, the implication is not that only older people adhere to this rejection of homosexual persons. Age is merely coincidental.



The *right of admission reserved* - setting of a church is determined by the people who form the decision-making core. Pastorally it creates an unhealthy and unsafe atmosphere in the church which is ideally a 'hospital' for the sick and wounded according to the gospel of Jesus in Luke 4. By 'sick' I do by no means suggest at all that homosexual persons are *sick* because of their orientation, rather sick because of the rejection and wounds inflicted on them by the church and/or other people.

The other society (congregation) prefers to have an 'ostrich' attitude towards the issue of homosexuality. They bury their heads in the sand hoping that the issue will go away without facing it. Homosexuality is thus not spoken of and the silence and

ignorance rule the determined condition for Christians of this society. This society has been visited by people of a homosexual orientation but they do not want to get involved in the debate and therefore prefer to maintain a ‘see nothing, hear nothing’-attitude. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) has urged her members to contribute towards the debate on Christians and same – sex relationships.³

It remains extremely difficult for the shepherd of the flock to minister to a wounded sheep and to ‘release’ the sheep into a fold with elements of judgment, condemnation and rejection. The church does not seem to be a safe place for a wounded sheep to be granted the space, opportunity and atmosphere to become whole or well and to find a place to belong.

Questions concerning homosexuality and the church are causing Christians to be in dire straits. The two fundamental incompatible positions continue to be held with animosity tenaciously. The one position asserts that homosexuality is acceptable and the other position rejects homosexuality and often the homosexual person too. The war seems to be focusing on the legitimacy of homosexuality rather than on the underlying need of the homosexual Christian and it has rendered the debate about homosexuality incapable of resolution.

³ The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) is at work in their preparation of a document entitled, *Christians and same-sex relationships: A discussion guide for the Methodist people of Southern Africa*. DEWCOM, (Doctrine, Ethics and Workshop Committee of the MCSA) has been given a mandate by Conference 2003 to receive responses and to develop a formal paper on the subject for presentation and consideration by 2005. By 2005 DEWCOM could not present the completed paper and requested that further work be done before the final document could be presented. Extension has been given.

Schisms are at the order of the day, families are torn between parent and child, brother and sister, family and friends. The ambiguity of scriptures and the different viewpoints on homosexuality in the church are leading the believers into an era of a deeper search for meaning, a search for clarity of the scriptures. Due to misunderstanding, ignorance and misinterpretation of scripture and the diversity of different exegetical presentations, the issue of homosexuality has become a contentious issue in the life of the church (*ekklesia*).

In the heart of the debate is not merely the question whether homosexuality is sin or not, but also whether homosexual persons should be included in the community of faith, whether they should enjoy the acceptance and hospitality of heterosexual believers.



2. RESEARCH QUESTION

Against the background of conflicting interpretations of scripture on the question of homosexuality, this study poses the question whether homosexual people are included in the ecclesia, i.e. the church. The research question can be specifically formulated as follows:

Are homosexual people included as full members in the ecclesial community?

Does an ethic of hospitality pave the way for the inclusion of homosexual people in the church? Does the notion of inclusion offer a hermeneutical key for interpreting the various biblical passages that deal directly and indirectly with homosexuality?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A literature study is conducted to gather all available information to compare different interpretations of the issue of homosexuality. New and Old Testament scholars have different exegetical explanations of passages that deal with homosexuality. Two prominent and conflicting approaches are identified namely the conservative - traditional approach and a liberal approach. Works of authors that adhere to these approaches will be investigated. Ethical works on inclusion and hospitality are dealt with in the ethic of inclusion and hospitality.



4 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

In this section some central concepts of this study are briefly defined, namely ekklesia, ethics and homosexuality.

Since these concepts are central in the study, a better understanding of them will lend clarity to the broader argument of the thesis.

4.1 THE CHURCH - *ekklesia*

When we look at defining church for this study I would prefer to use the word

ekklesia to distinguish the church from merely different denominations and to refer to the New Testament Church universally.

Lind describes the word for church, '*ekklesia*'. It was a common word in the first century Rome. It meant 'to tend to the affairs of the gathered.' *Ekklesia* is derived from two words; '*Kaleo*' which comes from the verb 'to call' and '*ek*' which is combined with the preposition 'out of'. *Ekklesia* simply means an assembly of citizens who attend to the affairs of the assembled. The early Christians found in this term a helpful way of expressing their own sense of identity to their world. They were a called-together or called-out-of people. They had been called out of the world by the gospel – or good news – of Jesus Christ for the purpose of belonging and consecration to God.⁴

A closer understanding of the meaning and purpose of the 'church' is required in order to understand the influence and impact she has on the wider community and particularly the ecclesial community. Millard, in her UNISA guide defines 'church' in the origin from the Greek word *ekklesia* which means the gathering together of believers of Jesus Christ.

According to her, when Jesus ascended to heaven, he did not leave behind an institution called 'the church'. Instead, he left behind a community of believers led by twelve men who were trusted with the task of spreading the good news of the gospel. From this beginning grew the institution we know today as 'the church'. Each one of us belongs to a different branch of the Christian community, but we all belong to the church of Jesus Christ.⁵

⁴ Lind, p1

⁵ Millard, p1

People seek a place to belong; homosexual people seek a place to belong. With the rise of the Metropolitan Churches, a place of belonging was created for people of a homosexual orientation throughout the world, South Africa included. Yet it has become a segment of the greater church and we remain with the struggle of not being ‘one, holy, catholic, apostolic’ church as referred to by McGrath as ‘marks’ of the Christian church. The four adjectives are describes as ‘one’; *one* being a unity, to be part of a greater whole, the term ‘*holy*’ acquires the association with morality, sanctity and ethical behavior, ‘*catholic*’, is more described as the universal, all embracing church extending throughout the world. ‘*Apostolic*’ is restricted to Christian use, it is the church planted in the world by the Apostles, as adhering to the teaching of the apostles, carrying on the succession of apostolic ministry.⁶

Shillington states that Jesus Christ planned the *ekklesia* as a new humanity standing alongside the old. The new covenant in Christ’s blood produced a new community. When the writers of the New Testament simply *assume* the formation of the *ekklesia* through evangelism it is because they have caught the meaning of Jesus’ plan to create a new community. New Testament evangelism resulted in the formation of a new community as surely as day follows night (Acts 2:41). Paul’s missionary journeys did not result in converts here and there, but in the *ekklesia* everywhere. Membership in the *ekklesia* was not an optional fringe benefit of the gospel; it was the goal of the gospel.⁷

⁶ McGrath, p12

⁷ Shillington, p3

According to Nelson *ekklesia* as a non-institution was first used of the Christian community gathered at Jerusalem, cf. Acts 5:11, Acts 8:1, 3. They were gathered at Jerusalem and were still going to the synagogue or the temple at the time. Because they were a community which had received the Spirit of the Messiah, they were a Christian community. The *ekklesia* is not divided into smaller units. It is not the *ekklesia* added which makes the *ekklesia*, but rather the *ekklesia* is found in every *ekklesia*. And yet one can speak of each individual *ekklesia* as *ekklesia*.⁸

In continuing with the greater understanding of the New Testament Church, Miller speaks of the modern *ekklesia* as a community that consists of persons who in their varied ways and relationships live lives of service to God. It is *in* community that our interpretation of scripture happens. It is what we say and do together.⁹

People who are bound together by a common denominator, namely Jesus Christ, seek to gather together to share their faith and way of life in a communal setting, namely the *ekklesia*, the church.

The *ecclesial community* is subject to the four ‘marks’ of the church and one of the ‘marks’ which influences the inclusion of homosexual people to the community is clearly the ‘holy’ aspect. Referring to the ethical understanding of ‘holy’ we find that a clear definition of ‘ethics’ becomes a stepping stone to the

⁸ Nelson,p36

⁹ Miller, p2

beginning of a journey required for all Christians as part of a *holy ecclesial community*.

4.2 ETHICS

There are various definitions to ethics, with variations to ‘ethos’ and ‘moral’ all in conjunction with behavior that makes a person *holy* and separates him/her from the secular world. Kretschmar defines ethics as what we perceive to be right or wrong, good or bad. A Christian theological ethic can be defined as an understanding of what ought to be, a willingness on the part of individual believers to be saved and to become disciples of Jesus Christ, and a commitment on the part of both individual believers and communities to practice their faith with reference to human, social and physical reality.¹⁰

Barclay however defines ethics as ‘the science of behavior’.¹¹

Frankena approaches ethical thinking or ethical investigation by referring to points that Socrates laid down, namely how to approach any question ethically. Firstly, we must not let our decision be determined by our emotions, but must examine the question and follow the best reasoning. We must try to get our facts straight and to keep our minds clear. Secondly, we cannot answer moral or ethical questions by appealing to what people generally think. They may be wrong. The only question we need to answer is whether what is proposed is right or wrong, not what will happen to us, what people think of us, or how we feel

¹⁰ Kretschmar, p10

¹¹ Barclay, p22

about what has happened. Having said this, Socrates goes on to give, in effect, a threefold argument to show that he ought not to break the laws of escaping.

First: we ought never to harm anyone. Socrates' laws of escaping would harm the state, since it would violate and show disregard for the state's laws.¹²

Second: if one remains living in a state when one could leave it, one tacitly agrees to obey its laws; hence if Socrates were to escape he would be breaking an agreement, which is something one should not do.

Third: one's society or state is virtually one's parent and teacher, and one ought to obey one's parents and teachers. In each of these arguments Socrates appeals to a general moral rule or principle which upon reflection, he and his friend Crito accepts as valid: (1) that we ought never to harm anyone, (2) that we ought to keep our promises, and (3) that we ought to obey or respect our parents and teachers. In each case he also uses another premise which involves a statement of fact and applies the rule or principle to the case in hand: (1a) if I escape, I will do harm to the society, (2a) if I escape, I will be breaking a promise, and (3a) if I escape, I will be disobeying my parents and teachers. Then he draws a conclusion about what he should do in his particular situation. This is a typical pattern of reasoning in moral matters.¹³

Barton speaks of ethical approaches and explorations and says that obedience to the declared will of God is probably the strongest model for ethical obligation in most books of the Hebrew Scriptures.¹⁴

¹² Frankena, p2

¹³ Ibid, p2

¹⁴ Barton, p47

Villa-Vicencio says that an ethic of responsibility accepts that the demands of the actual situation or context are as important as the ethical norms on which one draws in deciding on what is morally right.¹⁵

In his book Stout refers to Nielsen's argument that we could not know that God is good or that a given being deserves the title *God* without first knowing, on independent grounds, some criteria of goodness other than being in accordance with God's will. This contributes to the larger argument of ethics without God, which shows at most that God's will cannot function as a moral criterion all by itself.¹⁶

Bonhoeffer says that the knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection.¹⁷

This brief outline demonstrates responsibilities in how to deal with the choices between right and wrong, good and bad, that Christians have to make. Ethics, however, also focuses on the type of person and character that we are. The different approach to ethics emphasizes the dimension of ethical reflection. South African ethicists like Robert Vosloo and Nico Koopman have recently focussed on this important approach.

Koopman and Vosloo use the term "moral orientation" rather than the words "moral formation" for the sake of preventing misunderstandings around these words. They emphasize that it is important to understand that "moral orientation"

¹⁵ Villa-Vicencio, p75

¹⁶ Stout, p112

¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, p47

is not meant to be the security that is found in solid, unwavering principles or ever valid answers.¹⁸

Their main idea is that moral orientation in the Christian sense is not a primary orientation with regards to boundaries, principles, rules, laws etc, but it is an orientation from within a relationship. It is from the relationship with the God who became human that a person's moral orientation has its origin. Christian ethics and morality can not be separated from this relationship, nor can it exist outside of this relationship.¹⁹

In this study both the decision and person – character dimensions of ethics will be focussed upon.

4.3 HOMOSEXUALITY



The understanding of who the homosexual person is varies from different kinds of definitions. Not all people are clear about the definition of the word homosexuality. The word 'homosexual' in the scriptures were only used in the late 19th century when the term was coined by a Hungarian physician, Karolyn Maria Benkert who wrote in German. It was only introduced into the English language in 1891.

The word homosexual was not used but the phenomenon of sex between people of the same sex was known.

¹⁸ Koopman, p9

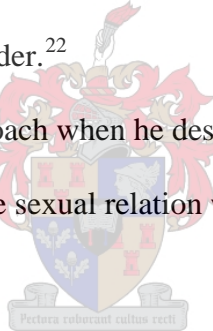
¹⁹ Ibid, p9

Thatcher explains that the word 'gay', which referred to courtly love and later same-sex attraction was derived from the 19th century Provençal word 'gai'.²⁰

It is commonly known and it is confirmed by Wogaman that the word 'lesbian' originates from the name of the island of 'Lesbos' in the Aegean Sea where the home of the ancient Greek poetess Sappho was who lived in 600BC. Her poetry mainly described the love between women.²¹

The Wikipedia defines homosexuality in the original sense as a sexual orientation characterized by lasting aesthetic attraction, romantic love, or sexual attraction for others of the same sex or gender.²²

Bahnsen has a different approach when he describes homosexuality as; 'an affectional attraction or active sexual relation with a person of the same gender'.²³



Siker refers to a homosexual *orientation* and defines it as:

A homosexual orientation does not reflect a distortion of God's intentions for human sexuality; rather, it is simply another expression of human sexuality along with heterosexuality. The issue is not homosexuality per se, but how one gives expression to one's sexuality, just as this is the case for heterosexuality.²⁴

²⁰ Thatcher, p127

²¹ Wogaman, p2

²² www.wikipedia.com

²³ Bahnsen, p3

²⁴ Siker, p179

Stott says that we have grown accustomed to distinguish between a homosexual inclination or ‘inversion’ (for which people may not be responsible) and homosexual physical practices (for which they are). The importance of this distinction goes beyond the attribution of responsibility to the attribution of guilt. We may not blame people for what they are, for we may for what they do.²⁵

5. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The debate in the universal church around homosexuality differs from one denomination to another. The MCSA is still at work on the issue of same-sex relationships. As an ordained Methodist minister I would like to contribute towards the debate through my research around the inclusion or exclusion of homosexual people in the New Testament Church, referred to in this research as the *ecclesial community*.

The purpose and aim of the research is to give guidelines for dealing with the dominant opposing interpretations of scripture. This can be achieved by developing an ethic and hermeneutic of inclusion and hospitality.

6. STRUCTURE OF STUDY - CHAPTER DIVISION

Chapter one of this study deals with the background, research question, methodology and aim of the research. It also clarifies important concepts.

²⁵ Stott:1999, p384

In Chapter two the Wesleyan Quadrilateral will be discussed in detail. This chapter explains how the quadrilateral can be used in dealing with ethical matters, specifically with homosexuality.

Chapter three discusses the role of scripture in ethics, specifically with regard to the homosexuality debate. Different interpretations of scriptures are discussed. The conservative-traditional and liberal approaches towards this subject are clearly indicated in this chapter.

In chapter four the ethic of inclusion and hospitality is introduced. It is argued that inclusion and hospitality constitute the thrust of the ethics of the bible and the church through the ages. The point is made that the debate on homosexuality should take this broader ethic of inclusion of the bible into consideration. Some implications of this position will be suggested. One of the implications is that even though dissensus exist among Christians on the meaning of the biblical texts that deal directly with homosexuality, consensus should exist that the broader biblical message, as well as the witness of the long church history, is one of inclusion and hospitality. Inclusion, however does not imply legitimization of wrongs.

In chapter five a concluding overview is offered and some directives for a way forward are spelled out.

