

Questions and Answers On Homosexuality¹

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1. What is homosexuality?

The *Encyclopaedia of Bioethics*² defines a homosexual as someone who:

- has “a predominant, persistent and exclusive psychosexual attraction towards members of the same sex.”
- “seeks or would like to seek actual sexual fulfilment of this desire by sexual acts with a person of the same sex”

This definition is comprehensive. It acknowledges and respects the distinction between the psychosexual attraction and acting on that attraction. A person can be homosexual in orientation without actually engaging in homosexual practice. Being homosexual also does not preclude interest in and care for members of the opposite sex.

2. What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

Human Sexuality, the Family and Society

Let's start by looking at what the Bible teaches about human sexuality and sexual relationships.

According to the creation account in Genesis, human beings are created male and female (Gen 1:26). Genesis 2 tells us what this implies for human sexual relationships: the man is created for the woman, and

¹ This article was published in *A Christian Response to Homosexuality* (Singapore: National Council of Churches, 2004), pp. 99-126. I would like to thank Bishop Dr. Robert Solomon for permission to republish it here.

² George A. Kanoti and Anthony R. Kosnik, *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*. Volume 2 (New York: The Free Press, 1978), p. 61.

vice versa. Genesis 2 also shows that the sexual relationship sanctioned by God is within the bounds of a monogamous marriage.³

This is God's original intention for sexual conduct. The sexes complement each other, and the command to procreate is a natural extension of this (Gens 1:28). Human sexuality is a gift of God, and sex is a profound expression of love between a man and a woman within the covenant relationship of marriage. The Bible therefore clearly maintains that sexual intercourse is not for all: within marriage the Bible commands chastity; outside marriage it commands celibacy (Gen 2:20-25; 1 Cor 6 & 7).

God's divine order as described above, has profound significance to human society and its future:

- The sexes were created to complement each other, and to teach us to appreciate diversity and difference. At the same time, we also learn to appreciate and commune with those who are unlike us.
- In any society, the different impulses that exist must be subjected to proper direction and restraint for the society to be viable. One of these impulses is sexual desire. In the Christian tradition, the proper place for the expression of this desire is marriage. This pattern of connecting sexuality with marriage and family life is found in many societies and throughout history (Gen 2:20-25).
- The command to procreate is how God intends human beings to participate in His creative work, giving life to the next generation. Even marriages that do not give rise children are still in conformity to God's ordinance for the sexes.

To think of the Bible standard of sexual relations only within monogamous marriage as merely one of many 'alternative lifestyles', undermines the biblical vision of sexuality and disrupts the social well-being of human society.

³ See Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM, 1972), pp. 57ff.; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Publishers, 1987), pp. 27ff.; Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Leicester: IVP, 1967), pp. 52ff.

Homosexuality in the Old Testament

There are a number of passages in the Bible that deal with homosexuality, whether directly or indirectly. One of the main texts is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19.⁴ Two angels arrive and stay with Lot. But before they can retire for the night, the men of Sodom gather around Lot's house and demand that he brings the two men out so that they can "have sex with them" (19:5, NIV). There is no ambiguity in the text. The men of Sodom were attempting homosexual rape.

Sodom was responsible for many acts of wickedness and immorality. Jeremiah presents a catalogue of Sodom's sins, including adultery, lying and an unwillingness to repent (Jer 23:14). But among the sins of Sodom is the practice of homosexuality. 2 Peter 2:7 interprets one of Sodom's sins as "licentiousness" and Jude 7 describes the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah as "unnatural lust". It is therefore reasonable to conclude that homosexuality was among the many sins for which Sodom was punished.

Another major reference to homosexual practice is found in the Holiness Code of Israel in Leviticus.⁵ Leviticus 18:22 tells us: "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable". Similarly, we are told in Leviticus 20:13: "If a man lies with a man as with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their heads". The Holiness Code is intended to preserve the identity and integrity of Israel as the true people of God. It sought to identify and condemn practices that must remain foreign to the life of Israel. Homosexual intercourse is one of them.

