

Orientation

Disorientation

Reorientation

A Cultural, Biblical & Theological Treatment of
Homosexuality with a Missional & Pastoral Application:

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WHAT DO WE HEAR FROM PEOPLE?

FROM a cultural analysis

Introduction

Not long after arriving home from dinner on the 15th of January, 2011, lesbian partners Lindsay Curnow and Juliet Leigh of Blooming Bulbs in Mangawhai, New Zealand, were startled and devastated by the sudden explosion and burning of their business storage shed.¹ The arson followed anti-gay slurs being written on their home less than a week before. Suspicions of religious motivation were strengthened by a subsequent act of vandalism on July 26th, likely by the same person(s), where the message “God hates dikes + queers [sic]” was spray-painted on their fence.² The response from around the country has consisted of anger at the offenders and support for the couple. Additionally, there has been a renewed opposition to ‘homophobia’, including the call for vigilant work to change views in “places of worship”.³ There is thus a degree of implied responsibility for the traditional teaching of the Christian Church in causing such ‘homophobia’.

Are we guilty of this? How do we respond to this issue, and what is a loving and truthful approach to homosexuality? By way of a cultural, biblical and theological assessment of homosexuality, this essay will construct a missional and pastoral response to what is perhaps one of the Church’s most difficult and sensitive issues.

Listening in on Culture’s Conversation

Popular Discourse:

A cursory glance across the modern world of popular media (TV/film, music, web, newspapers, magazines, etc.) provides an ample sense of what the popular discourse is concerning homosexuality. In the music scene, it shows up in the lyrics of hit songs by Katy Perry and Lady Gaga, two infamous pop divas. For example Katy Perry sings “I kissed a girl

¹ Rosemary Roberts, “Outrage over anti gay attack”, *The Northern Advocate*, 25 January, 2011, <http://www.northernadvocate.co.nz/local/news/outrage-over-anti-gay-attack/3938117/> (accessed 3 August, 2011); “Lesbian couple targeted in hate crime arson”, *NZ Herald*, 23 January, 2011, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10701514 (accessed 3 May, 2011); Notice Board, Blooming Bulbs (website), <http://www.bloomingbulbs.co.nz/index.php> (accessed, 3 August, 2011).

² Rosemary Roberts, “Hate message found on lesbians’ Mangawhai fence”, *The Northern Advocate*, 28 July, 2011, <http://www.northernadvocate.co.nz/have-your-say/news/hate-message-found-on-lesbians-mangawhai-fence/3960979/> (accessed 3 August, 2011); Amelia Wade, “Persecuted lesbians forced from home”, *NZ Herald*, 28 July, 2011, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10741288 (accessed 3 August, 2011).

³ Martyn Bradbury (‘Bomber’), “Len, isn’t it time to bring back the Hero Parade?”, Tumeke (blog), 30 January, 2011, <http://tumeke.blogspot.com/2011/01/len-isnt-it-time-to-bring-back-hero.html> (accessed 3 August, 2011); “New Zealand has work to do on gay rights”, *NZ Herald*, 27 January, 2011, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10702447 (accessed 3 May, 2011).

and I liked it... I kissed a girl just to try it. It felt so wrong, it felt so right.” In ‘Born This Way’, Gaga declares “I’m beautiful in my way, ‘cause God makes no mistakes. ...no matter gay, straight, or bi, lesbian, transgendered life I’m on the right track baby I was born to survive.”⁴ Television programming interacts with the topic, through sitcoms such as *Glee* and *Friends*.⁵ Films like *Brokeback Mountain* and *Milk* and documentaries such as *Bullied* lend their perspective to the discussion.⁶ A range of more specified media, such as gay-newspapers, gay-magazines and gay-blogs provide updates on the latest gossip for a niche market of homosexual readers. Media like this reinforce the views and identities of its readers, lamenting opposition and celebrating victories. One gay newspaper New Zealand celebrates being in a country that is seen to be “more live and let live than most.”⁷

Political Discourse:

Global political views on sexuality in general (and homosexuality in particular) have shifted radically and recently. Shifting views on gender have shaped views on homosexuality, leading to the reform of legislation.⁸ In New Zealand, within fifty years, from the Department of Health’s conservative view in 1955 that “It is only in the sanctity of marriage that [sex] can be enjoyed freely, unashamedly, and with the sanction of society”, through the removal of life imprisonment for Sodomy with the Crimes Act of 1961, and to the legalisation of same-sex civil unions in 2004.⁹ Laurie Guy writes:

“In contrast to its earlier uniformity and conformity of thought and behaviour, New Zealand opted for a diverse society. Major shifts of world view were part of this change process.” [...] “Worlds collided. The outcome was the substantial routing of the conservative sexual world view in the arena of public discourse.”¹⁰

Globally, the rate of change in legislation regarding homosexuality, same-sex unions and adoption policy is rapid. In many contexts, views are so strongly in favour of not only decriminalisation, but acceptance of homosexuality, that some have experienced a new kind of discrimination against religious views that it is immoral.¹¹ Despite the widespread

⁴ Katy Perry, “I Kissed A Girl”, *Capitol Records*, 2008; and Lady Gaga, “Born This Way”, *Interscope Records*, 2011.

⁵ ‘Glee’, *Ryan Murphy Productions* (2009-current); and ‘Friends’, *Warner Bros.* (1994-2004).

⁶ ‘Brokeback Mountain’, *Alberta Film Entertainment* (2005); ‘Milk’, *Focus Features* (2008); and ‘Bullied’, *Bill Brummel Productions, Inc.* (2010).

⁷ Leif Waters, “The Bubble” *Express* (June, 2011): 11.

⁸ Karin A. Martin, “Gender and Sexuality: Medical Opinion on Homosexuality, 1900-1950,” *Gender and Society* 7.2 (1993): 246-260.