CHAPTER 2: THE WESLEYAN QUADRILATERAL – THE PLACE OF SCRIPTURE IN RELATION TO TRADITION, REASON AND EXPERIENCE:

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is used as an interpretive framework to illustrate that “evidence from four sources: scripture, tradition, reason and experience” is necessary when seeking guidance on complex moral issues. Some critical views on the quadrilateral are also discussed before concluding remarks are offered.

The Wesleyan quadrilateral is a distinctive method that formulates Christian views, values, and provides a way of thinking about controversial issues by interweaving interpreted lines of evidence from four sources; Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience. The term itself was coined by twentieth century American Methodist, Albert C. Outler in his introduction to the 1964 collection *John Wesley*. Instead of basing his convictions on any one of these, Wesley interpreted and drew on evidence from all four, even although he did not give equal weight to all four pillars. John Wesley insisted that the bible remains the Christian’s primary source of truth and value.

In answering the research question, *are homosexual people included in the ecclesial community?* I will apply the Wesleyan Quadrilateral as a tool to find a way forward in the homosexual debate. The quadrilateral however is based on four pillars which would bring this research to insurmountable length and therefore I will base this

research mostly on the primary pillar, namely Scripture. I will however briefly explain the method according to its four pillars, namely scripture, reason, tradition and experience.

2. SCRIPTURE

When we have become accustomed to looking at scripture in a particular fashion it makes us uncomfortable when we discover that the different ways of scriptural interpretation actually changes our understanding of just what certain scriptures meant to us before and how they have shaped us as members of an *ecclesial community*.

Hays says that obedience must precede understanding. Athanasius formulates this hermeneutical dictum in terms of the character of the individual interpreter, but Hauerwas extends Athanasius's logic to the character of the church as an interpretive community. The most important task of the church is 'to be a community capable of hearing the story of God we find in the scripture and living in a manner that is faithful to that story'. Readings of scripture that occurs outside of the context of the church of a character-forming community will merely underwrite 'the ideology of a politics quite different from the politics of the church', in other words, such readings will promote individualism, self-indulgence, and violence. Only a community already formed by the story of the kingdom of God can begin to read scripture rightly.²⁶ It is not an issue of whether the bible should be read politically, but an issue of which politics should determine our reading as Christians.²⁷

²⁶ Hays, p255

²⁷ Hauerwas:1993, p15

Steinmetz focuses our attention on Jowett's interpretation of scripture, who says that:

Scripture has one meaning – the meaning which it had in the mind of the prophet or evangelist who first uttered or wrote, to the hearers or readers who first received it. Scripture could be interpreted like any other book, and later accretions and venerated traditions surrounding its interpretations, should, for the most part be brushed aside or severely discounted. 'The true use of interpretations is to get rid of interpretations and leave us alone with the author'.²⁸

Hauerwas says that that there can be no proper interpretation of scripture apart from the interpretations sanctioned by community tradition. It is important to understand that Hauerwas reflects that one should never set scripture and tradition in opposition to one another or subordinates scripture to tradition. Rather, tradition embodies the meaning of scripture, or – perhaps more accurately – scripture is carried to us through the medium of tradition in such a way that there can be no 'scripture' apart from that tradition. There is no access to the truth of the bible through any other method or medium, for 'the church creates the meaning of scripture'.²⁹

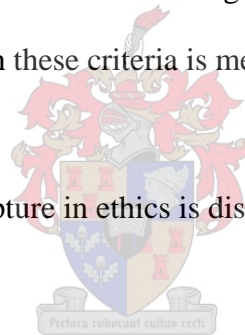
In his approach to scripture Nelson stresses the importance of two questions that need to be asked. Firstly, what did the text mean? In answering that question one has to keep in mind what the author was trying to say. The questions that the author was

²⁸ Steinmetz, p65

²⁹ Hauerwas, p113

asking and the historical context influences the hermeneutical way of approaching scripture. It is also important to look at the literary form the author was using. Only in wrestling with the first question and gaining some insight can one move on to the second question. The second question; what does the text mean for us today? Through the exegetical studies of the quoted scriptures on homosexuality one has to consider the relevance of the text for us now and that depends further on two additional questions; Is the text consistently in harmony with our best understanding of the greater theological-ethical message of the bible as interpreted through the best insights of the church's long tradition and our reason and experience? The question is whether the situation that the author addresses is genuinely comparable to our situation today? It is only when these criteria is met that the text is ethically compelling for us.³⁰

In chapter three the role of scripture in ethics is discussed in more detail.



3. REASON

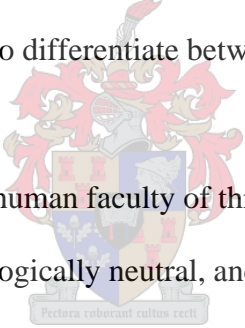
Reason refers to understanding the world through scientific research. Reason is a necessary tool in weighing the intelligibility of the text and to convey the message of scripture through other influences, e.g. Philosophical reflection.

Hays shows that by the middle of the seventeenth century, especially in England and Germany, a new attitude began to develop. It was argued that Christianity was reasonable. The new school differed from Thomas Aquinas who understood this to mean that faith rested securely upon rational foundations. The new school of thought

³⁰ Nelson, p79

had different ideas. If faith is rational, they argued, it must be capable of being deduced in its entirety by reason. Every aspect of faith, every item of Christian belief, must be shown to derive from human reason. What this school of thought then says is that reason came to be regarded as being capable of what is right without any assistance of revelation and in that Christianity has to follow. When reason could tell us all we could possibly wish to know about God, the world and ourselves, the working of the Holy Spirit of revelation, by conviction is not accepted. This gives total competence to human reason and depreciates the Christian doctrine of revelation in Jesus Christ through scripture.

McGrath emphasizes the need to differentiate between 'reason and 'rationalism'. He explains it as follows:



Reason is the basic human faculty of thinking, based on argument and evidence. It is theologically neutral, and poses no threat to faith – unless it is regarded as the only source of knowledge about God. It then becomes rationalism, which is an exclusive reliance upon human reason alone, and a refusal to allow any weight to be given to divine revelation.³¹

Wesley considers reason to be of utmost importance to the point of saying that to renounce reason is to renounce religion. Religion and reason go hand in hand and all irrational religion is a false religion. In ethical discernment there is room for reason as McGrath and Wesley use it.

³¹ McGrath, p181

4. TRADITION

The pillar of Tradition in the Wesleyan quadrilateral does not refer to general cultural customs but it refers specifically to the church's practices of worship, doctrine and ethics over time. The writings of theologians such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and Wesley form part of the Christian tradition.

McGrath explains tradition as the way the Lord's commandments are kept. He continues to explain that the Gospel was handed on in two ways and the continuation of the gospel forms the tradition of the church.

McGrath explains the two ways as follows:

1. Orally, by the apostles who handed it on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received – whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit.
2. In writing, by those apostles and others associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing.³²

In order that the full and living gospel might always be preserved in the church the apostles left bishops as their successors. Indeed the apostolic teaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time. This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit is called tradition. Through tradition, the church, her doctrine, life and

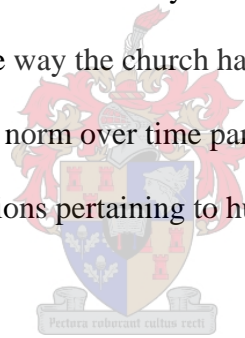
³² McGrath, p185

worship perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.³³

Möhlér explains tradition in the objective sense, to be ‘the general faith of the church throughout all ages, manifested by outward historical testimonies; in this sense, tradition is usually termed by the norm, the standard of scriptural interpretation – the rule of faith’.³⁴

Christian tradition plays a critical role in ethical reflection on sexual matters, specifically on the question of homosexuality.

Nelson refers to tradition as the way the church has responded over time. He suggests that there has been no constant norm over time particularly with regards to sexual expression and in asking questions pertaining to human sexuality, tradition is expressed.³⁵



According to Boswell a careful examination of tradition yields a negative answer.

Definitely for the two centuries, the early church did not generally oppose homosexual behavior as such. The opposition that did arise during the third to sixth century was in principal theological. The demise of urban culture and the increase of government regulation of personal morality and the general pressure placed on people from the church’s side moved them into the direction of asceticism.³⁶

³³ McGrath, p185

³⁴ Möhlér, p112

³⁵ Nelson, p238

³⁶ Boswell, p39

Persecution against homosexual people disappeared and in the eleventh century homosexual literature and leadership in both secular society and in the church reappeared. In the late twelfth century hostility surfaced and it is now part of the general intolerance and rejection by a minority of people and their presumed association with religious heresies. In the minds of some people the fallacy of homosexual people always being scorned and rejected and disapproved carries through in present times. Yet taking a closer look at tradition, evidence of remarkable acceptance is found.

The same surprising evidence regarding marriage and singleness are found in Christian tradition.

Modern times set the norm of heterosexual marriage as the appropriate sexual pattern. This however differs from the church's beginnings to the sixteenth century reformation where singleness and celibacy was acquired above marriage. In much the same way procreation has been prevalent as the primary function of sexual expression which then defeats sex as an act of enjoyment to be the crown of human intimacy.

The church's tradition may not always give definite guidance to Christian sexual behavior or expression but it challenges our significant wisdom and refocuses our perspectives.³⁷

A lot can be learned from Christian tradition in order to deal with contemporary moral challenges like homosexuality.

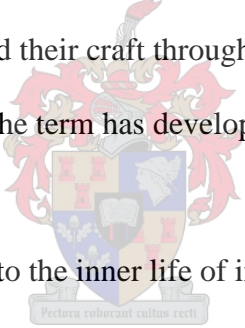
³⁷ Nelson, p83-84

5. EXPERIENCE

Experience is not just the religious experience of individuals but also the experience of the *ecclesial* community as members of the church. Some experiences may claim normative status in the interpretation of scripture while others proclaim liberty from oppression and captivity.

McGrath says that ‘experience’ is an imprecise term. The origins of the word are relatively well understood, it derives from the Latin term *experiential*, which could be interpreted as ‘that which arises out of traveling through life’. In this broad sense it means ‘an accumulated body of knowledge, arising through first hand encounter with life’. When one speaks of ‘an experienced doctor or teacher’, the implication is that the teacher or doctor has learned their craft through first-hand application.³⁸

McGrath continues to say that the term has developed an acquired meaning and he describes it as follows:



It has come to refer to the inner life of individuals, in which those individuals become aware of their own subjective feelings and emotions. It relates to the inward and subjective world of experience, as opposed to the outward world of everyday life. Christianity is not simply ideas; it is about the interpretation and transformation of the inner life of the individual.³⁹

³⁸ Nelson, p182

³⁹ McGrath, p189

Nelson says that experience by itself is not reliable nor does it give a constant picture. Without the ratification of the textual insight, experience, reason and tradition, scriptural insight remain abstract and without conviction.⁴⁰

Wesley believed that the Holy Spirit within us confirms God's truth through our experience. Specific experiences with regard to homosexuality determine different approaches to this issue, e.g. homophobia, heterosexism, and patriarchy.

Larson says:

We must encourage our interpretations of evidence from scripture to correct and inform our interpretations of evidence from tradition, reason and experience. We must also encourage our interpretations of evidence from each of them to correct and inform our interpretation of scripture. This interchange, this give and take among our various interpretations, must continue until we reach an appropriate equilibrium that does as much justice as possible, for now, to all the relevant considerations.⁴¹

6. SOME PERSPECTIVES ON THE QUADRILATERAL

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral does not compel us to integrate scripture, reason, tradition and experience. Rather it invites us to form our own interpretations of the evidence gathered from each of the four pillars. Larson makes a profound statement in that the Quadrilateral is significant in its application; 'if our interpretations of scripture are sound, they will dovetail with our interpretations of tradition, reason and

⁴⁰ Nelson, p137

⁴¹ Larson, p2

experience. Likewise, if our interpretations of tradition, reason and experience are sound, they will fit with our interpretations of scripture.’⁴²

Jones’ preliminary assumption has been that scripture possesses a normative place in the movement, and that experience, reason, and tradition possesses relative weight. It is assumed that scripture brings experience, for example, under its regulative influence; while experience replicates the biblical standards of spirituality and ethics. Wesley frequently states that scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) ought to determine Christian teaching. Jones suggests that scripture in the Wesleyan quadrilateral is primary whilst the other pillars, tradition, reason and experience are secondary to the application of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral in particular controversial issues.⁴³

I agree with Jones that scripture forms the main pillar of the quadrilateral and that reason, tradition and experience are subject to scripture. The other pillars do not carry equal or merely the same weight than scripture. Scripture is the foundation of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and determines the conclusion of any moral issue.

Hays says that scripture can never occur in a vacuum and the bible is therefore read under the formative influence of some particular tradition, using the light of reason and experience and attempting to relate the scripture to a particular historical situation.⁴⁴

McGrath approaches scripture from a different angle. He refers to an approach associated with the 2nd century writer Marcion:

⁴² Ibid, p1

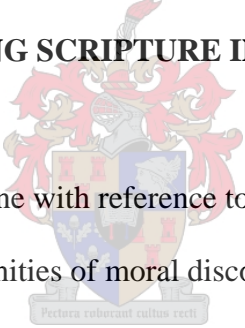
⁴³ Jones, p3

⁴⁴ Hays, p22

‘According to Marcion Christianity was a religion of love, which had no place whatsoever for law. The Old Testament God, who merely created the world, was obsessed with the idea of law. The New Testament God, however redeemed the world, and was concerned with love. According to Marcion the purpose of Christ was to depose the Old Testament God, and usher in the worship of the true God of grace.’⁴⁵

Although Luther insists that both the Old and New Testament relate to the actions of the same God, he nevertheless insists upon the total opposition of law and grace.⁴⁶

7. GUIDELINES FOR USING SCRIPTURE IN ETHICS



Jan Botha gives a clear guideline with reference to the use of the bible in ethics. Christian churches are communities of moral discourse and discernment, in which the moral question “What ought we to do?” is asked. In many different ways the bible is involved in this continuing moral discourse and discernment of the church. As the classical document of Christian origins, the bible continues to play a role when Christians seek to answer moral and ethical questions.⁴⁷

There are different approaches to apply the bible in relation to ethics and to present day situations and because of the diversity of the application of scripture in ethics, Botha offers four approaches:

⁴⁵ McGrath, p163

⁴⁶ Ibid, p163

⁴⁷ Botha:1994, p36

7.1 A prescriptive approach

For Christians following this approach, scripture in its literary form has authority in matters of faith and conduct. The bible is prescriptive and therefore authoritative for their way of life. The details of the bible are directly applied as prescriptive to an existing present situation.

This approach fails to do justice to the New Testament because it does not consider the existence of the historical, cultural and literary context of the time in which the bible originated. In congruence to the present the context is not considered either. The New Testament can not only be viewed as a law book because it would distort the contents of the whole literature of the book.⁴⁸

7.2 An ethic of principles or ideals



Contrary to the prescriptive approach, an ethic of principles or ideals approach scripture as not being literal or having a binding force on the Christian. This approach can best be explained according to Reinhold Niebuhr's description of a biblical morality approach according to the 'law of love'. This may be all good and well compared to the total opposite of the prescriptive approach but it reduces the value and diversity of New Testament teaching to a limited number of moral principles.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Botha:1994, p36

⁴⁹ Ibid, p41

7.3 “Revealed reality” rather than “Revealed morality”

According to Botha, Karl Barth spearheaded a revolution in European theology in his different approach to the ‘application’ of the bible to current issues. Other theologians followed him and emphasized that the bible is not the revelation of a morality, but the revelation of the living God. Christian ethics, therefore, has to think not about morality reduced to propositions, but about God and how life ought to be properly related to God’s power and presence. The bible points first of all towards the living God. Ethics requires obedience to a person and not to a proposition.⁵⁰

7.4 Relationality and responsibility



This approach builds directly upon the revealed reality rather than the revealed morality approach. It focuses the attention on the believer’s response to his or her creator, who has given them the gift of faith. The bible has to be used in such a way that it helps the ecclesial community to interpret God rather than scriptures as a directive to guide towards moral living. It then becomes a faith response propagated from knowing God and being shaped through the bible.⁵¹

Other important theologians give helpful guidelines of the use of scripture in ethics. Their thinking concurs in different ways with that of Botha.