Some scholars have argued that these commands refer to homosexual temple prostitution or homosexual rape. But the words 'as with a woman' seem to indicate that what is permissible for a man to do with a woman is not permissible for him to do with members of the same sex. Sexual activities that are permitted between the sexes in marriage are not permitted between members of the same sex. Furthermore the punishment of both individuals engaged in homosexual intercourse

⁴ See von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 215ff.; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, pp. 32ff.

⁵ See Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 248ff.; John Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Publishers, 1992), pp. 280ff.; and Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), pp. 111ff.

suggests that the relationship is consensual, thus ruling out rape. The texts therefore unequivocally prohibit and condemn homosexual practices.

Homosexuality in the New Testament

The New Testament also contains a number of passages that refer to homosexual practices. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10⁶ Paul rejects homosexual behaviour along with other sinful acts: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God".

The concepts "homosexual" or "homosexuality" as sexual orientation were unknown in Paul's day, and the concern in this passage is therefore not with orientation but with actual practices. What is condemned here is genital intimacy or sexual intercourse between members of the same sex. The same is true for the catalogue of sins in 1 Timothy 1:8-11. There, the original Greek term *arsenokoitai* literally means men who have sexual intercourse with other men. In both passages, such acts are rejected.

In Romans 1:22-27, Paul describes homosexuality and lesbianism as unnatural: "Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion"⁷.

In this passage Paul associates homosexual and other immoral acts with idolatry. The theological point is this: When man inverts his relationship with God, it becomes the basis for inverted relationships between man and man. Homosexual relationships, along with strife, envy, murder and the rest, are manifestations of perverted and disordered human relationships.

⁶ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 242ff.

⁷ Gagnon, *Homosexuality*, pp. 229ff.; James Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Publishers, 1988), pp. 73ff., Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (London: SCM, 1980), pp. 36ff.; Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 108-114.

When Paul says that the homosexual relationship is "unnatural",⁸ he does not mean that it is against the instincts of the participants. Rather he is saying that such sexual relationships transgress the divine order that God has laid out in the creation. Further, verbs like "exchanged" and "gave up" indicate that a decision has been consciously made. Those concerned have a choice either to participate in such activities or refrain from them; but they have chosen the former.

Lastly, it is important to emphasise that the Bible does not treat homosexual activity as especially repugnant, but condemns it together with other sins. The Bible maintains that homosexual practices are wrong just as fornication, adultery and bestiality are wrong, because they all defile the one man-one woman marital relationship that God has ordained. The Bible also teaches that homosexual practices are wrong just as murder, envy, pride, and slander are wrong because in their own ways they pervert human relationships. This Biblical balance must be maintained whenever we discuss homosexuality.

3. What should be our response to attempts by scholars to re-interpret Scripture in favour of homosexual practices?

It is important to seriously consider alternative voices. Yet, we should also respond to them objectively with the help of the best biblical and theological scholarship.

Some scholars have challenged the traditional interpretations of the Scripture passages discussed above. They have sought to present alternative interpretations that are more sympathetic to and affirming of homosexuals and homosexual practices. While it is not possible to consider all approaches and respond to each in detail here, we have summarised some of the main counter-arguments and our brief response below.

⁸ The major lexicons and dictionaries agree that the term "natural" (*phusis*) refers to natural endowment or condition. Thus in Romans 1:26ff Paul is making the point that these men and women have exchanged sexual relationships that are in accord with nature (i.e. the heterosexual norm) for those that are not (i.e. the homosexual deviant). The context allows for no other interpretation. See W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 2nd Edition, Chicago, 1979., p. 869; Gagnon, *Homosexuality*, p. 235.

Objection 1. The Bible does not condemn all homosexual relationships but only those that are exploitative and promiscuous.