⁹ Laurie Guy, *Worlds in Collision: The Gay Debate in New Zealand 1960-1986* (Wellington, NZ: Victoria University Press, 2002), 32; John Tucker, ‘A Braided River: New Zealand Baptists and Public Issues, 1882-2000’, PhD thesis, University of Otago, 2010, 266; David E. Newton, *Gay and Lesbian Rights: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2009), 107.

¹⁰ Guy, *Worlds in Collision*, 228.

¹¹ David R. Hodge, “Epistemological Frameworks, Homosexuality, and Religion: How People of Faith Understand the Intersection between Homosexuality and Religion,” *Social Work* 30.3 (2005): 207-218.

movement of decriminalisation, homosexuality remains illegal in 80 countries, 5 of which (Iran, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen) punish homosexual acts by death.¹²

Scientific Discourse

Homosexuality is very topical in both the hard and 'soft' sciences. If you were to walk into the Biology, Medicine or Sociology Department of an academic institution, you would be exposed to a host of sub-discourses. There are a host of causal theories from the general sciences, such as Neurology, Evolutionary Biology & Genetics. British-American neuroscientist, Simon LeVay concluded that among homosexuals there tends to be a different sized hypothalamus in the brain (above the stem). His study, however, doesn't confirm "if the changes in the hypothalamus are the cause or consequences of an individual's sexual orientation."¹³ Janis Bohan acknowledges the reality of multiple factors, saying "[for] some, biology may play a major role; for others, choice predominates; for each, environmental forces likely contribute; for all, the meanings given by society shape how experiences will be understood and identities will be defined."¹⁴

There is also evidence that a simplistic 'either/or' view of orientation ('either-homosexual-or-heterosexual') is not sufficient as it fails to take into consideration the range of stability and plasticity of sexual orientation.¹⁵ In fact, the apparent plasticity of sexual orientation has given rise to terms such as 'heteroflexible' and 'B.U.G.' (Bisexual Until Graduation), the latter being found particularly among university students.¹⁶ The label 'heteroflexible' "describes women who do not adhere to an identity included in the existing triangle: heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbian."¹⁷ Finally, ongoing studies within the medical sciences continue to track rates of HIV and AIDS.¹⁸

In the 'soft' sciences, such as sociology, there is research about the 'mainstreaming' effect (influencing away from extreme views) of media, which has found evidence of the tendency of people to shape their beliefs about the origin of homosexuality to match their

¹² Daniel Ottosson, "State-sponsored Homophobia: A world survey of laws prohibiting same-sex activity between consenting adults," (May, 2010), ILGA (The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association), http://old.ilga.org/Statehomophobia/ILGA_State_Sponsored_Homophobia_2010.pdf (accessed Aug 6, 2010).

¹³ John S. Feinberg et al., *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1996), 187.

¹⁴ Janis S. Bohan, *Psychology and Orientation: Coming to Terms* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 88.

¹⁵ William J. Jenkins, "Can Anyone Tell Me Why I'm Gay? What Research Suggests Regarding The Origins of Sexual Orientation," *North American Journal of Psychology*, 12.2 (2010): 279-296.

¹⁶ Elisabeth Morgan Thompson and Elizabeth M. Morgan, "'Mostly straight' Young Women: Variations in Sexual Behavior and Identity Development," *Developmental Psychology* 44.1 (2008): 15-21; Margaret Rosario, et al. "Sexual Identity Development among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youths: Consistency and Change Over Time," *Journal of Sex Research*, 43.1 (2006): 46-58; and Ambrose, Emily (2009). "Heteroflexibility: Bending the Existing Label Triangle" *Colorado State University Journal of Student Affairs* 43 (2009): 69-75.

¹⁷ Ibid, 69.

¹⁸ P. J. Veugelers, et al., "Estimation of the Magnitude of the HIV Epidemic Among Homosexual Men: Utilization of Survey Data in Predictive Models," *European Journal of Epidemiology* 9.4 (1993): 436-441.

existing political or religious values.¹⁹ A study in the field of economics also has observed that while *male/gay* same-sex partners tend to earn *less* than heterosexual partnered/married men, *female/lesbian* partners tend to earn *more* than heterosexual partnered/married women.²⁰ There are even studies that research the researchers, studying their methodology and the semantics of the writing of those who research sexual behaviour in animals.²¹ Jenner Terry writes:

“Laboratories, like zoos, are sites of voyeurism. We look to the sexual behavior of animals to give meaning to human social relations, and by doing so, we engage in imaginative acts that frequently underscore culturally dominant ideas about gender and sexuality.”²²

The urgent need for increased attention to suicide rates is a continuing concern.²³ Whilst warning against a return to seeing homosexuality itself as a mental disorder, a recent article reminds that “the strength of the empirical evidence that significant numbers of LGBT people suffer from mood, anxiety and substance use disorders compels concerted action aimed at encouraging help seeking, improving the quality and availability of culturally appropriate mental health services...”²⁴ The discipline of analytic psychology, offers helpful counselling insights from the work of psychotherapists with their homosexual clients.²⁵

Philosophical Discourse

Philosophy has a lot to say about homosexuality as a case within ethics in general (and sexual ethics in particular). The voices of Ancient and modern philosophers contributes to the conversation. Plato saw homosexuality as “unnatural” in relation to a natural law.²⁶ Aquinas (picking up on the more flexible Aristotelian notion of natural law) required sex to be “of a generative kind”, thus ruling out homosexuality. A very recent philosopher, Michael Foucault raised a significant challenge on the category of ‘identity’ with regard to sexuality.

¹⁹ Jerel P. Calzo & Monique Ward, “Media Exposure and Viewers’ Attitudes Toward Homosexuality: Evidence for Mainstreaming or Resonance?” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 53.2 (2009): 280-299; and Gregory B. Lewis, “Does Believing Homosexuality Is Innate Increase Support for Gay Rights?” *The Policy Studies Journal* 37.4 (2009): 669-693.