⁵⁰ Botha:1994, p41

⁵¹ Ibid, p.41

Fowl says that scripture is rather to be pursued for meaning of the text than interpreted for situation. Scripture not only shapes political contexts of faithful interpretation, it also tells us who God is and how we ought to live in relation to that God.⁵²

The debate on homosexuality in the church has enhanced the fact that there are different ethical approaches to the authority and interpretation of scripture.

Adam says that people have their own different opinions with regards to homosexuality and sexual activity outside the marriage, some people express annoyance with the entire process of homosexuality and the church. “Why does God care about who I sleep with? Some responded to their own question with the words of the old song, “*Ain’t nobody’s business but my own*”, even though such a stance presumptuously banish the God to whom “all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid” from involvement in our sexual lives. Other participants flattened the complexity of theological deliberation into a bald assertion that “if the Bible says it, we have to do it”.⁵³

There are two dominant opposing approaches to diversify the debate.

Firstly, the conservative-traditional approach of scholars who insist that the Levitical laws and the Pauline condemnations of homosexual behavior are

⁵² Fowl, p37

⁵³ Adam, p123

obligatory because it is scriptural. They insist that the church can never sanction relationships of a homosexual nature.

Secondly, there are the ‘modernists’ who argue that scientific research has shown that homosexuality is not a matter of choice, but by birth and that the scriptures are condemning homosexual rape and homosexual promiscuity and not same-sex love. There is no scriptural evidence of Jesus speaking on this matter at all and Christ’s command to love one another as he has loved us implies that we should love our homosexual neighbor as ourselves.

In accordance to Barclay’s definition of ethics as ‘the science of behavior’ and Barton’s view that obedience is to be the declared will of God, is probably the strongest model for ethical obligation and brings some understanding to the fundamentalist’s way of approaching scripture.⁵⁴ Yet, when I reflect on Bonhoeffer’s statement that ‘the knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection’, I question the fundamentalists view in that there is no evil found in a same-sex love relationship.⁵⁵

Birch speaks of the divergence of biblical studies and Christian ethics. He explains it as follows:

The bible is more important for helping the Christian community to interpret the God whom it knows its existential faith than it is for giving a revealed morality that is to be translated and applied in the contemporary

⁵⁴ Barclay, p67

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, p111

world. The Christian moral life is not a response to moral imperatives but to a person, the living God. The bible makes known not a morality but a reality. The growing divergence between biblical studies and Christian ethics also contributes to a growing gap between biblical resources and ethical concerns in the life of the church.⁵⁶

The question, *are homosexual people included in the ecclesial community?* depends mainly on the interpretation of scripture. By using an ethic of inclusion and hospitality towards an answer brings equilibrium to the situation. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is applied for the interpretation of scripture. What is scripture saying on the issue of homosexuality and the church?

Nelson states that not many texts in scripture – perhaps seven at the most – speak directly about homosexual behavior. We have no evidence of Jesus’ teachings on or concern with the issue. The subject, obviously, is not a matter of major scriptural preoccupation. In comparison for example to the incidence of texts on economic injustice of which there are many hundreds.⁵⁷

Scroggs says scripture is the guideline for a faith community and those believing in the scriptures to be the truth, live according to it.⁵⁸

In reflecting upon the scriptures Countryman suggests that homosexuality as an ethical question demands from us that we listen to the scriptures and ask ourselves; ‘What is *normative* for us and the issue of homosexuality in the bible?’

⁵⁶ Birch, p99-101

⁵⁷ Nelson, p126

⁵⁸ Scroggs, p92

Norms and values are the results of human experience, but norms are not timeless. Values could be included in love, justice and freedom drawn from the perspective of faith in Jesus Christ and his new commandment he gave us, namely to love one another. The search for norms and values are a continuous effort to bring our human experiences in harmony and in sync with whom we are today as Christians and as citizens of a multicultural and multi-religious South Africa.⁵⁹

According to Countryman we cannot simply take numerous New Testament injunctions and assume that they apply literally to significant different contexts. Scripture radically relativizes our theological and ethical systems. It presses towards the transformation – the conversion of the hearer. It presses us to do our ongoing theological-ethical work in ways that attempt faithfully to discern the beginning reign and grace of God in our present contexts. Even if many specific scriptural prescriptions and proscriptions regarding sex are not the gospel's word for today, they are still basic and utterly crucial scriptural foundations for our sexual ethic.⁶⁰

Coleman emphasizes that we need to carefully exegete the scriptural data in light of the church's tradition regarding homosexuality. He reminds us:

that the concepts of 'homosexual' and 'homosexuality' were unknown during the time of the bible's composition. While scripture does speak about homosexuality, it does not recognize homosexuality as a sexual

⁵⁹ Countryman, p82

⁶⁰ Ibid, p83

orientation as such, since the biblical writers took it for granted that all people were created with a natural attraction to members of the opposite sex and their genital activity would and should reflect this fact.

Consequently, any homosexual behavior was likely to be judged from this perspective. In other words, the biblical writers were non-cognizant of the concept of a sexual orientation as such.⁶¹

8 CONCLUSION

Botha says that the ‘moral teachings of the bible cannot be reduced neatly to one single and simple set of rules. Given the nature of the bible and the process of its development, it does not make sense for one to expect to find such a system in the writings of the bible. However, it is the widely held conviction of the Christian church that the bible is an authority for life and faith. Used critically and responsibly, the bible is a rich source of age-old wisdom and an important conversational partner in the church’s ongoing engagement with the moral question “What ought to be done?”’⁶²

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral enables us to consider the inclusion or exclusion for homosexual people in an *ecclesial* community in helpful ways. This method helps us to incorporate the aspects of the tradition of the church, reason and personal experience in relation to scripture. It also helps us to be part of the bigger picture when it comes to be active members of the church in a changing world. It is my

⁶¹ Coleman, p57

⁶² Botha:1994, p44

purpose to reach an appropriate equilibrium between scripture, and ethics that would do justice to the homosexual Christian in the New Testament church.

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is helpful for moral decision making particularly with reference to scripture, tradition, reason and experience.

I will only focus on scripture. However on a secondary, implicit trend the other pillars (tradition, reason and experience) will also play a role.

In the next chapter I will discuss the role of scripture in relation to homosexuality.



CHAPTER 3: SCRIPTURE AND HOMOSEXUALITY – TWO DOMINANT OPPOSING APPROACHES

1. INTRODUCTION

Homosexuality is a very diverse topic when it comes to the interpretation of the quoted scriptures and determining of one's position on homosexuality. This chapter focuses on the different interpretation of scripture regarding homosexuality.

In my research I have discovered that there are two dominant opposing approaches towards the interpretation of the quoted scriptures regarding homosexuality namely the conservative-traditional approach and the liberal approach.

This study is in the field of Systematic Theology, specifically Christian ethics. The purpose when dealing with the dominant opposing approaches is not to do a detailed exegesis or thorough analysis of the passages. The purpose is to portray the different views and to appeal to the secondary literature. Although I have identified two dominant opposing approaches I realize that it is more complex than that, but for this study I only want to group the dominant opposing views together.

I will use the different interpretations of different scholars on the most commonly used scriptures in the homosexual debate. The scriptures are as follows:

- The creation stories Genesis 1:26 – 31 & Genesis 2:24
- The Holiness Code (Lev. 18:22 & 20:13)
- The Sodom Narrative (Gen. 19:1 – 29)

- Romans 1:18 – 32
- 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 10 and 1 Timothy 1:8 – 11

2. THE CONSERVATIVE-TRADITIONAL APPROACH

The conservative-traditional approach is intrinsically based upon a heterosexual norm with marriage and procreation as the basis of God's ideal for humanity.

Scholars of the conservative-traditional approach insist that the Levitical laws and the Pauline condemnations of homosexual behavior are subject to these laws and are obligatory to Christian obedience because it is scriptural. They insist that the church can never sanction relationships of a homosexual nature.

The conservative-traditional view is determined by the interpretation of scholars who believe that the scriptures/passages referred to with reference to homosexuality are directive and prohibitive towards homosexual behavior.

Wink refers to three texts as references unequivocally condemnatory to homosexual behavior. They are Lev. 18:22; Lev. 20:13 and Rom 1:26.⁶³

Hays interprets homosexuality as referred to by Paul in Romans 1 to be a disordered human condition.⁶⁴

Homosexuality is thus not an ordered condition and has to be changed or *ordered* to be sanctioned or accepted as Paul adduces the fact of widespread homosexual behavior as evidence that human beings are indeed in rebellion against their creator.⁶⁵

Hays says that to place the prohibition of homosexual activity in a canonical context,

⁶³ Wink, p34

⁶⁴ Hays, p389

⁶⁵ Ibid, p390

one should keep in mind factors in the biblical portrayal of human existence before God. He refers to:

God's creative intention for human sexuality wherein God has made man and woman for one another and that our sexual drives rightly find fulfillment within heterosexual marriage. The fallen human condition refers to human bondage to sin. Romans 1 depicts humanity in a state of self-affirming confusion: "They became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools... they know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die – yet they not only do them but applaud others who practice them" (Rom. 1:21-22, 32). Once in the fallen state, we are not free not to sin: we are "slaves of sin" (Rom. 6:17) which distorts our perceptions, overpowers our will, and renders us incapable of obedience (Rom. 7). Redemption (a word that means "being emancipated from slavery") is God's act of liberation, setting us free from the power of sin and placing us within the sphere of God's transforming power of righteousness. (Rom. 6:20-22; 8:1-11; cf. 12:1-2). We are in bondage to sin but still accountable to God's righteous judgment of our actions.⁶⁶

2.1 The Creation Accounts: (Gen. 1:26 – 31 and 2:24)

The creation stories are foundational for the biblical concept of family life and life in society. Some scholars refer to these two stories as the basis of 'natural' and 'unnatural' ways of the sex act and the basis of the procreation story.

⁶⁶ Hays, p390

Siker says that there are two accounts of creation in Genesis: the earlier, so-called Yahwistic account in Genesis 2 and 3, and the later so-called Priestly account in Genesis 1. They have entered into the discussion of “male and female” and about the sexual union of man and woman. The first point is drawn from the later, Priestly account (P) (Gen. 1:26 – 28), while the second derives from the earlier, Yahwistic account (Y). (Gen. 2:24).⁶⁷

2.2 The first creation story – Genesis 1:26 – 31:

Hays says that there is no question that the creation accounts, specifically, in **Gen. 1:26-27 and 2:24** are fundamental to the discussion about homosexuality in the church.

First, the texts were not written to answer the questions that we may bring to them. Their concern is neither with human sexuality in general nor with homosexuality in particular. **Second**, the texts that we are considering are narratives rather than logical explanations. This does not mean that they are illogical or unclear in their presentation, but rather that the kind of truth and meaning they communicate is different than the kind of truth expressed through logical explanations.

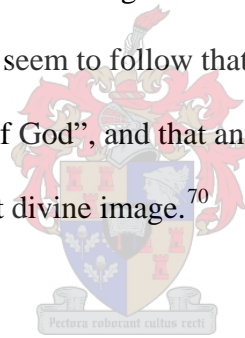
Third, the narratives about creation were written neither at the same time nor by the same author. **Gen. 1:1-2; 4a** for instance, represents one account, whereas **Gen. 2:4b-3:24** is a second account, incorporating two perspectives.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Siker, p21

⁶⁸ Hays, p4

According to Hays the two accounts of creation (Gen.1:1-2 and Gen.2:4-3:24) are foundational to the understanding of marriage in the Old Testament. Both devote major attention to the relationship between man and woman. Even the account of disobedience and expulsion from the garden (Gen.3) portrays Adam and Eve in representative roles.⁶⁹

Siker explains that one interpretation of these verses, namely the statement about being created “male and female” (v.27b) is to be closely connected with the preceding statement about being created in God’s image (vv.26 – 27a) as it is with the blessing that follows, to be “fruitful and multiply” (v.28). If so, then it would seem to follow that “heterosexuality” is part of what it means to bear “the image of God”, and that any kind of homosexual relationship would be a violation of that divine image.⁷⁰



2.3 Genesis 2:24

“Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” Stott says that some interpreters have found in the foregoing statement the basis for essentially all of the “constituent parts of marriage”, including its monogamous, covenantal, and heterosexual character.⁷¹

Grenz comments that for Paul, the only proper model of sexual relations is patterned after the creation story in Genesis 1 – 2. In keeping with the injunctions of the Holiness Code, Paul concludes that this model is natural, for it alone was

⁶⁹ Ibid, p386

⁷⁰ Ibid, p21

⁷¹ Stott: 1990, p229

instituted by the Creator. Homosexual relations, whether between men and men or women and women, are against nature, because they are contrary to the pattern placed within creation itself.⁷²

2.4The Holiness Code (Lev. 18:22 & 20:13)

The few biblical texts that do address the topic of homosexual behavior are unambiguously and unremittingly negative in their judgment says Hays.

The Holiness Code in Leviticus explicitly prohibits male homosexual intercourse:

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination”

(Lev.18:22). (Nothing is said here about female homosexual behavior). In Lev.

20:10 – 16, the same act is listed as one of a series of sexual offenses – along with adultery, incest, and bestiality – that are punishable by death.

It is worth noting that the act of “lying with a male as with a woman” is categorically proscribed: motives for the act are not treated as a morally

significant factor. This unambiguous legal prohibition stands as the foundation for the subsequent universal factor. The unambiguous legal prohibition stands as the foundation for the subsequent universal rejection of male same-sex intercourse within Judaism.⁷³

Jenson develops the argument of holiness in relationship to the cultic laws. He includes the concepts of holiness and purity. The holiness and glory of God is developed through a system of cultic laws and prohibitions. Holy and profane,

⁷² Grenz, p230


⁷³ Hays, p381

clean and unclean are opposed pairs. Holiness represents the divine relation to the ordered world and the clean embraces the normal state of human existence in the early realm.⁷⁴

2.5 The Sodom Narrative

The story about the men of Sodom is the one that most people think of when the topic of the bible and homosexuality is discussed, says Furnish. However, this story is not a story about homosexual behavior in general – and certainly not a story about homosexual acts performed by consenting adults. It is a story about the intent to do violence to strangers, who ought rather to have been accorded protection.⁷⁵

Hays refers to the Sodom narrative as:



The notorious story of Sodom and Gomorrah – often cited in connection with homosexuality – it is actually irrelevant to the topic. The “men of Sodom” came pounding on Lot’s door, apparently with the intention of gang-raping Lot’s two visitors – who, as the readers know, are actually angels. The gang rape scenario exemplifies the wickedness of the city, but there is nothing in the passage pertinent to a judgment about the morality of consensual homosexual intercourse. Indeed, there is nothing in the rest of the biblical tradition, save an obscure reference in Jude 7, to suggest that the sin of Sodom was particularly identified with sexual misconduct

⁷⁴ Jenson, p67

⁷⁵ Furnish, p19

of any kind. In fact, the clearest statement about the sin of Sodom is to be found in an oracle of the prophet Ezekiel: “this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and the needy” (Ezek. 16:49).⁷⁶

2.6 Romans 1:18 – 32

According to Hays the most crucial text for Christian ethics concerning homosexuality remains Romans 1, because this is the only passage in the New Testament that places the condemnation of homosexual behavior in an explicit theological context.⁷⁷

Rom. 1:24 – 27

(This is, incidentally the only passage in the bible that refers to lesbian sexual relations).