This viewpoint states that homosexual practices in the Greco-Roman world of Paul in the first century have to do with pederasty - sex between an adult male and an adolescent boy. It states that it is this exploitative form of homosexuality that the New Testament condemns.⁹

This objection cannot be supported by the Scripture passages (in both Testaments) that deal with homosexuality. This is simply because in all these passages homosexual practices are rejected without specifying the age of the participants. Furthermore, the rejection of lesbianism in Romans 1:26 shows that what is referred to here and elsewhere is not just pederasty but all forms of homosexual relationships since lesbianism in the ancient world was not confined to pederasty alone. The argument that the biblical passages on homosexuality are irrelevant to the contemporary world because they have to do with pederastic forms of homosexuality is therefore untenable.

Objection 2. Since the Bible does not talk about the idea of a 'homosexual orientation' same-sex passion was thought to have originated in over-sexed heterosexuals and therefore condemned.

This viewpoint states that since modern society does not regard homosexuality as originating from insatiable heterosexual lust, we should not condemn homosexuality in our society.

Some scholars interpret Romans 1 on the basis of this theory. According to this approach, in Romans 1, Paul was not condemning homosexuals but perverse heterosexuals who have sexual relations with members of their own sex because of their insatiable lust.¹⁰ This reinterpretation of the Biblical passages does not stand up to careful scrutiny. In Romans 1:26 Paul refers to females who "exchanged" sexual intercourse with men for intercourse with other females, and to men who

⁹ See Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). See Gagnon's rebuttal in *Homosexuality*, pp. 347ff.

¹⁰ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 109.

"abandoned" sex with women for sex with men. The word "abandon" implies that these males were exclusively oriented to other males. It weakens the argument that Paul was exclusively referring to the homoeroticism of heterosexual males and not to homosexual acts in general.

Thus, there is no evidence that Paul saw homoeroticism as excessive heterosexual passion and had opposed homosexual practices of this sort. Paul was not referring to certain individuals. He was speaking generally, and therefore was making the point that all homosexual acts are against nature. Furthermore the source of homoeroticism is not the main part of Paul's opposition to homosexual intercourse. The reason for his opposition is that such practices are unnatural, meaning that they fail to conform to God's design of heterosexual relationship within monogamous marriage.

Objection 3. Since we do not follow all the injunctions of the Bible, why should those on homosexual practices be binding?

This viewpoint points out that few churches would require women to wear veils during worship as Paul requires them to in 1 Corinthians 11:1-6. Hence, not all the commands in the Bible are being followed. Why, then, should we follow the biblical teaching regarding homosexual practices?¹¹

However, the command against homosexual practices in the Bible is found in both Testaments and therefore very difficult to avoid or ignore. In both the Old and New Testaments, the forbidding of homosexuality is persuasive and absolute. There are no dissenting voices and alternative judgements on such practices. The command is absolute in the sense that it includes every form of homoerotic sexual practice without exception. As we have seen under *Objection 2*, it is not limited to only certain forms of exploitative homosexuality. Finally, both Testaments stress the severity of the command. In the Old Testament, those found disobeying it would be punished by death (Lev 20:13). In the New Testament Paul places it alongside idolatry (1 Cor 6:9).

¹¹ David Bartlett, "A Biblical Perspective on Homosexuality" *Foundations* 20 [1977]: 142 and Gerald Sheppard, "The Use of Scripture Within the Christian Ethical Debate Concerning Same-Sex Oriented Persons" *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 40 (1985): 19; pp. 30-31 made this point in analogy to slavery.

4. Does the Bible allow stable and faithful homosexual partnerships?

Supporters of homosexual marriages argue that there is a place for stable, loving and faithful homosexual partnership, and that God would approve of such unions. They argue that such partnerships are more exemplary than some promiscuous heterosexual relationships or marriages.

It is a fact that some gays and lesbians strongly feel that theirs is the only form of love of which they are capable. To them, this love brings affection and erotic satisfaction. There can be no doubt that such love for them has profound personal significance, for even distorted love reflects the traces of some of love's grandeur.

But the simple fact that some homosexual partnerships are founded on mutual love does not legitimise homosexual intercourse. To say so would mean having to argue from a strange form of logic. If an act itself is wrong, it does not make it right just because its participants feel it is right. The fault of this kind of argument is made immediately obvious when it is applied to pedophiles. On the basis of this logic it would be legitimate for a pedophile to have sexual intercourse with a young child because he truly loves and cares for that child. But this surely cannot be the case (even if the child concerned expresses approval). The Bible rejects all homoerotic sexual relationships and, by extension, does not condone such homosexual partnerships.