²⁰ Amanda K. Baumle & Dudley L. Poston, Jr., “The Economic Cost of Homosexuality: Multilevel Analyses,” *Social Forces* 89.3 (2011): 1005-1032.

²¹ Jennifer Terry, “Unnatural Acts” in Nature: The Scientific Fascination with Queer Animals,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6.2 (2000): 151-193.

²² *Ibid*, 152.

²³ Ann P. Haas (PhD), et al. “Suicide and Suicide Risk in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Populations: Review and Recommendations,” *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58.1 (2011): 10-51.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 34.

²⁵ Barry Miller, “Expressions of Homosexuality and the Perspective of Analytical Psychology,” *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 55 (2010): 112–124.

²⁶ Pickett, Brent, “Homosexuality,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/homosexuality/>, (accessed 22/7/2011).

Some moral theorists have defined sexual perversion in terms of being psychologically 'truncated' (incomplete), arguing that homosexual acts are as complete as heterosexual acts, and thus are not perverted.²⁷ Interestingly, biological determinism has been used in arguments both in support and in critique of homosexuality being morally acceptable.²⁸ The sub-discipline of epistemology explores the issues involved with how we can know what is right and wrong, and how we "look at [homosexuality] through thick lenses with extensive histories of all sorts."²⁹ Gert Hekma observes that "causal explanations of homosexuality did not become common until the Enlightenment", which also speaks of the underlying philosophical issues involved.³⁰

Religious Discourse

Among religions, there are remarkable similarities and interesting differences of understanding across denominations and religions regarding homosexuality. Historically, various ancient law codes such as those of the Middle Assyrians and Hebrews sharply prescribed against it. And at other times it had a celebrated and even institutional place in society.³¹ Greenberg and Bystryn suggest that religious "intolerance toward homosexuality and other forms of sexual activity grew in late antiquity because of the strains of profound social change."³²

In modern times, we observe polemic slogans such as 'God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve' at one extreme end of the spectrum; for example, the infamous website of Westporo Baptist Church, 'Godhatesfags.com'.³³ On the other end, a host of gay-affirming churches offer various kinds of chastisements against "homophobia" and "heterosexism", as in the recent case of a church accusing its leadership of using 'Gay-dar' to assess potential priests.³⁴ And of course, in between these two, there is all manner of voices in between struggling to interpret Scripture faithfully and connect with and care for people lovingly. The ecumenical task of finding a way forward in the Church's debate on homosexuality has given

²⁷ Thomas Nagel, "Sexual Perversion," in *Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*, eds. Alan Soble and Nicholas Power (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 31-44.

²⁸ Bonnie Spanier, "Biological Determinism and Homosexuality," in *Same-sex Cultures and Sexualities: An Anthropological Reader*, ed. Jennifer Ellen Robertson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 33-47; and Edward Stein, "The Ethical Relevance of Scientific Research on Sexual Orientation," in *Same Sex: Debating the Ethics, Science, and Culture of Homosexuality*, ed. John Corvino (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 138-40.

²⁹ Hodge, "Epistemological Frameworks", 207-218; and Barry Miller, "Expressions of Homosexuality," 113.

³⁰ Gert Hekma, 'Causal Theories of Homosexuality,' in *Reader's Guide to Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Ed. Timothy F. Murphy (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), 120.

³¹ Victor H. Mathews & Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*, Fully rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 117; David F. Greenberg and Marcia H. Bystryn, "Christian Intolerance of Homosexuality," *American Journal of Sociology* 88.3 (1982): 515.

³² Greenberg and Bystryn, "Christian Intolerance", 542.

³³ Westporo Baptist Church, <http://www.godhatesfags.com> (accessed August 4, 2011).

³⁴ Nicholas Jones, "Church-sign challenge over gay priests," *The New Zealand [Weekend] Herald* Saturday, July 2, 2011, A3.

rise to many books.³⁵ Into the context of the Anglican Communion, Andrew Goddard and Phil Groves write, “Our *koinonia* demands further listening, deeper respect and the willingness to continue on this journey of exploration and encounter with the *other* to whom we so often choose not to listen.”³⁶

Conclusions

Without blurring the divergent (and at points contradictory) contributions to the conversation into one vague statement, we can make a few observations about the general tone of the cultural discourse on homosexuality as a whole.

- Globally, there is (for better or worse) **a growing trend of acceptance** of homosexuality – especially in western countries.
- In more liberalised contexts, there is often **a tenor of impatience** at people who ‘still’ see it as immoral.
- The amount of recent **research and technical analysis** (in the natural/social sciences as well as in philosophy and religion) in the last century is unprecedented.
- For many (especially the casual observer), it is **increasingly difficult to critique the information and opinion** that is increasing in amount and accessibility (i.e. internet research).
- There is **a growing inability for self-critique** by the voices at both extremes, which results in further polarisation.

³⁵ Examples include: Philip Groves, ed., *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality: A Resource to Enable Listening and Dialogue* (London: SPCK, 2008); D. Cameron Murchison, Jr. “Scripture, Tradition, Knowledge and Experience: A Review of Some Recent Literature from the Church’s Conversation on Homosexuality,” *The Ecumenical Review* 50.1 (1998): 48-53; and the double-issue of the journal by the Australian Theological Forum, *interface*, dedicated to the topic, Brian Edgar and Gordon Preece, eds., *Interface* (Whose Homosexuality? Which Authority? Homosexual Practice, Marriage, Ordination and the Church) 9.1-2 (2006).

³⁶ Andrew Goddard and Phillip Groves, “introduction,” in *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality: A Resource to Enable Listening and Dialogue* (London: SPCK, 2008), 13.