Because the passage is often cited and frequently misunderstood, an examination of its place in Paul’s argument is necessary. The aim of Romans 1 is not to teach a code of sexual ethics; nor is the passage a warning of God’s judgment against those who are guilty of particular sins. Rather, Paul is offering a diagnosis of the disordered human condition: he adduces the fact of widespread homosexual behavior as evidence that human beings are indeed in rebellion against God. The fundamental human sin is the refusal to honor God and give God thanks (1:21); consequently, God’s wrath takes the form of letting human idolatry run its own self-destructive course. Homosexuality, then, is not a provocation of “the wrath

⁷⁶ Hays, p381

⁷⁷ Ibid, p382

of God” (Rom. 1:18); rather, it is a consequence of God’s decision to “give up” rebellious creatures to follow their own futile thinking and desires. The unrighteous behavior catalogued in Rom. 1:26 – 31 is a list of symptoms: the underlying sickness of humanity as a whole, Jews and Greeks alike, is that they have turned away from God and fallen under the power of sin (cf. Rom. 3:9).⁷⁸

Hays concludes:

But one more thing must be said: Romans 1:18 – 32 sets up a homiletical sting operation. The passage builds a crescendo of condemnation, declaring God’s wrath upon human unrighteousness, using rhetoric characteristics of Jewish polemic against Gentile immorality. It whips the reader into a frenzy of indignation against others: those unbelievers, those idol-worshipers, those immoral enemies of God. But then, in Rom 2:1, the sting strikes: “Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.” The reader who gleefully joins in the condemnation of the unrighteous is “without excuse” before God (2:21), just as those who refuse to acknowledge God are. (1:20). The radical move that Paul makes is to proclaim that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, stand equally condemned under the just judgment of a righteous God.⁷⁹

Consequently, for Paul, self-righteous judgment of homosexuality is just as sinful as the homosexual behavior itself. That does not mean that Paul is disingenuous

⁷⁸ Hays, p389

⁷⁹ Ibid, p389

in his rejection of homosexual acts and all the other sinful activities mentioned in Romans 1:24 – 32; all the evils listed there remain evil (cf. also Rom. 6:1-23). But no one should presume to be above God's judgment; all of us stand in radical need of God's mercy. Thus, Paul's warning should transform the terms of our contemporary debate about homosexuality: no one has a secure platform to stand upon in order to pronounce condemnation on others. Anyone who presumes to have such a vantage point is living in a dangerous fantasy, oblivious to the gospel that levels all of us before a holy God.⁸⁰

2.7 1 Corinthians 6:9 – 10 and 1 Timothy 1:10

Grenz refers to the question at issue in 1 Corinthians 6:9 as the meaning of the Greek words, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, of which the latter is repeated in 1 Tim. 1:10. He says that many exegetes have been quick to accept the conclusion of Boswell that neither of these terms connoted homosexuality in the time of Paul or for centuries thereafter. Some do offer interpretations of the words that relate them to specific homosexual behaviours, whether to the “callboy” or his patron or to the Greek practice of pederasty.⁸¹

According to Hays in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Paul, exasperated with the Corinthians, confronts them with a blunt rhetorical question: ‘Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?’ he then gives an illustration list of the sorts of persons he means: ‘fornicators, idolaters, adulterers,

⁸⁰ Ibid, p389

⁸¹ Grenz, p229

malakoi, arsenokoitai thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers.’ The word *malakoi* is not a technical term meaning ‘homosexuals’, but it appears often in Hellenistic Greek as pejorative slang to describe the ‘passive partners’ – often young boys – in homosexual activity. The word *arsenokoitai*, is not found in any Greek text earlier than 1 Corinthians. Scroggs has shown that the word is a translation of the Hebrew *mishkav zakar*, (lying with a male), derived directly from Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 and used in rabbinic texts to refer to homosexual intercourse.⁸²

2.8 Concluding remarks

Botha says that the context of the list of sins clearly indicate that *malakos* and *arsenokoites* are part of the list. All these sins, but in particular, *arsenokoites* (men who take other men to bed), and *malakoi* (men who assume the female role in homosexual acts) represent people who endanger the form of sexual behaviour of those who exercise monogamous, life-long, exogamous and opposite sex marriage.

He concludes that the combination of the two terms *malakos* and *arsenokoites* must be understood to mean that both partners are judged in the homosexual act. Botha says that the evidence of the meaning of these terms are overwhelming.⁸³

Hays agrees with 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

⁸² Hays, p382

⁸³ Botha:2005, p169

literature is 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.⁸⁴

Seow says that two things are clear from the merest review of the direct evidence of scripture: homosexual relationships are not at all to the fore in scripture, but to whatever extent they are discussed, they are condemned as unacceptable, abominable, or wicked.⁸⁵

While individual biblical texts must be interpreted carefully and contextually, there is no doubt that both the Old Testament and the New Testament prohibit homosexual conduct. Even the absence of any expressing views of Jesus does not counteract this point.



However, Scanzoni and Mollenkott say:

A careful examination of what the bible says about issues relating to homosexuality still leaves us with many unanswered questions. For one thing, the idea of a life-long homosexual orientation or 'condition' is never mentioned in the bible... furthermore, it does not mention the possibility of a permanent, committed relationship of love between homosexuals analogous to heterosexual marriage.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Ibid, p291

⁸⁵ Seow, p67

⁸⁶ Scanzoni, p71-72

Hasbany says that it is probably accurate to describe gay/lesbian believers as isolated in both their identity communities. Within their faith communities they are castigated by religious conservatives and fundamentalists, who have successfully blocked the full participation of openly gay and lesbian believers in virtually every denomination. Outside the religious communities, on the other hand, many in the generally bitter lesbian/gay communities see gay believer activists as dupes and masochists engaged in a neurotic and meaningless struggle. Some go even further and scorn believers' activism as an obstacle to the building of a distinctive gay spirituality.⁸⁷

This analysis has made it clear that the conservative-traditional approach teaches that the bible prohibits homosexual activities.

Stott says that we should not deny that homosexual relationships can be loving (although *a priori* they cannot attain the same richness as the heterosexual complementarity which God has ordained). As the 1994 Ramsey Colloquium put it, 'Even a distorted love retains traces of love's grandeur.' But the love-quality of gay relationships is not sufficient to justify them. Indeed, I have to add that they are incompatible with true love because they are incompatible with God's law. Love is concerned with the highest welfare of the beloved. And our highest welfare is found in obedience to God's law and purpose, not in revolt against them.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Hasbany, p 2

⁸⁸ Stott:1999, p404

Nelson speaks of the Jewish tradition that had two laws with regards to sexuality, firstly the command to procreate and secondly it was a patriarchal model upon which the Jewish notion of marriage was institutionally based.⁸⁹

Nelson categorizes Karl Barth as a theologian with a rejecting-punitive position. He says Barth argues men and women come into its fullness only in relation to persons of the opposite sex. To seek one's humanity in a person of the same sex is to seek "a substitute for the despised partner", and this is "physical, psychological and social sickness, the phenomenon of perversion, decadence and decay." Moreover, this is idolatry. One who seeks same-sex union is simply seeking oneself in a quest for self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency. Hence, homosexuality is unnatural and violates the command of the Creator. But, Barth hastens to add, the central theme of the gospel is God's overwhelming grace in Jesus Christ. Homosexuality must be condemned, but in light of grace the homosexual person must not.⁹⁰

3. LIBERAL APPROACH

Scripture and human experience go hand in hand. Schmidt describes human experience as an important teacher, particularly as we observe in the case of race relations – a subject about which the bible says almost nothing. Human reason

⁸⁹ Nelson:1994, p112

⁹⁰ Ibid, p189-190

produces a rich tapestry of patterns for worship, devotion and church governance, few of which scripture expressly commands.⁹¹

Seow says the Bible undoubtedly affirms heterosexuality, but does it condemn homosexuality as we know it today? On close inspection, argue revisionists, it turns out that the handfuls of passages that supposedly condemn homosexuality actually describe activities that modern homosexuals would also condemn.⁹²

In this section the liberal interpretation of the bible in connection with homosexuality is investigated.

3.1 The Creation Stories. Genesis 1:26 – 27 & Genesis 2:18 – 24

These accounts, although a continuous narrative, consider creation from two fairly distinct perspectives:⁹³

Genesis 1: For many interpreters, the first creation account in Genesis 1 is critical in the debate; the Levitical laws presume it, as do most New Testament passages pertaining to human sexuality. Even though the text does not mention homosexual acts, this passage is considered pivotal because it presumes a heterosexual norm: God created humankind as male and female and commanded them to “be fruitful and multiply.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ Schmidt, p18

⁹² Seow, p4

⁹³ Ibid, p4

⁹⁴ Ibid, p17

God is portrayed as a sovereign who is ordering the universe. The resulting world is self-sustaining, procreative, and orderly.⁹⁵

Humankind, contrary to the animals, is created in “the image and likeness” of God (Gen 1:26). The exact meaning of this is not explicitly stated. Because humanity is referred to in this context as “male and female” (Gen 1:27), some interpreters have understood the sociality or sexuality of humanity to be the “image of God”. This is however, unlikely. The terminology of “male and female” identifies distinctions within humankind as biological creatures.

Similarly the categories of “male and female” are used in reference to animals preserved in Noah’s ark for the reproduction of their “kinds” after the flood (Gen 6:19, 7:3, 8, 16). In fact, “male and female” is used exclusively of animals except here in Genesis 1 and in the reference to this act of the creation of humanity (Gen 5:2). While sexual distinction is not, therefore, unique to humans, the “image of God” clearly is. There is no indication whatsoever that sexual distinction is a part of the divine character.⁹⁶

According to Seow Genesis 1 identifies only two sexes that are involved in the definition of humanity in its entirety and in its role as reproductive specie. Genesis 1 offers no grounds for excluding any human being, regardless of sex or sexual orientation, because sexuality is not what defines the “image of God”.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ibid, p6

⁹⁶ Seow, p6

⁹⁷ Ibid, p6

Genesis 2:

The concern within the narrative is to suggest why the *adam* needs to have a human “helper” (2:18). Although not explicitly stated, the text suggests that the woman is to be seen as a companion, as a co-worker, and a partner in sexual reproduction. The role of the woman as companion is indicated by God’s proclamation that “it is not good for the *adam* to be alone” (2:18, author’s translation). It is also possible that the need for companionship was occasioned by the human responsibility to till and keep the garden, a responsibility suggested by the verse that states “there was no one to till the ground” (2:5). This is consistent with the fact that what is sought for the *adam* is a ‘helper’, a companion worker in the garden. Finally, the woman’s role as a partner in sexual reproduction is implied in the passage, insofar as “a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (2:24). It is evident in the text, then, that the relationships between creatures, here the male and female of humanity are dynamic and complex.⁹⁸ Sex and sexual reproduction are not fully definitive of humanity’s identity and role in the created order.⁹⁹

While the Levitical laws introduce imperatives to maintain and support the order that God has created, Genesis 2 presents that very order as having some dependency upon human beings as well. It is not that the world is self-sustaining. The ideal world, if that term is appropriate, is a world in which

⁹⁸ Seow, p7

⁹⁹ Ibid, p8

human responses are consistent with the ordering of creation. The nature of that ordering is not predetermined by God; rather, God defines only the boundaries within which humans may function. Only God could create the animals, yet it is the human who names them. As for sexuality, it involves the sharing of tasks and the enjoyment together of the fruits of labor. It may be observed that when the *adam* saw the woman, what he recognized was not a sexually differentiated creature, but someone just like himself; she is his “own bone,” his “very flesh “ (author’s translation)¹⁰⁰

3.2 The Holiness Code (Lev.18:22 and 20:13)

These two verses appear at first glance to describe homosexuality:

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination (Leviticus 18:22).

“If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.” (Leviticus 20:13)

This is the only place in the bible where we find clear injunctions against same-sex acts.¹⁰¹

The Holiness Code is clear on many other issues as well. As one reads on, one finds that it is forbidden to crossbreed animals, sow two kinds of seeds in the same field, and wear clothing with two different kinds of fiber (Lev. 19:19; Deut.22:9-11). It is forbidden to eat meat with blood still in it (Lev. 19:26; cf.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p8-9

¹⁰¹ Seow, p14

Lev.3:17, 7:26-27; 17:11). Children who slight their parents are also supposed to receive the death penalty (Lev. 20:9; see also Ex. 21:17). In Leviticus 21, it is said, regarding priests:¹⁰²

“No man of your descendants in succeeding generations, who has any defect, may approach to offer the bread of his God. For any man who has a defect shall not approach: a man blind or lame, who has marred face or any limb too long, a man who has a broken foot or broken hand, or is a hunchback or a dwarf, or a man who has a defect in his eye, or eczema or scab, or is a eunuch” (Lev. 21:17-20).

Strictly speaking, of the entire Holiness Code, it is Leviticus 21 that most explicitly applies to the ordination to the ministry, for the chapter concerns the special qualifications of priesthood. Yet it is rarely discussed.¹⁰³

The revisionists remind us, however, that these verses lie within what is commonly called the Holiness Code of Leviticus 17-26, which exhorts the people of Israel to separate themselves from the practices of the surrounding nations.¹⁰⁴

In the New Testament, it is noteworthy that Jesus himself never condemns homosexuality. The only sexual sin he mentions is adultery (Mt 5:27-30; John 8:1-11), and even then his primary concern is to condemn the hypocrisy of lust and judgment attitudes. It was certainly not his style at any time to list biblical passages that condemn behaviors.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Brawley, p18

¹⁰³ Ibid, p18

¹⁰⁴ Schmidt, p32

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p33

The problem with a simplistic application of these texts to the contemporary Christian world is that in this way the interpreter colludes with the exclusivist assumption of the texts. As Paul wrote in Galatians, if you apply one part of the law you are under an obligation to observe the whole law (Galatians 3:10-12). And this is a central problem with using any laws of the Holiness Code.¹⁰⁶ Our survey of the three Old Testament texts which are often assumed to refer explicitly to homosexuality demonstrates that none of them is useful for constructing a normative ethic for homosexuality in the modern world. The Genesis passage is concerned with sexual violence and rape; while the Levitical prescriptions are not only part of the Holiness Code, which is universally recognized as no longer binding on Christians, but also may be concerned with male prostitution in foreign cults.¹⁰⁷

3.3 The Sodom Narrative (Genesis 19:1-8 and Judges 19:16-30)

The first of these passages is the famous story of Sodom; the second is a less familiar parallel passage. In the Sodom story Lot gives shelter to two angels for the night:

Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house.

And they called to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally.” So

Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind them, and

¹⁰⁶ Germond, p219

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p220

said, “Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! “See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof.”

(Genesis 19:4-8)

In Judges a man takes in a stranger for the night in the city of Gibeah:¹⁰⁸

As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house and beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, and saying, “Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally!” But the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, “No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act so wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage. “Look, here is my virgin daughter and the man’s concubine; let me bring them out now. Humble them, and do with them as you please; but to this man do not do such a vile thing!”

(Judges 19:22-24)

Judges 19 is also commonly cited as a narrative illustration of the wrongness of homosexual acts. The issue is not same-sex love but gang rape. In fact, the violence that was actually perpetrated was not of homosexual but heterosexual. The eventual victim is a woman. In sum, the passages that either clearly mention or possible allude to same-sex intercourse are difficult to use in Christian ethics.