5. What causes homosexuality? Is it natural or genetically determined? Is there a choice?

There are numerous theories about the causes of homosexuality. Some authorities believe that it is caused by hormonal or genetic factors. Others maintain that homosexuality is the result of environmental factors and experiences like a distorted relationship with one or both parents early in childhood. Some argue that it is a sickness or disease and that attempts should therefore be made to cure homosexual persons by altering their sexual orientation. Some sociologists think that cultural prejudices concerning gender roles may result in rejection and alienation in certain people, and this in turn may cause them to try to regain their self-esteem by finding satisfaction in homosexual relationships. There are others who

think that homosexuality is not a disorder but simply a neutral alternative to heterosexuality, a variation in sexual orientation.

In the last decade or so, the genetic argument has gained some popularity. In 1991, neurobiologist Simon LeVay¹² (then with the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California) claimed to have found differences in the brain structures of gay and straight men. He examined the brain tissues of 41 homosexuals and heterosexuals obtained from a routine autopsy. Focusing on the third interstitial nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus known as INAH-3, LeVay found that on average heterosexual men and women had higher volumes of INAH-3. LeVay is convinced that this is significant and speculated that it could mean that homosexual orientation is genetic. In the last quarter of the same year, Dean Hamer¹³ and his team of researchers at the National Cancer Institute in Maryland conducted tests on 40 pairs of homosexual brothers. They discovered that 33 of them shared a segment of the q arm of the X chromosome that is designated on the gene map as Xq28. Sexual orientation is believed to be strongly linked to this region of the X chromosome called Xq28. Hamer, who himself is a gay man, concluded in 1993 that homosexuality can be attributed both to the genes and the environment.

Presently, scientific research into the causes of homosexuality has produced inconclusive results.¹⁴ In some cases, the methods employed by scientists have been called to question, weakening the quality of their conclusions. For instance, Hamer was criticised for inflating the statistical significance of his findings. A young researcher, whose service was later

¹² Simon A. LeVay, "A Difference in Hypothalamic Structure Between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men", *Science*, 253 (1991) pp. 1034-1037; *The Sexual Brain* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1993).

¹³ See Dean Hamer and Peter Copeland, *The Science of Desire* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

¹⁴ Neil and Briar Whitehead has stated succinctly that "Science has not yet discovered any genetically dictated behaviour in humans. So far, genetically dictated behaviours of the one-gene-one-trait variety have been found only in very simple organisms ... But if many genes are involved in a behaviour, then changes in that behaviour will tend to take place very slowly and steadily (say, changes of a few percent each generation over many generations, perhaps thirty). That being so, homosexuality could not appear and disappear suddenly in family trees the way it does". *My Genes Make Me Do It! A Scientific Look at Sexual Orientation* (Lafayette, La.: Huntington House, 1999), p. 209.

terminated, accused him of not reporting findings that would undermine the significance of his results.

Most molecular biologists do not embrace the one-gene-one-trait theory. They reject this theory and other forms of genetic determinism which claim that human behaviour is caused by genes. Determinism is the belief that everything, including every human act, is caused by something and that there is no free will. Most scientists and philosophers have rejected the biological determinism associated with scientists like Richard Dawkins.¹⁵ Moreover, genetic theories of homosexual orientation are refuted by numerous studies of identical twins that developed different sexual orientations. If homosexual orientation indeed is genetic, identical twins should display identical sexual orientations.¹⁶ This indicates that sexual orientation is a matter of choice.

But even if the direct correlation between genetic make-up and homosexual orientation can be shown conclusively (and we are saying that this is not the case to date), from the perspective of the Christian faith, the conclusion that homosexuality is "natural" would still be illegitimate. The Christian faith teaches that ours is a fallen world, and that the reality that we perceive as well as our perception of it, is distorted and perverted by the sinful nature. "Nature" and what is "natural", therefore, cannot be made certain by scientific investigation or philosophical speculation alone – it must be obtained from the revelation of God in Scripture.