WHAT MIGHT WE DISCERN FROM GOD?

THROUGH: a biblical/theological lens

Introduction

This section will use an adaptation of the schema Walter Brueggemann developed for the Psalms (Orientation, Disorientation, Reorientation).³⁷ He uses the schema to refer to the progression from a pre-critical to post-critical posture in the Psalms. Our use will outline stages of progression in the homosexuality conversation within the Church (see figure 1).³⁸

Figure 1

	'Orientation'	'Disorientation'	'Reorientation'
Complexity	Simplistic	Complexity	Simplicity
Mode of Discourse	Slogans	Facts/Detail	Paradoxes/Priorities
Biblical Interpretation	Under-interpretive	Over-interpretive	Interpretive
Theological Analysis	None	Pre-Analytical	Analytical

Orientation

The entry-level of the conversation is a popular, pre-critical stage we'll call **Orientation**. For both traditionalists and revisionists, the issue of homosexuality is clear and simple. The conversation is characterised by *polarisation*, and speaking past one another. Patient biblical work, let alone theological reflection, is absent.

Scripture, for the traditionalist, doesn't need to be interpreted, but simply *read*. Genesis 1&2 outlines the biblical design for both marriage and gender, which is encapsulated in the pop-slogan: 'God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.' The sin of the Sodomite men was clearly and totally homosexuality – end of conversation. Whether or not the death penalty (Lev. 20:13) was excessive or not, the book of Leviticus tells us all we need (or were wanting) to know, namely that it is wrong. Three proof-texts in Paul's letters (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; and 1 Timothy 1:10) confirm that it is still 'wrong' in the New Testament as well. Popular use of the 'it's unnatural' slogan evidences unawareness of

³⁷ Originally "Orientation, Disorientation, New Orientation" in Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1984). The schema is analogous to the philosophical 'thesis, antithesis, synthesis' triad as well.

³⁸ Because this is a *biblical and theological* analysis, we will focus on the conversation among those with biblical and theological convictions.

reports of 'homosexual' behaviour in animals.³⁹ Church doctrine, for traditionalists, simply needs to be *obeyed*. The church's political mission is to fight the 'gay agenda', which is seen as one of society's worst ills.

For the revisionist, texts can be reinterpreted or disregarded either for being 'ancient', or sometimes with a single hermeneutical sweep of the word 'love'. No robust hermeneutical or theological method is needed at this level of conversation. At this stage, the experience of homosexuality, combined with the assumption that homosexual behaviour is acceptable, seems to guide all further considerations. The task within the church is to 'update' Church teaching. In the world, however, the political mission is the war against 'homophobia', the next global social justice hurdle to leap over.

Disorientation

Increased reading, reflection, and dialogue moves the conversation from the popular, pre-critical stage of 'orientation' to a more academic, and critical stage: **Disorientation**. What was clear and simple is now multi-sided and complex. The conversation is characterised by increased consideration of other's views. Precise interpretation of all relevant passages becomes imperative.

Genesis 1-2

All biblical teaching on sexuality links back to the creation account in Genesis 1-2, where humans are created, male and female, in God's image (1:27), and come together as 'one flesh' (2:24). For revisionists, this text does not *prescribe* timeless boundaries for marriage, but *describes* a pattern for loving relationships. Traditionalists, however, see it as *both* descriptive and prescriptive. Only the woman was both different enough (not an animal), yet also similar enough (2:23 - 'bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh') to be a 'suitable helper' for the man.⁴⁰ Adam and Eve are "the positive male-female model" for the 'one flesh' sexual union," the seal of the marriage covenant.⁴¹

Genesis 19

In Genesis 19, the men of Sodom ask Lot to bring out the two men to them so they could 'know' (have sexual intercourse with) them (19:5).⁴² Several have suggested that the

³⁹ And possibly signals an 'either/or' approach to Science and Scripture.

⁴⁰ Leonard J. Coppes, "1289 נָגַד", in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris et al. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 550; The Hebrew term for 'helper' (נִגְדָן – *kýnegdo*) can carry the sense of being opposite.

⁴¹ Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 8.

⁴² Wold, *Out of Order*, 89; "On the basis of ancient Near Eastern parallels, and the Septuagint translation, we can say with confidence that the verb *yāda*^c means sexual intercourse..."

passage condemns, not homosexuality in general, but homosexual (or any kind of) *rape* in particular; thus leaving *consensual* homosexual acts unmentioned.⁴³ Appeal is often made to the mention of the sin of Sodom in Ezekiel 16:49-50, which says ‘they did not help the poor and the needy.’ The argument is that their sin was *inhospitality* toward the visitors and not homosexuality (despite its mention of ‘abominable deeds’).

Traditionalists respond with another ‘both/and’: the passage condemns both inhospitality and homosexual acts. Appeal is made to both the immediate context (the actions were ‘wicked’ before they tried to use force - 19:9), and wider Old Testament teaching. Furthermore, the New Testament epistle of Jude, describes their actions as pursuing ‘strange flesh’, implying the sinfulness of both the forcefulness and the nature of their intended actions.⁴⁴ Wold concludes “the view that homosexuality should be replaced by inhospitality in the Sodom story cannot be supported...”⁴⁵

Leviticus 18 & 20

Leviticus 18:6-23 contains the Mosaic instruction regarding sexuality. In v. 22, males are forbidden (with death as the sentence in 20:13) to ‘lie’ with men as with a woman. Some have suggested that because these laws are located in a section emphasizing distinctness from pagan nations (cf. Lev. 18:3), they do not forbid homosexual practice in general, but specifically Israelite participation in pagan temple prostitution (in this case same-sex).⁴⁶ Traditionalists counter that it is not only about cultic sexual rites, but ‘co-mingling’; transgressing the male-with-female, one flesh sexual order implied in Genesis 1:26.⁴⁷ Wold writes: “all same-gender sexual relations are categorically forbidden by the Hebrew terms. The biblical writer leaves no room for compromise. The language is emphatic.”⁴⁸

⁴³ See Phyllis Bird, “The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contributions”, in *Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture*, ed. D. Balch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); and Adrian Thatcher, *God, Sex and Gender: An Introduction* (U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 159-61; who takes the same view.