The only explicit prohibition is embedded in a body of legal materials that are

¹⁰⁸ Schmidt, p30

culturally conditioned. The church no longer accepts as authoritative for Christian conduct many regulations that are found in the Levitical instructions.¹⁰⁹

Schmidt explains that the Sodom story in particular gradually took on a life of its own in Jewish and Christian history, and the English word sodomy has been applied to a variety of sexual practices among both heterosexuals and homosexuals, especially oral and anal sex. The Hebrew word *yada*, translated in Genesis 19:5 as “know” and in Judges 19:22 as “have intercourse with” is used in a coital sense only ten times out of hundreds of instances in the Old Testament.¹¹⁰ When we are told that the men of the city wanted to “know” the visitors, we should understand that they wanted to *interrogate* them. Because this would have been a terrible breach of hospitality, the host in each story offers women to protect his visitors. Modern readers find this appalling behavior, but that is because they value hospitality less, or women more, than did people of the ancient Near East. Thus the sin of Sodom in this instance was *inhospitality*¹¹¹.

It is here that readers, including those in positions of authority in the churches, have sometimes seen a reference to homosexuality: the men of Sodom want to have sex with the two visitors, who are themselves, men. The men of Sodom are, it is sometimes claimed, expressing homosexual desire they never actually get to have sex with the visitors), and it is for this that they and their city, as well as the neighboring city of Gomorrah, are destroyed. But this interpretation is inadequate for several reasons. Lot appeals not to the sinfulness of (male) homosexuality,

¹⁰⁹ Seow, p16

¹¹⁰ Schmidt, p30-31

¹¹¹ Ibid, p31

but to the fact that the men are his guests. Hospitality demands that the visitors be treated with honor, in fact as superiors; Lot, like Abraham, has bowed to the ground before them. To use them for sexual pleasures would dishonor them, to treat them as inferiors, and thus humiliate them. It is in order to carry out his obligations to the visitors whom he has brought under his roof that Lot seeks to protect them now from the sexual predations of the citizens of Sodom, and he will be rewarded in his turn by being warned to escape the city before it is destroyed.¹¹² Even in the new testament, Hebrews 13:2 enjoins hospitality on the ground that some “have entertained angels without knowing it,” and Jesus himself associates the destruction of Sodom only with inhospitality (Mt 10:14-15; Luke 10:10-12) Whatever distortions later interpreters have added, the Sodom and Gibeah stories fundamentally address proper treatment of strangers, not sexual morals. Indeed. If they are taken as object lessons about sex, we have to wonder what lessons we should take from the treatment of women as sexual bribes in these passages.¹¹³

But even if the Sodom story is about male-to-male sex, it is not about homosexuality as defined above. On the contrary, it describes male rape, and that is not necessarily motivated by homosexual desire. Rather, it expresses the habit in many ancient cultures of humiliating an enemy by forcing him to “play the woman.” This kind of sex certainly does not involve mutual consent, and it is probably not pleasurable to either party. Modern gays and lesbians condemn such behavior just as vigorously as heterosexuals do. As for the two narrative passages

¹¹² Moore, p71

¹¹³ Ibid, p71

(Genesis 19 and Judges 19), they are not about same-sex love, but about violence and general wickedness. Here, too, the culturally conditioned character of the Biblical narratives must be recognized. Moreover, the narratives reflect ethics that cannot be normative for our times, such as the secondary valuation of women and the offering of one's own kin to ensure that strangers are protected from sexual abuse.¹¹⁴ The context and time that we live in has to be considered when people choose to use texts to prove a prescribed behaviour. The issue of women has been dealt by several scholars and it has brought understanding to the mind of some Christians. Homosexuality is an issue that is currently in need of understanding.

How terribly unfair, then, to apply the (just) condemnation of Sodom to private same-sex activity between consenting adults today.¹¹⁵ These scriptures are used as proof-texts to justify the exclusion of homosexual believers as part of the ecclesial community. Bailey confirms that the sin of Sodom must not be identified with homosexuality¹¹⁶

3.4 Romans 1:26-27

Paul certainly appears to condemn homosexuality. In the context of a general pronouncement of judgment on the Gentile world for its idolatry, he writes:

For this reason [idolatry] God gave them up to degrading passion. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed

¹¹⁴ Seow, p16

¹¹⁵ Schmidt, p31-32

¹¹⁶ Bailey, p123

with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error (Rom. 1:26-27).

Schmidt refers to several ways where revisionists interpret this passage as other than a condemnation of homosexuality. One is to set Paul's writing in the context of his time, where the forms of same-sex intimacy commonly practiced were pederasty (sex between man and boys) and prostitution. These practices are degrading because they are unjust, as most modern homosexuals would agree.¹¹⁷

Boswell says another possibility is that Paul is condemning homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual people-that is, those whose occasional actions contradicted their true nature.¹¹⁸

The passage in Romans says nothing about homosexual love. The emphasis is entirely on sexual activity in a context of lust and idolatry. But what about the third point in this passage-doing that which, in the traditional King James wording, is "against nature"? What seems "natural" in any culture is often simply a matter of accepted social custom; and sometimes Paul spoke of nature in that way.¹¹⁹

In Greek and Roman culture, homosexuality was at least to some extent part of the accepted social custom, and no doubt it seemed as natural as anything else to many persons. Thus, in Romans 1:26-27, it is doubtful that Paul is speaking of

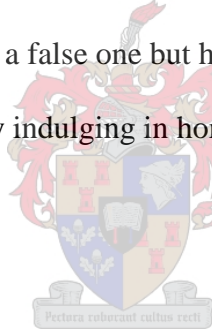
¹¹⁷ Schmidt, p108

¹¹⁸ Boswell, p33

¹¹⁹ Scanzoni, p63

nature in the sense of custom, unless he is referring to a violation of Jewish culture and law. It is also possible that Paul had in mind the “natural” complementary design of male and female bodies, specifically their ability to fit together sexually in such a way as to produce children.¹²⁰

Just as we have kept in mind that the Sodom story must be studied in the context of the reprehensibleness of *inhospitality* and *gang rape*, we must keep in mind that the context in chapter 1 of Romans is one of *idolatry* and *lust*. No reference is made to persons whose own “nature,” or primary orientation, is homosexual, as that term is understood by behavioral scientists. What Paul seems to be emphasizing here is that persons who are heterosexual by nature have not only exchanged the true God for a false one but have also exchanged their ability to relate to the opposite sex by indulging in homosexual behavior that is not natural to them.¹²¹



3.5 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10

These lists of immoral behaviors include words that, according to revisionists, have mistakenly been translated as references to homosexuality:

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, *malakoi*,

arsenokoitai, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers-none of

these will inherit the kingdom of God.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ibid, p64

¹²¹ Scanzoni, p66

¹²² Schmidt, p33

The constituents of *arsenokoitai* are *arseno* (=male) and *koite* (=coitus or intercourse), but a compound word does not denote the sum of its parts (for example, *understand* does not mean “stand under”); rather, it denotes what people use it to denote. The trouble is, we know of no occurrence of the word prior to 1 Corinthians 6:9, and anti homosexual human traditions may influence later explanation or translations. Schmidt refers to Scroggs’ explanation of scripture; he says that it makes sense to interpret the passages in light of practices common at the time. *Arsenokoitai* in conjunction with *malakoi* (literally “soft”) may denote solicitors of prostitutes and the prostitutes themselves, or more specifically adult pederasts and their prepubescent companions.¹²³

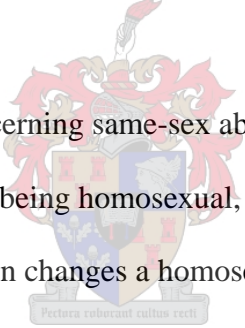
Between the end of the nineteenth and the middle of the twentieth century, the translation of *arsenokoites* shifted from being the reference to an action that any man might well perform, regardless of orientation or disorientation, to refer to a “perversion,” either an action or a propensity taken to be self-evidently abnormal and diseased.¹²⁴

Malakos can refer to many things: the softness of expensive clothes, the richness and delicacy of gourmet food, the gentleness of light winds and breezes. When used as a term of moral condemnation, the word still refers to something perceived as “soft”: laziness, degeneracy, decadence, the feminine. Women are weak, fearful, vulnerable and tender. They stay indoors and protect their soft skin and nature: their flesh is moister, more flaccid, and more porous than male flesh,

¹²³ Ibid, p33

¹²⁴ Brawley, p118

which is why their bodies retain all that excess fluid that must be expelled every month. The female is quintessentially penetrable; their pores are looser than men's. One might even say that in the ancient male ideology women exist to be penetrated. It is their purpose. And so it was that a man who allowed him to be penetrated – by either a man or a woman – could be labeled a *malakos*. But to say that *malakos* meant a man who was penetrated is simply wrong. In fact, a perfectly good word existed that seems to have had that narrower meaning: *kinaedos*. *Malakos*, rather, referred to this entire complex of femininity. This can be recognized by looking at the range of ways men condemned other men by calling them *malakoi*.¹²⁵



Since the Greek words concerning same-sex abuses refer to specific kinds of acts rather than the condition of being homosexual, it is improper to use 1 Corinthians 6:11 as proof that conversion changes a homosexual orientation into a heterosexual one, as some groups have tried to claim. And to tell homosexuals on the basis of this passage that to enter God's kingdom they must cease to be homosexual, or at least cease expressing their homosexuality, is to place them under the law rather than under grace. Homosexuals cannot earn salvation by the sacrifice of their sexuality any more that heterosexuals can.¹²⁶

One dimension of the liberal approach is perhaps some feminist interpretation of scripture.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p125

¹²⁶ Scanzoni, p70-71

The *correction* of the biblical message allows for affirmation of homosexuality by applying the scriptural message of liberation to the troubling passages themselves. In general, this approach affirms the exodus story as central to the biblical message. Oppressed people, including homosexuals, see their own experience when they read the biblical stories that offer deliverance to social outcasts. This experience allows them to correct unjust (and therefore unchristian) elements in the bible or in traditional interpretations of the bible.¹²⁷

One variation of this approach involves a feminist reading of the scriptures. This perspective begins with the recognition that biblical sexuality is patriarchal (male-dominant), rooted not in human biology but in human culture. If the Bible is not to continue as a tool for oppression, only its non-sexist parts and non-oppressive biblical interpretation can have the theological authority of revelation.¹²⁸

The Old Testament passages that condemn homosexuality are all patriarchal, and the attitude carries over into the key New Testament text. When Paul labels same-sex intimacy as “unnatural” in Romans 1:26-27, he mistakenly equates “natural” with a social order that assumes an active, dominant role for men. He condemns lesbian relations because he follows his culture in assuming that the activity involves a grasping after, maleness. This “theft” of male superiority

¹²⁷ Schmidt, p36

¹²⁸ Fiorenza, p108

corresponds to the disgrace of the loss of maleness when one male is penetrated by another. Experience teaches us; however, that homosexuality defies stereotypes of cross gender behavior and instead involves symmetry of mutual pleasuring. This is “natural” for some people. Therefore we can set aside the Pauline assumption of sexual asymmetry or active-passive roles. We can define sexuality in terms of equality and justice.¹²⁹

Schmidt says that another variation of the liberation approach acknowledges the patriarchalism of Scripture but gives greater stress to the identification between homosexuals and oppressed people in the Bible. It is the children of Israel who suffer in exodus, rather than those who control and exclude in Leviticus or Romans, who provide the pattern for Christian discipleship. Jesus came to set captives free, and homosexual people experience themselves as captives.¹³⁰



If theologians and church people wish to continue to exclude lesbian and gay Christians from full participation in the church, they should have the dignity to be honest and say so, rather than hiding behind the pitiful defense of the six texts. Christ died to break down all dividing walls. He died so that all may no longer be aliens but members of the household of God.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Schmidt, p37

¹³⁰ Ibid, p37

¹³¹ Germond, p228

4. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the liberal interpretation is convinced that the bible does not prohibit homosexual orientation and homosexual practices in the context of a relationship of faithfulness, love and exclusivity.

It is a curious but unmistakable phenomenon that a great many Christians treat so literally the references to homosexual practice in the bible, while at the same time they interpret biblical texts on almost every other topic with considerable flexibility and non-literality.¹³²

This chapter has made it clear that Christians differ on the interpretation of scripture regarding homosexuality. This does not however mean that Christians should leave the bible out of the discourse.

The next chapter will propose that an ethic of inclusion and hospitality which is based on the bible and Christian tradition provides us with a hermeneutical key and an ethic to deal with the question of homosexuality.

¹³² Nelson:1978, p181

CHAPTER 4: AN ETHIC OF INCLUSION AND HOSPITALITY

1. An ethical hermeneutic of inclusion

In this chapter an ethic and hermeneutic of inclusion and hospitality is proposed as a way of dealing constructively with homosexuality. Inclusion does not imply legitimization of wrongs.

Germond illustrates a hermeneutic of inclusion through the compilation of testimonies given by gay Christians and their personal experiences of being excluded from the ecclesial community. He dedicates his book to David Roos, a housemate, horseman and above all, a gay Christian gentleman. He describes David as; a deeply committed Christian who held responsible positions in both church and society. David was gay. He kept that a well-hidden secret, and was forced, by his wanting to belong to the church, into denial and dishonesty about his real self. The public person who was seen to be radiating the love of Christ was actually not David Roos. The real David Roos was hiding, and he was hiding because of the prejudices of other Christians. The whole thing would be amusing if it weren't such a terrible indictment of Christians in the church.¹³³

De Gruchy speaks of a contextual theology that is about listening and taking seriously the narratives of ordinary people in a given context, people who form part of our ecclesial community without permission.

¹³³ Germond, p1

Contextual theology takes the experience of people, principally the experience of suffering, as a primary point of departure. It does theology from the perspective of the experience of a particular group of people.¹³⁴

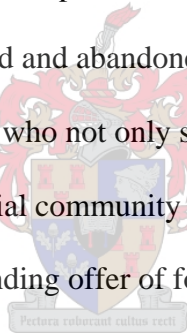
1.1 Definition of inclusion

Volf defines inclusion in his emphasis on the meaning of exclusion, as:

cutting of the bonds that connect, taking one self out of the pattern of interdependence and placing oneself in a position of sovereign independence.

The other then emerges either as an enemy that must be pushed away from self and driven out of the space or as a non-entity – a superfluous being – that can be disregarded and abandoned.¹³⁵

Jesus was the bearer of grace who not only scandalously included ‘anyone’ in the fellowship of the open ecclesial community but made the intolerance demand of repentance and the condescending offer of forgiveness (Mark 1:15; 2:15-17)



Volf continues to explain Jesus’ mission of not simply renaming the behavior that was falsely labeled ‘sinful’ but also in re-making the people who have actually sinned or who have suffered misfortune. He defines inclusion and exclusion as follows:

One has to distinguish between differentiation and exclusion, which in turn will lead to a distinction between exclusion and judgment, and then suggesting a profile of a self capable of making non exclusionary

¹³⁴ Germond, p6

¹³⁵ Volf, p86

judgments. Such non-exclusionary judgments past by persons willing to embrace the other are what is needed to fight exclusion successfully.¹³⁶

1.2 The bible and inclusion

Throughout the bible there are examples of strangers and aliens who were included in the communities, yet the inclusion went along with many resistance and questions in the quest for justification to exclude rather than to include. Exclusion it is not a new phenomenon, examples are quoted to show how the issues were dealt with in the bible.