To sum up, the attempts to discover the causes of homosexuality have proved to be unsatisfactory and inconclusive. Attempts to discover the biological basis for homosexual behaviour fail to consider the fact that human behaviour is not determined solely by biological factors. Furthermore scientific research into the causes of homosexuality alone cannot answer the theological and ethical questions pertaining to the issue. The Christian must search the Scripture to find answers to such questions.

¹⁵ For my contribution to the discussion, see Roland Chia, "Biological Essentialism and the Person", in *Beyond Determinism and Reductionism: Genetic Science and the Person*. Edited by Roland Chia and Mark Chan (Australia: ATF Press, 2003).

¹⁶ See Pillard Bailey, "A Genetic Study of Male Sexual Orientation", *Archives of General Psychiatry* (1991) 48: 1089-1096; E. Eckert, T. Bouchard, L. Heston, "Homosexuality in Monozygotic Twins Reared Apart", *British Journal of Psychiatry* (1986), 148:421-425; and McConaghy, "A Pair of Monozygotic Twins Discordant for Homosexuality: Sex-Morphic Behaviour and Penile Volume Responses", *Archives of Sexual Behaviour* (1980) 9:123-131.

6. What about the "ten percent argument"? Should it lead to the conclusion that homosexuality is acceptable behaviour?

Gay activists have sometimes argued for homosexual behaviour to be accepted on the basis that ten percent of the population is homosexual. The 1948 report by Alfred Kinsey, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, which arrived at the ten percent figure has been heavily criticised by psychologists as profoundly flawed in its methodology.¹⁷ Kinsey's subjects were drawn from convicted criminals, twenty-six percent of which were convicted sex offenders, and therefore cannot be representative of normal sexual practices. Moreover, the ten percent figure includes even people who have engaged in some homosexual behaviour for a certain period, i.e., those who have undergone a homosexual "phase", but were not long term homosexuals.

Recent and more scientific studies have shown that only around one to two percent of the population is homosexual. But even if the percentage of a population that engages in homosexual behaviour could be determined, it does not prove that the behaviour is right. In our Christian belief, everyone is born with original sin and the desires that result from it (Rom 5:12-13; Eph 2:1-5). If it can be shown that ten percent of the population is greedy or adulterous or murderous, does this make these behaviours acceptable? The argument that because ten percent of the population is homosexual makes homosexual behaviour acceptable is intrinsically flawed.

7. Can homosexual orientation be changed?

Those who hold that homosexuality is genetically or biologically determined have concluded that one's sexual orientation cannot be changed. If this is true, then homosexuality is a condition that cannot be treated. Those who hold this view often appeal as their source to a publication of Dr. C.C. Tripp¹⁸ that states categorically that not a single

¹⁷ For criticism of Kinsey's methodology and rebuttal of his conclusions, see Judith Reisman and Edward Eichel, *Kinsey, Sex and Fraud* (Lafayette, Louisiana: Lochinvar & Huntington House, 1990).

¹⁸ C. Tripp and L. Hatterer, "Can Homosexuals Change with Psychotherapy?" *Sexual Behaviour* (1971) 1, 4:42-49.

recorded instance of change in homosexual orientation has been validated. Studies have shown that those who oppose therapy for change see such therapy as unethical because they view such therapy to be oppressive to those who do not want change. These researchers and scientists also maintain that those who express desire for change are actually victims of societal or religious pressure. It is important to note that in studies on homosexuality, many of those who advocate moral acceptance of homosexuality, also endorse sexual behaviours which are unacceptable biblically regardless of the orientation of those who practice them. These include infidelity in committed relationships, anonymous sexual encounters and general promiscuity.

Scientists like Tripp have chosen to ignore a large body of literature documenting the treatment and surveys of therapists.¹⁹ These documents²⁰ show that therapies on homosexuals have enjoyed relative success:

- about 30 percent experience freedom from symptoms
- another 30 percent experience significant improvement.