⁴⁴ For a rebuttal of Bird’s treatment, see Robert A. J. Gagnon, “The Old Testament and Homosexuality: A Critical Review of the Case Made by Phyllis Bird”, *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 117.3 (2005): 367-394.

⁴⁵ Wold, *Out of Order*, 89; see also Thomas Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Leicester: IVP, 1995), 86-99.

⁴⁶ Thatcher, *God, Sex, and Gender*, 161-63. Interestingly, Thatcher’s exegesis is littered with tentative ‘may be’ and ‘might be’ interpretations, which contrast sharply with his more certain ‘is’ conclusions.

⁴⁷ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Sex and Sexuality,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* vol. 5, ed. David Noel Freedman, (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 1145-46.

⁴⁸ Wold, *Out of Order*, 119; See also D.H. Field, “Homosexuality” in *New Bible Dictionary* (3rd ed.), eds. D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 478-79; who holds that whilst the Leviticus instruction does “not necessarily” apply more widely than when occurring as a part of “idolatrous cult prostitution”, Paul’s teaching is that homosexuality “flies in the face of God’s creation scheme for human sexual expression.”

Revisionists also point out that in the New Covenant, believers are “not under law but grace (Romans 6:14).”⁴⁹ Traditionalists respond that the *legal discontinuity* between Old and New Covenants does not do away with the *ethical continuity* between them. James Dunn writes helpfully:

“That Paul simply takes it for granted that the Jewish abhorrence of Gentile sexual license is still the appropriate ethical response ...means that he recognises at least one distinctive element of Israel’s covenant righteousness which remains unchanged within the wider freedom of the new covenant.”⁵⁰

One of the most popular arguments used in reference to the New Testament is the Gentile Analogy, which argues that if Gentiles were included into the people of God based on evidence of the Spirit’s work (Acts 11 & 15), then (practicing) homosexuals can be included on the same basis.⁵¹ The traditionalist response is that while believing Gentiles *persons* were welcomed, not all *behaviour* so often associated with Gentiles was condoned. They were, in particular, required (15:20, 29) to abstain from ‘sexual immorality’ (πορνείας - *porneias*).⁵²

Romans 1

The immediate context (vs. 18-32) of chapter 1 is establishing the consequences of rejecting the truth about the one Creator God. Paul’s point is that worshipping the creature rather than the Creator results in behaviour that disregards the ‘natural’ intent of the Creator.

The first kind of revisionary argument interprets Paul as not opposing all forms of homosexuality (i.e. consensual and committed), but only homosexual acts fuelled by idolatry or ‘burning’ lustful desire. The countering view is that Paul’s description of the behaviour as ‘unnatural’, along with the language of ‘dishonouring their bodies’ (v. 24), signals that homosexuality is counter to the intent of the Creator. Homosexuality “falsifies our identity as sexual beings, just as idolatry falsifies our identity as created beings.”⁵³ It is also argued that because the subsequent vice-list (vs. 29-31) is full of non-cultic actions, the reference cannot be *only* to cultic, pagan homosexual rites.

⁴⁹ Thatcher, *God, Sex, and Gender*, 161; “...there are many laws in the Holiness Code and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible that Christians do not regard as binding upon them.”

⁵⁰ James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 38A, Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 74.

⁵¹ John Perry, “Gentiles and Homosexuals: A Brief History of an Analogy,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38.2 (2010): 321–347.

⁵² Robert A. J. Gagnon, “Sexuality,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, eds. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al. (London; Grand Rapids, MI.: SPCK; Baker Academic, 2005), 747.

⁵³ Thomas Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Leicester: IVP, 1995), 85; see also Gagnon, “Sexuality”, 746; “Those who have suppressed the truth about God transparent in creation were more likely to suppress the truth about the complementarity of the sexes transparent in nature.

The other kind of revisionist argument is that Paul's teaching is simply *wrong*, or trumped by other New Testament teaching.⁵⁴ One view is that if Paul had both known of homosexual behaviour in animals and of sexual orientation in humans, he would have seen that it is just as 'unnatural' for heterosexuals to practice homosexuality as it is for homosexuals to practice heterosexuality.⁵⁵ Traditionalists counter that with a) Paul's certain awareness of habitual homosexuality, and b) Scripture's view of animals as an example both to *follow* (i.e. Isaiah 1:2) and to *avoid* (i.e. Proverbs 26:11!), it is historically and hermeneutically naive to imagine that learning of such animal behaviour or modern concepts of sexuality would have suddenly changed his moral view.⁵⁶

Paul is accused of committing a *naturalistic fallacy*: moving from an 'is' in nature to a moral 'ought'.⁵⁷ Traditionalists respond that Paul's audience would have taken 'against nature' (*para phusin*) in the Stoic sense: disharmony with divine natural order.⁵⁸ Paul's understanding "does not rest on empirical observation of what actually exists; instead, it appeals to an intuitive conception of what ought to be, of the world as designed by God."⁵⁹ Both moral and immoral behaviour would in this sense be 'natural' for humans.⁶⁰

1 Corinthians 6 & 1 Timothy 1

Both 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 list behaviours which characterise persons who 'will not inherit the kingdom of God'. Included are 'effeminate' or 'sodomites' (*malakoi*) and 'homosexuals' (*arsenokoitai*).⁶¹ Some have argued (as in Leviticus and Romans) that *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* refer to pagan cult prostitution. Traditionalists point out that the terms signal the passive (*malakoi*) and active (*arsenokoitai*) male partner, and observe that Paul likely "formed the compound *arsenokoitai* from ...the terms *arseno* and *koitai* ...in the [Septuagint version of] ...Leviticus 18 and 20."⁶² To the argument that Paul distinguished between sinful and loving homosexual acts, the traditionalist responds that Paul could not have imagined 'loving' homosexual acts, any more than 'loving' versions of other items in these passages: for example sexual immorality (in general), idolatry, adultery and greed.