‘Why’, Jesus’ critics are reported to have asked, ‘does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ Mark 2:16

Koenig relates this phenomenon to other scriptures, calling to remembrance the exhortations of Paul and the Corinthians and Romans in support of inclusiveness at church meals. (1 Cor. 11:17 – 34; Rom. 14:1 – 15:7). A few will think of the apostle’s strong stand in Antioch against the practice of separate tables for Jewish and Gentile believers, a stand taken to preserve what he called ‘the truth of the gospel’ (Gal. 2:14).¹³⁷

We could call to mind words of Jesus like the following:

Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matt. 11:28). Those who receive you receive Me, and those who receive me receive the One who sent me’. (Matt. 10:40). In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to

¹³⁶ Volf, p65

¹³⁷ Koenig, p.3

prepare a place for you? (John 14:2). Behold I stand at the door and I knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. (Rev. 3:20).

Koenig relates the most winsome of all New Testament passages relating to inclusiveness:

‘Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares’. (Heb.13:2). With only a little effort we can show that significant strands within the New Testament reveal a concern for guest-host relationships involving God, Jesus, and humanity’.¹³⁸



An examination of the ministry of Jesus, the missionary practice of Paul and the structure of the early communities in Luke-Acts are evidence that ‘inclusion’ and ‘partnership with strangers’ provide a hermeneutical key to the proclamation of the Good News and show important moments of the development of the early church’s thought and practice.

When Paul urges the Romans to ‘welcome one another...as Christ has welcomed you’ (15:7), Koenig says, he is revealing something close to the heart of his gospel. With Luke, the task is simply determined why his work contains so much material relating to the theme of hospitality. Only he records the parables of the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son, and the rich man and Lazarus. Only his gospel preserves the stories about a sinful woman who washed Jesus’ feet at the home of

¹³⁸ Koenig, p3

a Pharisee, Mary and Martha, Zaccheus, and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Furthermore, in his Acts of the Apostles Luke pictures the first church in Jerusalem as a banquet community and documents its expanding mission to the Roman world with a long string of narratives about guests and hosts. A good case can be made that the combined testimony of Jesus, Paul and Luke provides a substantial and appropriate cross section for our study of New Testament inclusion and hospitality.¹³⁹

In the Old Testament we see how the story of alienation and exclusion progresses as the Israelites discovers firsthand what it is like to live as aliens and slaves in a foreign country under a monolithic regime. Israel's development and identity was profoundly shaped by this experience. Pharaoh refused to listen to the Israelites suffering and remained oblivious by choice to liberate them from oppression until it was extended into his own household.¹⁴⁰

The law of God contains repeated reminders to pay careful attention to the alien, stranger:

Ex 22:21; cf. 23:9... do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt.

Lev. 19:33-34; cf. Deut. 10:9 ...When an alien lives with you in your land do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as your

¹³⁹ Koenig, p11-12

¹⁴⁰ Smith, p8

native – born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

Deut. 24:17; cf. 27:19.... Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there.

That is why I command you to do this.

It is clearly seen in these scriptures that the Law takes Israel's responsibility of strangers very seriously. These strangers are the immigrants, the temporary or permanent residents who have come from other countries, possibly to find shelter from a previous situation of exclusion, conflict and oppression. The resident alien should at least expect justice and a sense of belonging in the place where they are at to live and grow in grace and acceptance.

Deut. 10:19 requires a more radical response to the minimal offer of justice and acceptance, it commands them to love those who are aliens, in fact to love them as you love yourself. (Lev. 19:34)

Two interrelated themes are recognized in the Old Testament. Firstly, the blessing of Israel to the nations beyond their borders and secondly, the command for her to love the strangers on her doorstep.

Jesus takes up both themes in the New Testament when he gives a new commandment in the form of a challenge to bring good news to all the nations. (Matt 28:19 – 20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47).

Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head. (Luke 9:58).

I was a stranger and you welcomed me. (Matt. 25:35).

Ogletree sees the moral life as exceedingly rich and complex. ‘To be moral is to include the stranger. Inclusion of a stranger is to welcome something new, unfamiliar, and unknown into our life-world. Strangers have stories to tell which we have never heard before, stories which can redirect our seeing and stimulate our imaginations. The stranger does not simply challenge or subvert our assumed world of meaning; she may enrich, even transform that world’.¹⁴¹

Jesus’ ministry marks teaching and practicing of the inclusion of not only sinners, tax collectors, women found in adultery but also for Gentiles and Samaritans.

Jesus is asked by an expert in Luke 10:25 – 37 about the meaning of loving your neighbor. He answers by telling them the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus reciprocates by asking them who do you think was the neighbor. His parable brings them to a point of deciding for themselves who their neighbor is and they are left to answer their own question.

In the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31 – 46) Jesus illustrates the importance of loving your neighbor in relation to who will inherit the kingdom of God.

A sign of response to the great commission and a prerequisite of discipleship are marked as a way of welcoming and accepting the stranger to the kingdom of God.

¹⁴¹ Ogletree, p1

Smith says:

Israel's dual calling to be a hearing people and to care for the stranger in her midst, a calling that continues to echo through the New Testament, points to a need to reflect on the kind of human community we want to build.¹⁴²

Brueggemann however comments that to identify unity with the good and diversity with sin is too simplistic, even dangerous:

God wills a unity which permits and encourages scattering. The unity willed by God is that all of humanity shall be in covenant with him. (Gen. 9:8 – 11) and with him only, responding to his purposes, relying on his life - giving power. The scattering God wills is that life should be peopled everywhere by his regents, who are attentive to all parts of creation, working in His image to enhance the whole creation, to bring 'each in its kind' to full fruition and productivity.... The purpose of God is neither self-securing, homogeneity as though God is not Lord, nor scattering of autonomous parts as though the elements of humanity did not belong to each other.¹⁴³

According to Volf the foundation of the Christian community is the cross. Christ unites the people of God into one body through his suffering.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Smith, p16

¹⁴³ Brueggeman, p99

¹⁴⁴ Volf, p13

Ellen Charry writes:

Jews and Gentiles are made one body of God's children without regard to ethnicity, nationality, gender, race, or class.¹⁴⁵

Volf continues by saying that a central designation for the community is created by the self-giving love of Christ (ecclesial community).

For just as the body is one and have many members and all the members of the body though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one spirit we were all baptized in one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and were made to drink of one Spirit” 1 Cor 12:13 NIV¹⁴⁶

Jesus' teaching on inclusion is clearly recorded in two New Testament texts; Matthew 25 and Luke 14:12 – 14:

Then Jesus said to his host, 'When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. (NIV)

This is a very profound teaching; the moral of the story is that to give to those who have is not really giving, because they can always give back to you. But to

¹⁴⁵ Charry, p190

¹⁴⁶ Volf, p15

give to those who do not have, who do not deserve and to know that they will not be able to return the favor, the gift, the hermeneutic of inclusion, that is the love in action required from us. There are many people who are not wanted at functions and particularly not a banquet of such significance. To include them is to go beyond the norm, to go against the acceptable manner in doing things according to a normative community. Jesus came to serve and not to be served and as we look at this passage we can hear Jesus saying to us; “The reason why I want you to invite strangers is because this is the concern of my heart. This is why I came. I want you to serve them.”

Germond highlights Jesus’ example of an ethic of inclusion. We see that throughout the gospels. Jesus intimately associated with the marginalized, the outcasts and the ritually impure. The gospels are filled with episodes in which the inclusion of the excluded is the most dramatic feature.¹⁴⁷

Germond makes a profound point in his application of Mark 2:1 – 12 & Luke 7:48 – 50:

Jesus is presented as one who rejects the purity system. The most profound rejection of the purity system, which was based on the temple cult, was that Jesus offered forgiveness of sins independently of the sacrificial and purity system of the temple. Jesus declared, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ (Mark 2:1 – 12; Luke 7:48 – in this way the whole edifice of the sacrificial system, which was designed to gain forgiveness of sins, was challenged. The culmination of Jesus’ message in Mark’s gospel is found

¹⁴⁷ Germond, p65

at the moment of his death. At that point the curtain that separates the most sacred place on earth from all that is impure and defiling – the curtain of the holy of holies – is torn from top to bottom. (Mark 15:38). For Mark this means that the death of Jesus laid open the way into God's presence for all, not only for the ritually clean few. The system of exclusion has been destroyed by the death of Jesus. This is the heart of an inclusive theology. Jesus' life offers inclusion to all who have been excluded by religious law and by the teachings of the religious establishment. Jesus reaches out his hand and touches all those who are considered unclean and polluting. He includes the excluded in the new community of faith. The death of Jesus breaks all barriers of hostility. The binary opposition of Jew and Gentile has been destroyed. In Christ there is no longer Jew or Gentile; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male or female; there is no longer heterosexual or homosexual; for we are all one in Christ.¹⁴⁸

Koenig remarks that it should not surprise us to learn that the strangers who receive most attention in the New Testament are disciples or church members who have suffered unjust exclusion from the fullness of community life or removed themselves by means of unacceptable behavior. In practically every case the insiders of the community are urged to seek out the exiles and welcome them back.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Germond, p205,207,210

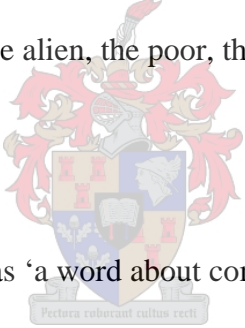
¹⁴⁹ Koenig, p7

2. An ethic and hermeneutic of hospitality

Hospitality was central to Christian identity for most of the church's history.

However, our generation knows little about this rich, life-giving and Jesus' exemplary practice of living discipleship. Hospitality is necessary for this present age, yet it is a very difficult practice to exercise. We live in a time where the need for hospitality is evident on our streets, in our neighborhoods and around the world. We have to admit that demonstrative hospitality and inclusion of *aliens*, particularly those in the church is central to the life of Christian faith. We can not express compassionate love with condition and still be inclusive. Jesus' ministry was built on love, compassion and inclusivity. As followers of Christ we ought to be 'welcomers' by opening our doors to each other, to the stranger, the alien, the poor, the weak and the different.¹⁵⁰

2.1 Definition of hospitality



Koenig defines hospitality as 'a word about comfort, security, and refreshment, first of all at the physical level. Thus, if we are caught in the grip of a cold spell, we may imagine ourselves as guests at a pleasant country inn, enjoying a cozy spot next to the fireplace. Or, if hot weather oppresses us, we may conjure up a picture of ourselves on the porch or patio of a neighbor's house, sipping an iced drink in the cool of evening. Usually our images will include other people: family, friends, or kindly strangers who extend just the right amount of welcoming. Hospitality is also a matter of human exchanges that restore the spirit'.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Oden, p.14

¹⁵¹ Koenig, p1

In looking at hospitality a great circumference will be covered in defining who the strangers are that are in need of hospitality. It could be the poor, the destitute, the HIV sufferer, the alien or simply just all people in need of acceptance and belonging.

Hospitality as defined in the Vines Expository Dictionary is simply a love of strangers.¹⁵²

Christian hospitality defined by the Early Writers regarded hospitality as a fundamental moral practice. The rule of St. Benedict (480 – 550) sets out that the distribution of goods must take into account the needs of the sick and weak.

Community rules regarding the sick or weak are grounded in hospitality. In this way a community deals with its own members hospitably.¹⁵³

Oden says that at the very least, hospitality is the welcoming of the stranger.

‘While hospitality can include acts of welcoming family and friends, its meaning within the Christian biblical and historical traditions has focused on receiving the alien extending one’s resources to them. Hospitality responds to the physical, social and spiritual needs of the stranger.’¹⁵⁴

2.2 Hospitality in the bible

There are various narratives in the bible with reference to hospitality. Stories that shape and define our understanding of hospitality. Often elements of surprise and ways of unexpected manifestations of God in the form of angels have been illuminated in the person of beggars and strangers. When Abraham entertained

¹⁵² Vine, p565

¹⁵³ Oden, p273

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p67

his three unexpected guests he didn't envisaged them to be angels (Gen. 18:2 – 5). He treated them with respect and opened up his home to them to have a meal and to rest. Abraham and Sarah were blessed from the visit in the context of hospitality extended to the visitors. In this context they received a message and it was confirmed to them that they would have a son in their old age. The story continues as we read further. The strangers continued their journey and in Gen. 19 the message of the destruction of Sodom was given. Lot greeted the strangers having no inkling of the message the strangers carried. He extended his hand of hospitality to them, which they accepted and entered his house. By night time the citizens of Sodom surrounded the house of Lot and demanded Lot to bring out the guests so that they could get to know them. Taking in consideration the responsibility of the host, namely to protect, provide and offer safety to strangers, Lot went outside to negotiate with the citizens of Sodom who wanted to use them for sexual exploitation. Lot was not an acknowledged citizen of Sodom and was still considered a stranger himself by the citizens of Sodom. The community was compelled by the 'moral of hospitality' to protect Lot as well as his guest, but these citizens insisted on having their way by demanding that the strangers be given for their own sexual gratification. The strangers came to Lot and his family's rescue when they saved him and his family from total destruction.

We find in the bible that inhospitality has worked ruins in many instances. The town or city's health and wealth was reflected in their exercise of this ancient practice. With reference to the narratives of Sodom (Gen. 19) and Gibeah

(Judges 19) we see how evil and corrupted characters were exposed and destroyed. In most cases hospitality bring blessings. The opposite is also true for inhospitality, it brings curses and destruction. Sodom and Gibeah suffered the consequences for inhospitality, the consequence was destruction. The contrast between hospitality and inhospitality is clearly manifested in the lawlessness and degradation of the community or the blessing and prosperity of such a community.¹⁵⁵

Hospitality in the New Testament is transformed and extended from the Old Testament. Paul urges believers to welcome strangers as Christ has welcomed them.

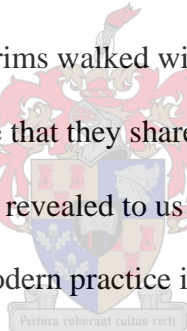
Jesus paid the price for strangers to become family, to become part of the greater community of all, namely the heavenly kingdom. The only entrance fee that could be paid was to possess sinless blood which no one had, not the Jews, not the scribes neither the disciples, it had to be the blood of Jesus. By giving his life, Jesus redeemed the stranger who needed a home and a part of the family of the eternal kingdom. Jesus paid the entrance fee. Paul urges all people to welcome one another, Rom 15:7.¹⁵⁶

Hospitality is a kingdom principal and a practice set forth by Jesus as symbolic to Christ's relationship with humanity and the divine connection between God and humankind. It is symbolic and a prerequisite for a Messianic nation. In the

¹⁵⁵ Pohl, p23

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p28

context of the early church the disciples and believers shared meals together and offered all they had to one another in meeting each other's needs. (Acts 2:49).¹⁵⁷ The perfect example of hospitality is set by Jesus where he gives his life as food and drink to us, the most basic expression of hospitality. His body becomes the bread of life and his blood becomes the wine, the ultimate sacrifice for the assurance of the continuance of life here on earth and the entrance price for eternal life. It is here that we recognize Jesus as being part of the community when we are in communion with one another at the table of our Lord commemorating and celebrating his sacrifice for us. (1 Cor. 11:23 – 26) Jesus promised us that He will be with us to the end of time and it is reinforced in Luke 24:13 – 35, the Emmaus pilgrims walked with Jesus, the stranger and they did not recognize him until such time that they shared a meal with Him, until He broke the bread with them. Jesus is revealed to us when we break bread with one another as is customary in modern practice in the sharing of a meal.¹⁵⁸



Paul instructs Christians to behave like Christians:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in neighborly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. *Practice hospitality.*¹⁵⁹ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p28

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p29

¹⁵⁹ 1 Pet. 4:9

another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.¹⁶⁰ Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath; for it is written: "it is mine to avenge; I will repay says the Lord. On the contrary: *"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.* In doing his, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good.¹⁶¹

Paul lays down the principal that we are to practice hospitality, which is to be a way of life, that as followers of Jesus Christ we are to be known as ones who are hospitable.