In a report that spans a ten-year period, from 1967 to 1977, Dr Charles Socarides, who has extensive clinical experience with homosexuals, stated that of the 45 overt homosexuals that have undergone psychoanalytic therapy, 20 patients, nearly 50 percent, have developed full heterosexual functioning. They were able to develop feelings of love for their heterosexual partners. Moreover, there are also numerous published autobiographical reports from homosexual men and women who have experienced a sexual reorientation. Many report that they are totally free from homoerotic fantasy and conduct, while others report that they have gained considerable control over their homosexual impulse.

¹⁹ W. Throckmorton, "Efforts to Modify Sexual Orientation: A Review of Outcome Literature and Ethical Issues", *Journal of Mental Health and Counselling* (1996), 20, 4:283-305 and "Initial Empirical and Clinical Findings Concerning the Change Process for Ex-Gays" in *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 2002 (33) 3:242-248. I thank my colleague Thomas Harvey for drawing my attention to the second article.

²⁰ See for instance J. Clippinger, "Homosexuality Can Be Cured", *Corrective and Social Psychiatry and Journal of Behaviour Technology, Methods and Therapy* (1974) 21, 2:15-28.

It is pertinent to note that the renowned Columbia University psychiatric researcher, Robert Spitzer, M.D., who was directly involved in the 1973 decision to remove homosexuality from the list of mental disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association, has recently been involved in research into sexual reorientation.²¹ Spitzer now believes that reorientation is indeed possible. As same-sex attraction is better understood and as therapies for change improve, treatment for homosexuality will be more successful.

8. What is the Church's message to practising homosexuals?

The message of the Church to practising homosexuals is the same message that it proclaims to every person: Repent and believe the good news of Jesus Christ!

All human beings are sinners, born with a sinful nature, and in need of the saving grace of God. Homosexuality is but one of the many manifestations of human sinfulness and the fallenness of human life. Scripture tell us that by nature we are all lost and condemned sinners and that we are in need of the mercy of God in Christ (Rom 3:10).

The Church's central message to practising homosexuals is that in Christ there is the forgiveness of God and the promise of eternal life. While we were sinners, God sent his Son Jesus Christ to offer his life as a sacrifice and atonement for our sins. By his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, Christ has made the salvation of God available to all that place their faith in him.

9. What should be the Church's attitude towards practising homosexuals?

The Church, while rejecting homosexual practices and the movement that promotes them in the name of tolerance and moral progress, must also resist all manner of persecution and ostracism of homosexuals. Instead the Church must acknowledge the fact that homosexuals are persons whom

²¹ *Homosexuality and Hope: Statement of the Catholic Medical Association*. November 2000, p. 6.

God has created and who therefore must be treated with dignity and respect.

The Church should welcome homosexuals who are seeking to turn from the sin of homosexual behaviour, and extend to them the same ministry of forgiveness, deliverance, prayer and nurture that she extends to all others. The Church therefore rejects homophobia in all its manifestations. By welcoming the homosexual while rejecting his or her lifestyle, the Church hopes that he or she will encounter Jesus Christ her Saviour and Lord, come to the saving knowledge of God and be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

10. What should be the attitude of a Christian who faces homosexual temptation towards his own sexuality?

The Christian with a homosexual temptation must realise that his identity is fundamentally based on his relationship with God through Jesus Christ. He is not defined solely by his sexual orientation, even though the latter is an integral part of who he is as a person.

The Christian is first a child of God. The Christian who is faced with homoerotic temptations should understand that although sexuality is a gift from God, both homosexual *and* heterosexual temptations do not come from God. God deals with different people differently. For some, homosexual desires are slowly but surely conquered as they continually submit their lives to the lordship of Christ. For others such desires may persist throughout their lives. But God's call to both groups of people – and indeed to all his children – is the same.

All Christians are called to grow into the likeness of Christ through spiritual disciplines, and with the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit. They are placed in the community of believers, the Church, in order that they may encourage one another, carry each other's burden, and build one another up in Christ.