⁵⁴ Thatcher, *God, Sex, and Gender*, 166; going so far as to say that Paul was "against all expressions of [sexual desire], even the desire for straight sex within marriage (emphasis his)."

⁵⁵ J. Harold Ellens, "Homosexuality in Biblical Perspective", *Pastoral Psychology* 45.1 (1997): 35-53.

⁵⁶ The loyal ox and donkey in Isaiah 1:2, and the vomit-eating dog in Proverbs 26:11!

⁵⁷ See discussion in Anderson, 277ff; also in Thatcher, *God, Sex, and Gender*, 182-83.

⁵⁸ Dunn, *Romans*, 64.

⁵⁹ Richard B. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1" *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14.1 (1986), 194; See also Thomas Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Leicester: IVP, 1995), 64-85.

⁶⁰ This basically makes the nature/nurture debate irrelevant to the ethical conversation.

⁶¹ Colin Brown, "ἀρσεν" in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 570. Though Paul makes no distinction between desires and actions here (or elsewhere), it can be safely assumed from wider Pauline (and NT) teaching that merely having the desires or temptations (which all have in one form or another) is *not* implied here.

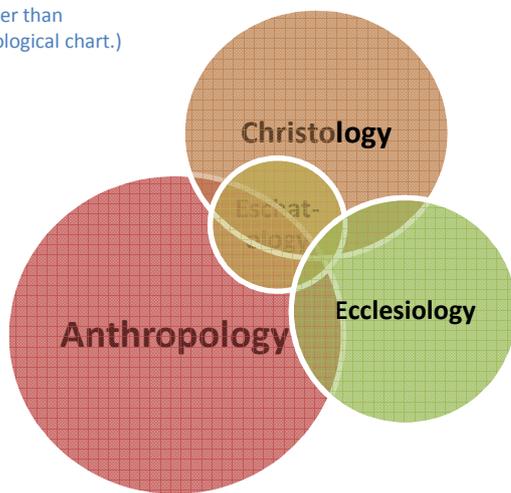
⁶² Wold, *Out of Order*, 205.

Finally, the graceful emphasis of both passages must be seen. The Corinthians had practiced the very things listed in his letter to them, but had been subsequently washed, sanctified and justified by God (1 Cor. 6:11). Paul, the blasphemer and persecutor, credits God’s strong, patient, mercy and grace for His provision of transforming faith and love (1 Tim. 1:12-16). Our detailed exegesis must not pan out the bigger biblical narrative of transforming grace, which would fail to appreciate the full teaching of Scripture.

Reorientation

As people persist through the disorientation stage, the conversation shifts into a more patient and reflective stage: **Reorientation**. Positions are now characterised by distinctions, spectrums and paradoxes. Over-exegesis of individual texts gives way to *theological engagement* with central doctrines and themes.

Figure 2 (A methodological rather than theological chart.)



Whilst, homosexuality, like any issue, can be traced across all of the standard theological loci, we will focus on the most relevant categories (Anthropology, Ecclesiology, Christology and Eschatology) in the subsequent biblical/theological analysis (see figure 2). As we shall see, because the person of Christ is the reference point and goal for genuine humanity, the categories

come together into what may be called a *Christotelic Ecclesial Anthropology*.

Anthropology, Sexuality & Gender Identity

As the conversation takes a turn into a more theological mode, the central driving question becomes one of theological anthropology: ‘*What does it mean to be human?*’ Particularly relevant to homo-*sexuality* is the question of how sexuality and gender relate to being human.

Humanity is created in the *Imago Dei* (Genesis 1:26-27) as embodied, *sexual* persons whose interrelatedness as male and female “mirrors the dynamic life of the triune God.”⁶³ Theologians Marc Cortez and Miroslav Volf both distinguish between (biological) ‘sex’ and

⁶³ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 298; following the *analogia relationis* of Karl Barth.

(socially negotiated) 'gender'.⁶⁴ On the interactive relationship between the two, Cortez writes: "Biology and culture work together to produce gender in a complex spiral of mutual interaction – one's biology providing the genetic structure but in turn being influenced by cultural perceptions and expectations" of what it looks like to be masculine or feminine.⁶⁵ For Volf, the social construction of gender identity should happen according to the *perichoretic* self-giving love within the Trinity, where each person is 'on-behalf' of the others.⁶⁶ As for sexual embodiment, Stanley Grenz sees it as a relationship-forming aspect in which 'the sense of incompleteness... [and] the drive for completeness', leading to personal *bonding*.⁶⁷ "[T]he stability of the sexed body" both enables and constrains gender-roles, even as they retain their fluidity.⁶⁸ The theological meaning of human sexuality thus *includes but cannot be limited to* procreation, fecundity, marriage and relationality, all of which are encompassed in the larger understanding of human *bonding*, "the end toward which human sexuality is fundamentally oriented."⁶⁹

Neither our gender identity nor sexual identities (or indeed 'orientations') compare to our identity of being in Christ, into whose image we are being remade. "Christians are then called to live out their culturally negotiated identities in such a way as to expose their non-ultimacy, to take them up into the processes of redemption."⁷⁰ The central observation related to homosexuality is that *personal bonding* is the goal of human sexuality *regardless of the nature of one's bodily sex, gender identity, sexual desires, or erotic behaviour (or lack thereof)*.