In Heb. 13:2 we are commanded not to neglect the gift of hospitality for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. 1 Pet 4:9 challenges us to offer hospitality ungrudgingly and freely, to have to right attitude. These passages clearly compel the people of Christ to act in such a way that strangers or aliens will encounter Christ personally through their reflection of Jesus within them. Hospitality is an outward manifestation of an inward grace that goes beyond self, a love that meets the needs of people by caring for strangers, for valuing them and to recognize them as part of a loving community.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ 1 Thes. 5:12

¹⁶¹ Rom. 12:20

¹⁶² Oden, p298

Hospitality is not optional or limited to saints who are gifted with the gift of hospitality, rather it is a practice of the Christian faith and reflection and utterance of the Good News by Christians – love in action. Hospitality is closely connected to love and love is manifested in actions and when actions touch strangers or needy people it changes them, it brings healing, it brings acceptance, it brings value to their existence, in essence, it gives them Jesus.

2.3 Hospitality in the history of the church

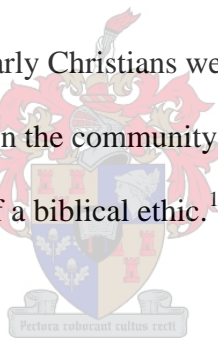
In the early Christian texts we acknowledge the power of hospitality not only to give out in miracles of abundance but as well as to transform lives. Hospitality involves risk most of the times. A risk to one's health, one's property and even to one's social standing. It requires the host and the guest to open doors to the unfamiliar and to the unexpected. Hospitality involves loss and giving away of one's life, and yet one gains life as well. In Mark 8:34-9:1, Luke 9:23-27 we read “Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” The more one holds on to oneself and one's world, the less one is able to receive the guest or host as Christ.¹⁶³

Rahab the harlot was saved on account of her faith and hospitality. When Joshua send out spies to Jericho and the king of the country found out that they had come to spy on their land, he send out men to seize them. The hospitable Rahab took them in and hid them on the roof of her house. When the kings' men arrived and said “Some men who are spying on our land came in here. On the king's

¹⁶³ Ibid, p132-133

command, bring them out,” she answered, “The two men you are looking for came to me, but quickly left again and are gone.” She did not tell them where the spies were. Then she said to them, “I know for certain that the Lord your God has given you this city, for the fear and dread of you have certain on its inhabitants. When you do take it, keep me and my family in safety.” And they said to her, “It shall be just as you have spoken to us. As soon as you know that we are coming, gather all your family under your roof, and they shall be saved. Anyone outside of the house will perish.” There was not only faith in Rahab, but prophecy as well.¹⁶⁴

The hospitable practices of early Christians were not simply a matter of virtue. Hospitality was fixed firmly in the community and was a sign of God’s presence, and was so an embodiment of a biblical ethic.¹⁶⁵



Pohl describes strangers and those who are in need of hospitality as:

‘those who are disconnected from basic relationships that give persons a secure place in the world. The most vulnerable strangers are detached from family, community, church, work and polity. This condition is most clearly seen in the state of homeless people and refugees. Others experience detachment and exclusion to lesser degrees’.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p281

¹⁶⁵ Pohl, p16

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p13

It is when we offer other people a portion of *our* space of belonging that we extend hospitality to them. The place where we feel valued, safe, respected and loved, is the most risky place to share. Yet it is the place where strangers need to feel welcome, the place where they need to be invited in.

The necessity of human well-being and the protection and safety of strangers was dependant upon the Christians. Hospitality was very purposeful particularly with regard to the protection of some provision towards strangers. The community depended upon a network of relationships. It was sustained and maintained through hospitality and adding to moral and social bonds between family, friends and neighbors.¹⁶⁷

Pohl continues to describe the ancient and biblical sources of hospitality as a distinctively Christian understanding that developed in the early centuries of the church. She says:

‘Partly in continuity with Hebrew understandings of hospitality that associated it with God, covenant, and blessing, and partly in contrast to Hellenistic practices which associated it with benefit and reciprocity, Christian commitments pressed hospitality outward toward the weakest, those least likely to be able to reciprocate. In the 4th century, writers articulated a clear statement of the scope of Christian hospitality’.¹⁶⁸

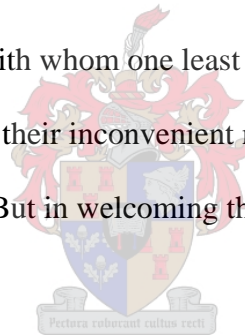
¹⁶⁷ Oden, p273

¹⁶⁸ Pohl, p17

No distinction was made between the hospitality extended to friends and family and the hospitality extended to strangers. The focus was however on the strangers who were in need and seemed to have little to offer.

Pohl continues to take a new look at an Old Tradition, as reflected in First-century Judaism especially incorporated into the institutions of the Sabbath and synagogues.¹⁶⁹

The Gospels portray Jesus' notion of hospitality most vividly in Matthew 25 and Luke 14.¹⁷⁰ Pohl refers to a number of ancient civilization, she says; 'Jesus challenges narrow definitions and dimensions of hospitality and presses them outward to include those with whom one least desires to have connections. The poor and infirm come with their inconvenient needs and condition, with their incapacity to reciprocate. But in welcoming them one anticipates and reflects earthly behavior'.¹⁷¹



2.4 Contemporary theological perspectives on hospitality

Pohl says that hospitality is a way of life fundamental to Christian identity. Its mysteries, riches, and difficulties are revealed most fully as it is practiced. To live in an instant, replaceable world makes it so much easier to rather find another and to replace a custom of free-giving to a demanding people who have a 'give-

¹⁶⁹ Koenig, p15

¹⁷⁰ Oden, p18

¹⁷¹ Pohl, p23

me' attitude. When the opposite is required, namely, 'take from me', it becomes extremely difficult, conditional and short-lived.¹⁷²

Tenacity, unconditional acceptance and 'to welcome' as a verb, have become almost extinct practices in our current world. More than a 'cry for freedom' is being echoed in the world, and when we listen carefully we would identify the cry as a cry for hospitality and inclusion. "Please accept me as I am and let me in".¹⁷³

Henry Nouwen says:

'If there is any concept worth restoring to its original depth and evocative potential, it is the concept of hospitality'.¹⁷⁴

Pohl's description of our understanding of hospitality indeed differs from what Jesus intended. She says that when we think of hospitality today, we do not think of welcoming strangers. We picture having friends and family over for a braai and a good time. Or we think of the 'hospitality industry' namely hotels, restaurants and B&B's which are open to strangers twenty four seven, as long as they have money or credit cards. Perhaps large churches come to mind, with their 'hospitality committees' that coordinate the coffee hour, greet the visitors, or help with parking, even the existence of a welcoming committee for new members. In most cases, today's understanding of hospitality has a minimal component of morality – hospitality is a nice extra. We have the time and the resources, but we

¹⁷² Pohl, p24

¹⁷³ Ibid, p24

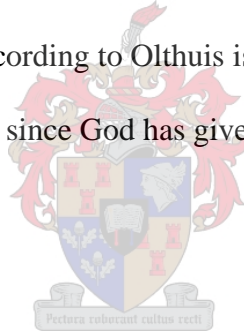
¹⁷⁴ Nouwen, p66

rarely view it as a spiritual obligation or as a dynamic expression of vibrant, obligatory Christianity.¹⁷⁵

Murray describes hospitality as a virtue common to all human cultures, implies the gracious sharing of a meal with a stranger and often includes giving shelter. The host creates a space where a non-member of a group can feel temporarily at home.¹⁷⁶

Ogletree states that the practice of hospitality lies close to the centre of a Christian's life before God. 'To be moral is to be hospitable to strangers'.¹⁷⁷

Welcoming the stranger according to Olthuis is not an option: it is a central dimension of being human, since God has given humankind the 'gift of and call to connection'.¹⁷⁸



In the Reformation period, Martin Luther wrote that when persecuted believers were received hospitably, "God himself is our home, is being fed at our house, is lying down and resting."¹⁷⁹

John Calvin promised that nothing, no offer, no duty done could be more pleasing and acceptable to God than being hospitable to religious refugees. He regarded this practice as a 'sacred' form of hospitality.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ Pohl, p13

¹⁷⁶ Murray, p17

¹⁷⁷ Ogletree, p1

¹⁷⁸ Olthuis, p160

¹⁷⁹ Luther, p189

¹⁸⁰ Calvin, p484

Hallie, an ethicist who spent years studying the human capacity for good and evil concluded his research with:

The opposite of cruelty is not simply freedom from the cruel relationship, it is hospitality.¹⁸¹

To live in hospitality, we have to remember who we are as Christians and to identify the stranger stranding before us.¹⁸²

3. Conclusion

A clear conclusion can be drawn from the ethic of hospitality and the inclusion of all people into the ecclesial community. It was a Christian tradition and practised without reservations. We are however aware of the changing times and particularly the time we live in today. The application of such a tradition in post modernism changes the willingness and liberty of single Christians to oblige to an ancient custom.

The apparent stranger is not simply the sick, the poor, the adulterer, the homosexual who knock on the door, but it is Christ himself. In receiving the stranger, we receive Christ. If we reject the stranger, we reject Christ.¹⁸³

By being a witness to God's love and grace, it welcomes and empowers people and is a door to a grace-filled life.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Hallie, p26-27

¹⁸² Pohl, p61-84

¹⁸³ Rose, p. 63-72

¹⁸⁴ Oden, p298

Hospitality and inclusion are subject to influences. Douglas explains that we exclude because we are uncomfortable with anything that blurs accepted boundaries, disturbs our identities, and disarranges our symbolic cultural maps.¹⁸⁵

Volf adds that others strike us like objects that are ‘out of place’, like ‘dirt’ that needs to be removed in order to restore the sense of propriety to our world.¹⁸⁶

Bauman says others then become;

‘the gathering point for the risks and fears which accompany cognitive spacing. They epitomize the chaos which all social spacing aims staunchly yet vainly to replace with order, and the unreliability of the rules in which the hopes of replacement have been vested’.¹⁸⁷

Volf makes a very important comment, he says that we assimilate or reject strangers in order to ward off the perceived threat of chaotic waters rushing in.¹⁸⁸

It is not always necessarily true that strangers will bring chaos, disruption or risk, but it is true that strangers, ‘the others’ will challenge you beyond your comfort zone, your paradigms and your norms.

It is undeniable that there is choice says Volf, so it is also undeniable that our choices are made under inner and outer constraints, pressures, and captives. We choose evil; but evil also ‘chooses’ us and exerts its terrible power over us. Choice and justice are interrelated and interdependent. There can be no justice without exercising one’s will to do what is right.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Douglas, p178

¹⁸⁶ Volf, p78

¹⁸⁷ Bauman, p162

¹⁸⁸ Volf, p78

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p79

Volf remarks that there can be no justice without the will to embrace. To agree on justice you need to choose to make space in yourself for the perspective of the other, and in order to make space, you need to want to embrace the others. If you insist that the others do not belong to you and you do not belong to them, you will have your justice and they will have theirs; your justices will clash and there will be no justice between you. The knowledge of justice depends on the will and choice to embrace. Embrace is part and parcel of the very definition of justice.¹⁹⁰

Volf continues to emphasize injustice and he does so in the comparison to a profound ‘injustice’ about the God of the biblical traditions. It is called grace. He relates the story to the parable of the prodigal son. (Luke 15:11 – 32). It was ‘unjust’ of the father to accept the son back after his wanderings and squandering of half of his inheritance. He did not deserve to even be received back into the household, yet the father calls a celebration for his son who has returned from his journey. The father acted in accordance to unktion, a ‘must’ of ‘justice’ that the family must be brought together because they belong together. He granted his son grace, and extended his arms to his son to invite him back into his household.¹⁹¹

Stott adds that however strongly disapprove of homosexual practices, we have no liberty to dehumanize those who engage in them.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 78

¹⁹¹ Volf, p220

¹⁹² Stott:1999, p382

The implications of hospitality and inclusion to the ecclesial community for homosexual discourse will be investigated in the next and final chapter (five) when hospitality and inclusion are applied ethically as a way forward.

The analysis of this chapter has made it clear that inclusion and hospitality are central notions in the Christian faith. They pave the way for Christians not to demonize those who differ from you, and also not to stereotype, stigmatize and demonize homosexual people.



CHAPTER 5: THE WAY FORWARD – SOME SUGGESTIONS

In this chapter the implication of a life and ethic of inclusion and hospitality is spelt out as a way forward. It is not implying that hospitality or inclusion legitimize wrongs.

Welcoming the stranger according to Olthuis is not an option: ‘it is a central dimension of being human since God has given humankind the gift and call to connection’.¹⁹³

1. An ethic of inclusion and hospitality and love

To be human is to be in relationship. Adam asks why *does* God care about our relationships?

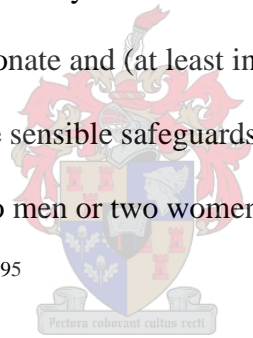
God cares because the character of our relationship with one another is inseparable from the character of our relationship with God. This is one implication of Jesus’ teaching in the gospel of Matthew. There Jesus teaches us that in showing hospitality to others, we show hospitality to Him; in clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, visiting the prisoners, we do the same to Jesus (Matt. 25). We cannot be hard hearted to our neighbors and warm hearted to God, we cannot be fickle to our loved ones and faithful to God. The intensity and intimacy of a relationship increases its importance as a barometer of our relation to God. Thus, God cares about our relationships with one another because God cares about our relationship with God.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Olthuis, p160

¹⁹⁴ Adam, p.125-126

We do find something in scripture that is frequently overlooked in the current discussion. There are clear biblical affirmations of deep love between same-sex adults. Not implying genital relations in these instances. Nelson notes that in the instances of David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, Jesus and ‘the beloved disciple,’ and others; the scripture seems to hold strong emotional bonding between members of the same sex to be cause for celebration, not fear.

According to Stott same-sex friendship, like those in the bible between Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, and Paul and Timothy, Jesus and John are to be encouraged. There is no hint that any of these were homosexual in the erotic sense, yet they were evidently affectionate and (at least in the case of David and Jonathan) even demonstrative. Of course sensible safeguards will be important. In African culture it is common to see two men or two women walking down the street hand in hand, without embarrassment.¹⁹⁵



These relationships, both same-sex and opposite-sex, need to be developed within the family of God which, though universal, has its local manifestations. God intends each local church to be a warm, accepting and supportive community.

Perplexing and painful as the homosexual Christian’s dilemma is, Jesus Christ offers him or her (indeed all of us) faith, hope and love – the faith to accept both Christ’s standards and His grace to maintain them, the hope to look beyond present suffering

¹⁹⁵ Stott, p360

to future glory, and the love to care for, and support one another. 'But the greatest of these is love'. (1 Corinthians 13:13).¹⁹⁶

2. An ethic of inclusion and hospitality and embrace of the other – the stranger

Christians affirm that they 'are no longer strangers and sojourners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God' (Eph. 2:19). To be welcomed by God is the Christian's heritage and hope.