Sex is not everything. This is true for all, not just for those grappling with homosexual desires and tendencies. God has ordained that a man and a woman should have sexual relations with each other only in the context of monogamous marriage. In this sense the homosexual person who is determined to respond to God's call to discipleship is in a similar position with numerous heterosexuals for whom marriage is not possible.

While it is true that in theory the heterosexual at least has an option, in reality that option eludes many heterosexuals who will have to come to terms with their singleness and be determined to live celibate lives. Many homosexuals – and single heterosexuals – who have answered this divine call, have found fulfilment in their celibate lifestyles. They have discovered an abundance of life – a Spirit-filled life that is lived in compassion, selflessness and service – that many "normal" people may never find.

11. Should the Christian who faces homosexual temptation be (a) allowed to participate in the worship service and holy communion, (b) allowed to assume a leadership role in the church, and (c) ordained to the Christian ministry?

Worship and Holy Communion

The Christian who wants to live the life of faith but who faces homosexual temptation, struggles together with others in the community of faith to answer the call of God to holiness. As a member of God's household the repentant but struggling Christian should be allowed to participate in its life and worship.

The Church is a fellowship of repentant and forgiven sinners who offer their worship to God who in Christ has redeemed them from sin and death. The members of the Church are not perfect, but are being transformed to perfection by the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit. Other members of the Church should do their best to support and nurture the Christian who is struggling with his sexuality so that he may receive the strength to persevere in the life of obedience. There is no reason why a Christian with such struggles should be prevented from participating in the sacred family meal, the Lord's Supper. But in doing so, he must remember that 'whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27). He must watch and pray and so that he will not fall into temptation and sin. This warning is not just for him, but for the whole community of faith.

Christian Leadership

The Christian who struggles with homosexual temptations should not in principle be disqualified from assuming a leadership role in the Church if he acknowledges and renounces homosexual practice as sin, and is determined to live a celibate life. He must be self-controlled and submit not to the flesh but to the Spirit of God.

The call to serve as a leader in the Church is a tremendous privilege as well as an awesome responsibility. In 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Paul provides a catalogue of qualities that an overseer or deacon must possess. Character is a more important criterion for spiritual leadership in the Church than competence. The leader in God's Church must be a person of impeccable character: beyond reproach, temperate, self-controlled, and respectable. This is the requirement of *all* leaders.

Ordained Ministry

The ordination of homosexuals to the Christian ministry is an issue that is much debated in churches in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Europe and Australia. There are two questions.

(a) Should active homosexuals who are in a stable and committed relationship with one partner be ordained? As argued above the Bible does not condone the sexual relationship of two individuals of the same sex. There can therefore be no question of ordaining persons involved in such relationships into the Christian ministry.

(b) Should Christians who acknowledge that homosexual behaviour is sinful but who struggle with homosexual temptations be ordained? Such persons could be ordained into the Christians ministry if they fulfil other scriptural criteria. They must be willing to live a celibate life and seek deliverance from the power of sin and healing of their sexual orientation. They must put themselves under the supervision and spiritual direction of their colleagues.

12. How should a Christian respond to the "Gay Rights Movement"?

In the West, the influence of the "Gay Rights Movement" is growing and its impact sometimes felt even in some Protestant Churches. The gay and lesbian movement may be said to be part of the larger ethos, a logical extension, so to speak, of the Sexual Revolution. Basically, this movement is seeking to convince our culture to accept homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle. The progression that this comes about may be described thus: from endurance (tolerance), to pity (compassion), to embrace (affirmation).

Advocates of the movement offer various arguments to achieve this goal. Firstly, they maintain that homosexual orientation is innate, and that some are simply 'born this way'. By doing this they take advantage of the Gene Myth which says that human behaviour is controlled by the genes. However, as we have seen in Question 5, there is very little basis for such claims.