Ecclesiology, Intimacy & Desire

As embodied, sexual persons, we desire intimacy with others, which cannot happen in isolation (cf. Genesis 2:18: "It is not good for man to be alone."). Humanity is created as an intimate community, to experience intimacy in community, and so to reflect the intimate triune community that is God.⁷¹ God's image-bearers are, like God, personally interdependent. The more relationship there is between persons – both divine and human – the more the personhood of both persons is realised. The converse is true. Less interpersonal relationship lessens the personhood of all persons. Isolation between human persons is quite literally impersonal and dehumanising. "Our desire for the other is

⁶⁴ Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 41-67; and Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 167-90.

⁶⁵ Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 56.

⁶⁶ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 169-181.

⁶⁷ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 301.

⁶⁸ Myk Habets, "Prologue: Gender: Divine or Human?" in *Reconsidering Gender: Evangelical Perspectives*, eds. Myk Habets and Beulah Wood (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2011), 14.

⁶⁹ Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 66; see entire discussion, 57-67.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), 108.

⁷¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 27.

ultimately desire for the Other and will not be satisfied until it reaches its *telos*, its end in God.”⁷²

This is a subversive confession in modern western culture, where “the market-shaped culture we inhabit treats [sexual expressions] as if they are consumer choices among others, existing merely to offer personal fulfilment to the contemporary subject.”⁷³ Whether married or not, or celibate or not, “in the Church no one is actually single, no one is alone, all are bonded together in the body of Christ.”⁷⁴

The relevance to homosexuality is clear. All secondary human desires are thus relativised. Contrary to what we are told by a culture where desire is a commodity to be bought and sold, it is *not* inhumane to deny certain desires. “Even if it could be demonstrated that homosexual inclinations were genetically rooted... Christian moral thought offers no right to sexual gratification... regardless of the origin or object of sexual desire.”⁷⁵

Eschatology, Sex & Marriage

The people of God exist in what is called the ‘eschatological tension’ between the Present (evil) Age and the Age to Come. Believers are called to pray and work for the kingdom to come ‘on earth as in heaven’, now as it will be then. So how does this relate to homosexuality? Matthew 22:30 seems to indicate that there will be no marriage (and therefore no sexual intercourse) in the Resurrection.⁷⁶ Does this mean that we are called to stop people having intercourse *now*? No. We are not called to stop people having sex any more than we are called to stop people witnessing (which will also cease at the Resurrection). We are merely to put intercourse and marriage in their proper perspectives: “secondary to the prior vocation of welcoming others as if those others were representatives of Jesus himself.”⁷⁷

For C.S. Lewis, giving sex too much of a place in the kingdom is like a boy insisting on having chocolate while having sex.⁷⁸ The kingdom of God, like being embodied sexual persons, is not a matter of marriage or intercourse, but of love, justice, grace and mercy. Grenz reminds us that ‘[because] marriage does not exhaust human relationality, the physical union of male and female in marriage does not constitute the essence of human

⁷² Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies*, 108.

⁷³ Joel James Shuman, “Eating Together: Friendship and Homosexuality” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 403.

⁷⁴ Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies*, 109.

⁷⁵ Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 310.

⁷⁶ See detailed discussion in W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *Matthew 19-28 – International Critical Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 1997), esp.230fn67, noting how few (Andreas the Chaplain, Emmanuel Swedenborg, Charles Kingsley, and Mormon teaching) have held that intercourse would occur in heaven or ‘the resurrection’.

⁷⁷ Shuman, “Eating Together,” 411.

⁷⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 163-4.

sexuality.⁷⁹ Singleness “constitutes an equally powerful image of ...the universal, nonexclusive, and expanding nature of the divine love.”⁸⁰

Christology, Celibacy & Cruciformity

To put it quite simply, as far as we know, Jesus did not engage in sexual intercourse. “In the New Testament, Jesus never takes a lover, but is often seen gathered around the table with those to whom he is ministering.”⁸¹ He enjoyed rich, interpersonal, and intimate friendships with many.

Jesus’ perfect humanity was achieved, not through sexual intercourse (or the denial and/or suppression of it), but through humble dependence on the Spirit. Because of this, people of different genders and sexual desires can also, as we participate with the Spirit, be made more human – not by having more (or less) intercourse, but by being conformed into the likeness of Jesus. Further, because Jesus experienced a particular (in his case, male) human life of both desire and temptation, we (even females) can relate to Him in our struggles with the same – whatever our desires and temptations are homosexual or heterosexual. This is the cruciform life that followers of Jesus embrace. All our desires, homosexual, heterosexual, non-sexual, need to be daily crucified so that they can live.

Conclusion

As we have seen, erotic physical expression does not make us human, but rather identity in Christ, lived out in intimate community with others. The humanness of *God the Son* was not expressed in a gender identity, by having (or abstaining from) intercourse, by having any secondary desires fulfilled, or by any marital status, but by *God the Spirit* enabling his perfect embodied life, in which he experienced intimacy with *God the Father* and his disciples.

⁷⁹ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 302.

⁸⁰ Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, 194-95.

⁸¹ Shuman, “Eating Together,” 407.

WHAT OUGHT WE SAY AND DO?

TO: a missional/pastoral application

Introduction

Having listened to various cultural discourses on homosexuality, and having discerned the biblical and theological teaching on it, we shall now seek to discern how the church should witness to both truth and grace into the homosexual discourse, both missionally in the world, and pastorally in the church.

For the missional section, we will again use the 'Orientation-Disorientation-Reorientation' schema to represent stages in the discourse on homosexuality, with the invitation being to progress to the 'Reorientation' stage. Then, in the pastoral section, we will explore how a 'Reorientation' Christian community might minister to persons with same-sex desires and/or identity.