Volf develops a useful image for any encounter with the stranger – *the other*: the act of embracing. He uses this image in his reflections on conflict in multicultural settings, on what it means to love one's enemy, and on how to bring about reconciliation. His exploration of the embrace as an essential category of Christian social action is particularly helpful in the homosexual debate. The stranger we embrace is the person who has a different sexual orientation to our own. Volf introduces the concept of embrace as follows:

In an embrace I open my arms to create space in myself to the other. Open arms are a sign that I do not want to be by myself only, an invitation for the other to come in and feel at home with me. In an embrace I also close my arm around the other. Closed arms are a sign that I want the other to become part of me while at the same time I maintain my own identity. By becoming part of me, the other enriches me. In a mutual embrace, none

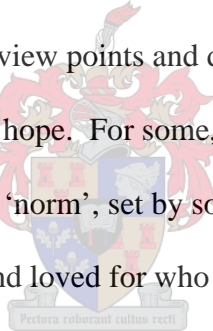
¹⁹⁶ Stott, p361

remains the same because each enriches the other, yet both remain true to their genuine selves.¹⁹⁷

Smith responds to Volf's concept by adding that when we embrace, we open our arms and show that the other is welcome.¹⁹⁸

We do not only open our arms to welcome the stranger but we also open our hearts and our minds to them to love and understand them in their humanity and in their being. 'We receive a gift, a blessing from the stranger we embrace', says Smith.¹⁹⁹

The church, referred to as the ecclesial community, is called to a response and it is evident that despite the different view points and different sides people choose to take in this debate, there remains hope. For some, the hope would be conditional, to change and to become like the 'norm', set by society and the majority, or the hope to be accepted, embraced and loved for who they are.



The research question, *are homosexual people included in the ecclesial community?* could be answered by every member of the ecclesial community on the information given in the different parts of this research paper. As members of the church - the ecclesial community, we have a personal and a communal responsibility towards the life of the community and our response will determine the continuation, segregation or destruction thereof.

¹⁹⁷ Volf, p203

¹⁹⁸ Smith, p100

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p101

McNeill expresses strong feelings about the inclusion of the homosexual person in the ecclesial community:

that the love between two lesbians or two homosexuals, assuming that it is a constructive human love, is not sinful nor does it alienate the lovers from God's plan, but can be a holy love, mediating God's presence in the human community as effectively as heterosexual love.²⁰⁰

We are to welcome with kindness those who do not belong, those who are not at home in our country, including those who have come from other cultures and those who differ in their sexual orientation.

Smith stresses that the biblical message tells us that to be at home is a gift given by God, to be used not for safe separation from others, but instead as a blessing to strangers, 'a true homecoming'. In response to God's goodness to us we extend the membership of our ecclesial community beyond the borders of our own comfort by receiving the stranger, the homosexual person into the confines of our ekklesia without reproach and with the same attitude of abundance extended to us by God. Believers have failed to welcome 'strangers' and instead have committed atrocities against them, often in the name of God.²⁰¹

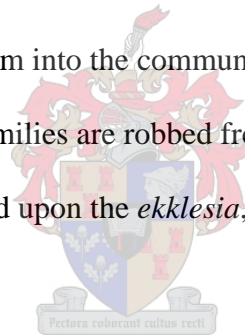
²⁰⁰ McNeill, p243

²⁰¹ Smith, p95

‘Our coziness with the surrounding culture’ writes Volf, ‘has made us so blind to its many evils that, instead of calling them into question, we offer our own version of them – in God’s name and with a good Christian conscience.’²⁰²

The Christian’s loyalty does not belong to strangers’ racial makeup or their national culture or sexual preference or orientation, but to the One who is God of all humankind. Smith says that it is ultimately this allegiance that transcends home as a source of power and identity and makes possible the freedom and openness to create a hospitable space for welcoming the stranger’.²⁰³

Strangers have so much to give to enrich even the ecclesial community and in the Christian’s refusal to invite them into the community the community and believers as individuals and families are robbed from receiving the gifts and blessing that could be bestowed upon the *ekklesia*, the church.



3. An ethic of inclusion and hospitality and full membership of the body

Koenig answers the research question in a scripturally illustrative way:

Synoptic Gospels show Jesus challenging exclusivism wherever it was officially sanctioned or accepted as normal. Above all, the challenge is dramatized in stories about Jesus’ association at table with the marginal people known as tax collectors and sinners. Such stories include the account of a meal with Levi and his disreputable friends, which follows upon the tax collector’s call to discipleship (Mark 2:13 – 14); and incident

²⁰² Volf, p197

²⁰³ Smith, p97

revolving a sinful woman who washes Jesus' feet with her hair at a meal held in Jesus' honor by a Pharisee (Luke 7:36 – 50); Jesus' self-invitation to the home of the notorious chief tax collector Zaccheus (Luke 19:1 – 10); and Luke's editorial introduction to the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son: "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them", (Luke 15:1 – 2).²⁰⁴

In answering the research question one could start by looking at a way forward, yet not from a distance but from an active, involved way, with the purpose to bring healing, restoration and transformation to the homosexual Christian who is in desperate need of love, inclusion and acceptance.



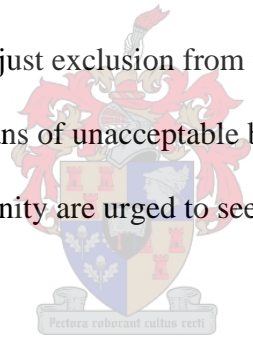
According to the New Testament, membership in the ecclesial community was not an option for the individual. Membership was a logical necessity, and the new disciple was simply baptized into the body of Christ as the logical sequel to conversion (1 Cor. 12:13). Every individual disciple of Christ finds him or herself vitally connected to the heart-beat of that new humanity, the *ekklesia*.

They suffer with the body, rejoice with the body, and experience the inner tensions of the body, and serve the body, for by doing so they serve the Lord to whom the body belongs. Furthermore, they are vitally attached (ecclesially) because their own life depend on it. Individual believers are not separately attached to

²⁰⁴ Koenig, p20

God by a spiritual umbilical cord. The New Testament does not make that kind of provision. Instead, the Lord Jesus Christ developed a living body to which the individual Christian becomes solidly attached, not as a parasite but as a natural member.²⁰⁵

According to Koenig strangers ‘need not differ from us in culture, race or socioeconomic status. In fact, they most frequently meet us in ‘our own kind of people’, in the families, friends, and neighbors who have become alienated from us for a variety of reasons. It should not surprise us to learn that the strangers who receive most attention in the New Testament are disciples or church members who have suffered unjust exclusion from the fullness of community life or removed themselves by means of unacceptable behavior. In practically every case the insiders of the community are urged to seek out the exiles and welcome them back’.²⁰⁶



Koenig comments on the importance of the relationship between the stranger and the believer: ‘When guests and hosts violate their obligations to each other, the whole world shakes and retribution follows. Our New Testament witnesses emphasize the presence of God or Christ in ordinary exchanges between human guests and hosts. As a result, the numinous qualities of hospitality referred above take on an equal significance alongside the moral ones. People who come from service in soup kitchens, shelters for the homeless, or organizations devoted to

²⁰⁵ Shillington, p6

²⁰⁶ Koenig, p21

helping refugees and aliens will probably bring a special empathy for such blending of the spiritual and the moral. Many will know from experience what it means to call hospitality holy ground'.²⁰⁷

According to Palmer, strangers may assume the role of 'spiritual guide' when we find ourselves confused about where God is in our private and public lives. In his view 'the stranger is not simply one who needs us. We need the stranger. We need the stranger if we are to know Christ and serve God, in truth and in love.'²⁰⁸ Rather than burdening or threatening us, the stranger comes to teach the deeper lessons of life and to enable us for ministry.²⁰⁹

Excluding people from the kingdom of God and hindering them from 'getting' to Jesus is not a new phenomenon. We read about it in the New Testament and Koenig points us to 'the interpersonal tensions among Jesus' disciples. They argued frequently with one another about who is the greatest (Mark 9:33-37); 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-27). The twelve disciples, the 'insiders' wished to practice their own brand of exclusivism is suggested by reports that they reprimanded an exorcist who ministered in Jesus' name but was not of their own crowd (Mark 9:38-41; Luke 9:49-50); tried to keep children away from Jesus (Mark 10:13-16); and wished to limit the number of times they would have to forgive their associates (Matt. 18:21-22). In each case the Gospel tradition, faithful to the aims of Jesus we have seen them in Matt. 11:16-19,

²⁰⁷ Koenig, p2

²⁰⁸ Palmer, p65

²⁰⁹ Koenig, p6

records that He prevented his followers from closing doors on their neighbors. (Mark 9:40; 10:15; Matt. 8:22).²¹⁰

Seow refers to a rule of faith and love:

Our interpretation happens in community, and what the community experiences in faith is more significant than the experiences of any individual. What we say and do together is more to be attended to than idiosyncratic reading of texts by one or a few individuals. This means listening to a broad range of interpretive judgments in the church, including its gay and lesbian members. The rule of love reminds us that our interpretation of scripture stands under the divine command to love God and neighbor.²¹¹

The interpretive comment of the “Presbyterian Understanding...of Holy Scripture” statement at this point is very revealing, particularly in light of the fact that it was not written with any reference to the church’s hermeneutical debate about the appropriate regard and judgment of persons who engage in same-sex love. The document says:

No interpretation of scripture is correct that leads to or supports contempt for any individual or group of persons either within or outside of the church. Such results from the interpretation of scripture plainly indicate that the rule of love has not been honored. To the extent that such a test

²¹⁰ Ibid, p31

²¹¹ Seow, p58

of our interpretation by the rule of love can be made, the church has fallen far short in its use of the texts dealing with homosexuality.²¹²

Our judgment that homosexual activity is a sin has controlled the way we have behaved toward Christians who are homosexual. The rule of love, which says that our interpretation is correlative with the way we live, raises serious questions about what we have done with the plain sense of the scripture. If it is a means by which we inflict pain and put down other Christians or other human beings of any stripe - then our interpretation is under question.²¹³

In rejecting the homosexual person we disobey Jesus' commandment – love one another as I have loved you. (John 15)

The church is an institution based on God's grace. God's grace is sufficient for all of us, not only the elected few, and who determines who they are anyway?

The acceptance of people of a different sexual orientation includes them into God's intent for all believers. To be gathered together as a believer of Christ Jesus.

The church is the place where believers desire to find a place to belong, to be cared for, to be nurtured and to have the liberty to proclaim Jesus Christ as their savior. To be affirmed and empowered within the confines of a safe, accepting milieu produces an energized, confident and motivated person to reach out to a love starving, needy world by reflecting and giving what they have received and experienced in the ecclesial community.

²¹² Ibid, p59

²¹³ Ibid, p60

Homosexuality as a controversial issue has brought division within the ecclesial community and has caused homosexual Christians to be hurt and excluded from the community of faith. In my research I have strived to answer the research question, are homosexual people included in the ecclesial community? In my search to answer this question I have clarified terminology around the meaning of the words homosexuality, ethics, and *ekklesia* as the church. I have only used one pillar of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, namely Scripture to illustrate two dominant opposing approaches with regards to scriptures referring to homosexuality. Greater emphasis was given to the ethic of inclusion and hospitality towards homosexuality in response to the question of whether homosexual people are included and accepted in the ecclesial community. Inclusion and hospitality is an ethic practiced throughout the Old and New Testament. The inclusion of “strangers” was not conditional and Christians had a responsibility towards the strangers in the ecclesial community. We continue to have strangers in our community but it is our interpretation of scripture that determines our inclusion or exclusion of homosexual people in our ecclesial communities. There are different scriptures that we could focus on to prescribe to us whether to include or exclude homosexual people, but ultimately the decision of inclusion ought to be determined by our ethic of inclusion and hospitality, inviting the stranger and making room for them.

Hays asks the question;

are homosexuals to be excluded from the community of faith?

Certainly not. But anyone who joins such a community should know that it is a place of transformation, of discipline, of learning, and not merely a place to be comforted or indulged. The community demands that its members pursue holiness, while it also sustains the challenging process of character formation that is necessary for Jesus' disciples. The church must be a community whose life together provides true friendship and emotional support for persons seeking an alternative to the gay subculture, as well as for heterosexually oriented single persons. In this respect, as in so many others, the church can fulfill its vocation only by living as counter-community in the world.²¹⁴

Hays continues by asking and answering a second question, Can homosexual people be members of the Christian church?

This is rather like asking, "Can envious persons be members of the church?" (cf. Rom. 1:29) or "Can alcoholics be members of the church?"

Unless we think that the church is a community of sinless perfection, we will have to acknowledge that persons of homosexual orientation are welcome along with other sinners in the company of those who trust in the God who justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). If they are not welcome, I will have to walk out the door along with them, leaving in the sanctuary only those entitled to cast the first stone.²¹⁵

Seow says in his conclusion that he would argue that the bible does not

²¹⁴ Hays, p400

²¹⁵ Ibid, p401

give us clear guidance regarding inclusion of homosexual people in the Christian community, but it does give us clear guidance regarding treating one another as God's wheat. It does provide clear directions regarding the inclusion of those who, even to our surprise, have received the Holy Spirit of God and join us in our Christian confession.²¹⁶

De Gruchy adds enlightenment to the inclusion of the homosexual Christian in his statement; *being human means being who I am*. He explains:

At the heart of the New Testament is the struggle about whether gentiles had to become Jews in order to become Christians. This was indeed the first real crisis that the young church had to face, and it did so by calling the first ever council of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15). The proponents argued most vehemently: "It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the Law of Moses (v.5). Peter then refused this legalistic approach, by drawing attention to the work of the Spirit in the lives of Gentile believers and their response in faith. It was this ceremony that enabled the council to agree that Gentiles need not become "something else" in order to become Christian.²¹⁷

The decision fired up Paul for his missionary journeys. And we are heirs to the theology that was worked out through this experience. Both Galatians and Romans are full statements on the reality of being saved through grace and not the

²¹⁶ Seow, p150

²¹⁷ Germond, p252

law, and through faith and not works. The good news is that “God’s grace is sufficient to all”. The gentile does not have to become a Jew in order to be saved. The woman does not have to become a man in order to be saved. The slave does not have to become free in order to be saved (absurd, but true). Is the logic not moving to the point of saying, the homosexual does not need to become heterosexual in order to be saved? Indeed it is. As we have explored above, because of the working of grace in the human situation we are no longer in Adam, but in Christ. “From now on, therefore, regard no one from a human point of view ... if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor. 5:16f).²¹⁸

A concluding remark from Siker clearly answers the question of whether we should include homosexual people into the ecclesial community:

Today as we are called to ask an analogous question: Despite our experience, do we insist that homosexual Christians can have the Spirit of God only if they are “heterosexual homosexual” Christians? Or, with Peter and Paul, are we up to the challenge of recognizing, perhaps with surprise and with humility, that gay and lesbian Christians, as gays and lesbians and not as sinner, have received the Spirit in faith? If so, let us welcome our newfound brothers and sisters in Christ and get on with the tasks to which God has called us all.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Ibid, p253

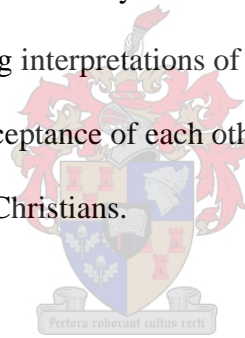
²¹⁹ Siker, p191

4. Conclusion

This chapter has spelled out some implications of an ethic and hermeneutic of inclusion and hospitality in the way we deal with the question of homosexuality. Heterosexual Christians are challenged to function with love, embrace and recognition of the full membership of homosexual brothers and sisters. The same challenge of love and embrace are directed to homosexual members of the body of Christ.

5. Conclusion to study

The most important findings of this study are that Christians will embrace each other, despite different and conflicting interpretations of scripture regarding homosexuality. This love, embrace and full acceptance of each other will be equally shared between heterosexual and homosexual Christians.



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