The second argument is that sexuality is an entirely private matter. To be sure, many people in society, homosexuals and heterosexuals alike, embrace this view. But such a claim must be refuted on the basis that certain 'private' behaviours have enormous ramifications on society at large and on the common good. The alarming rates of promiscuity, depression, suicide and AIDS infection in homosexual subculture have been widely documented.²² Furthermore, government policies to 'normalize' the gay lifestyle would encourage more people to adopt that lifestyle and undermine the normative nature of marriage and family life. The extreme individualism and liberalism advocated by the gay rights movement is dangerous both to homosexuals and the communities they live in bringing rejection, heartache and illness. The Christian belief is that liberty to do as you please is in fact a form of slavery whereas submission to God's ways brings true freedom. For instance, one constraint we place on ourselves as Christians is the well-being of others (Rom 14:21).

Gay activists argue that opposition to such movements is the same thing as discrimination against homosexuals. Those in America often compare their movement with the civil rights movement that sought to

²² See "The Homosexual Movement: A Response by the Ramsey Colloquium", in *First Things*, March 1994, 41:15-21.

stop injustice against black Americans. It is understandable why gay activists have adopted this analogy. They would like us to consider sexual orientation to be as natural as racial identity. Comparisons with the civil rights movement also help gay activists to clothe those who oppose homosexual orientation with the same characteristics as those who opposed the civil rights movement – ignorance, prejudice and hatred of people different from themselves. But this analogy is misleading on two counts. First, the Church's belief is that unlike certain sexual behaviour, racial differences are natural and good. Second, the Church opposes the gay lifestyle but does not encourage ignorance, prejudice and hatred towards the people in that lifestyle.

The Church cannot support the gay movement because the lifestyle that it advocates is not only incompatible with the teaching of Scripture but is explicitly rejected by it. The Church's main calling is to proclaim the Gospel and she is thus not involved in the political process. Members of the Church, however, must be fully aware of such issues and the policies of the government, and act as informed, responsible and active Christian citizens.

13. What is homophobia?

George Weinberg defines homophobia as:

"The dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals – and in the case of homosexuals themselves, self-loathing".

This is the classic definition that first appeared in Weinberg's 1972 book *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*. This definition can now be found in most dictionaries as well. Homophobia is not just an attitude of heterosexuals towards homosexuals, but also that of some homosexuals towards their own sexuality as well.

Following from this definition, a negative response to homosexual practice should not be immediately classified as homophobia. We have to ask ourselves what motivates that negative response. Is it fear, hatred and rejection of a person or is it rejection of the person's practices?

Hate-inspired prejudice and violence against homosexuals do exist. One survey conducted by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence

Programmes reports that violent attacks on gays and lesbians rose sharply over the 1,081 cases reported 1997.²³ Violent gay-bashing in America is epitomised by the vicious torture and murder of textile worker Jack Gaither in 1998, who was abducted, beaten to death with an axe handle and thrown onto a pyre of burning tyres.

The Church rejects and condemns all forms of violence against homosexuals either in attitude, language or behaviour. We maintain that no society should countenance hate-crimes against gays and lesbians. The Church rejects and condemns all forms of violence against homosexuals either in attitude, language or behaviour.

The Church has identified the practice of homosexuality as sin. Should the Church be labelled as homophobic for doing so? The answer is clearly no:

- The Church's rejection of homosexual practice is not based on fear but on the moral order regarding human sexual relationship taught in Scripture.
- In rejecting the sin of homosexual behaviour, the Church does not reject gays and lesbians but reaches out to them, inviting them to embrace God's offer of love and salvation in Christ in repentance and faith.
- The Church values all persons, including the homosexual, because we believe that God loves them and that Christ has died for them.

To object to homosexual acts undoubtedly hurts the feelings of those who practise them. To many of these people, the Church's objection is homophobia. While individual homosexuals who experience the love of Christian friends and family may understand the difference, it is likely that gay activists will continue to view all negative responses to homosexuality as homophobia. To label the Church's stand as homophobic is in the activists' interest as it stifles rational discussion of homosexuality.

²³ Chris Bull, "The State of Hate", *Advocate* April 13, 1999. *Advocate* is the national gay and lesbian news magazine in the United States.

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