The Missional Tension: Speaking Wisely and Winsomely

The Church should be 'wise as serpents, and innocent as doves' (Matthew 10:16) as it seeks to faithfully embody the gospel to the world. We have something to say, but if it is to be heard, we must say it well.

Public/Political Action

Orientation. Christians should not only refrain from but oppose political oppression and discrimination. "Looking for ways to deny homosexuals personal safety and security, access to jobs, housing, government service or other basic rights of participation in... society is abhorrent."⁸² Churches (whatever their understanding of the issue) "have usually favoured the reform of the civil law which has occurred in many countries, removing the harsh penalties previously imposed."⁸³

Disorientation. There are very real and difficult questions: how the spread of A.I.D.S. through homosexual practice should be decreased/eliminated; how much a government should be involved in people's sexual practices; whether or not a government should regulate practices which are intrinsically physically damaging (such as anal penetration); whether or not same-sex partners (married or not) should be able to adopt and raise children; and more. We do not have space to treat these, but they must be prayerfully considered in community.

⁸² Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 311.

⁸³ F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, "Homosexuality" in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd rev. ed., (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 791.

Reorientation. The Church should be careful not to speak as though ruling the world in a dictatorial top-down kind of authority, but should rather speak with a posture of bottom-up servant-hood.⁸⁴ On the one hand, the fear of disagreement or unpopularity should not keep a Christian or Church (indeed anyone) from voting according to conscience on any issue. On the other hand, people, families, communities and nations are not transformed by laws, but by the truth and grace of Christ through the sharing of the gospel through word and deed.

Personal Witness

Orientation. Many Christians fear talking about homosexuality with their un-churched friends, family or colleagues. To a world that sees itself as ahead of the Church on sexual morality we need to be patient and humble on one hand, yet confident and prophetic on the other. We need to check our posture and language to see if it needs adjustment, or else we risk doing more harm than good. Simplistic slogans can communicate that you are closed to further learning. We need to show our friends and colleagues that we are no stranger to ongoing reflection.

Disorientation. Within an open, mutual conversation, we can aim to help our friends appreciate (without dumping information on them) the complexity and multi-layered nature of the issue. We need to recognise when it is or is not a good time for the conversation, and not hesitate when it is. We want to shift the conversation into a larger one that takes into account that our sexual desires and tendencies are neither static, simple, nor sweet. Not only is it important to see that desires can flex and change as our physical, mental, emotional and social lives develop, but also they are not automatically wonderful.

Reorientation. We want to invite people to see the colour on the far side of the grey; “the simplicity on the far side of complexity.”⁸⁵ We want to model and communicate a view of life where the goal is not ‘sexual fulfilment’ but rather relational intimacy as sexed, gendered, persons. Jesus experienced this, anyone can have it, and everyone deeply, truly needs it. We can be direct about how toxic the sexualisation of culture is, and insist that our deepest need is not sexual expression, but relational intimacy.

The Pastoral Tension: Ministering Truth and Grace

In this section, we address one of the most urgent questions of all: How might we administer the truth and grace of Christ to people in (or on the fringes of) our faith communities, who have – happily or unhappily – same-sex desires? Grenz provides four types of church postures: “*Unqualified Acceptance*” (membership, ordination & blessed

⁸⁴ Wolfgang Lienemann, “Churches and Homosexuality: An Overview of Recent Official Church Statements on Sexual Orientation” *The Ecumenical Review* 50.1 (1998): 7-21.

⁸⁵ The quote is attributed to Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

unions for all), “*Qualified Acceptance*” (membership for all, ordination if celibate, but no blessed unions), “*Differentiated Acceptance*” (membership & ordination if celibate, no blessed unions), and “*Undifferentiated Rejection*” (nothing for even celibate persons).⁸⁶ The ‘Reorientation’ stance adopted here is most akin to “*Differentiated Acceptance*”.

Marriage/Unions

The solemnisation of same-sex unions or marriages is usually sharply bifurcated into ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’ stances. Wolfhart Pannenberg unfortunately makes the conservative position into a litmus test for orthodoxy when he says that to recognise homosexual unions as marriage is to no longer be a part of the Church.⁸⁷ It is more helpful, pastorally and ecumenically, to retain fellowship across different points of view, and foster healthy dialogue and debate.

It is key to observe that denying solemnisation to same-sex couples does not deny them anything essential to their humanity, including their sexuality. Joel James Shuman helpfully writes that as *sexual bodies* we have two kinds of *friendships* in which to (bodily) express the gift of sexuality: marriage and celibacy.⁸⁸ In both, ‘sexuality’ is manifested in the non-erotic, bodily relationality, and in marriage, it is also manifested through bodily union. For Shuman, “Marriage is not simply about the satisfaction of sexual desire; it is also about the rest of life – cooking and cleaning, paying bills and repairing houses, rearing children, and often about negotiating *not* having sex.”⁸⁹

Ordination/Leadership

The issue of ordination of ‘openly’ gay church leaders hangs on the question of whether or not homosexual acts are sinful. There is no space to investigate a biblical theology of ‘leadership’, where service and office might be distinguished, but suffice to say that the general biblical expectation for not only elders or deacons, but all brothers and sisters, is (not sinless perfection), but *holiness*. Continuing unrepentantly in any known sin (sexual, financial, relational or otherwise) is to be met with loving discipline.

Some see a strategic purpose in ordination of openly gay clergy, in terms of relating to the wider gay networks.⁹⁰ However, the aim is not only to relate to others, but to extend, patiently yet faithfully, God’s call to redemptive discipleship. Whilst, on the one hand, an emphasis on holiness at the expense of an equal emphasis on forgiveness can quickly lead

⁸⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 131-2.

⁸⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Revelation and Homosexual Experience”, *Christianity Today*, 40.13 (11 Nov., 1996); <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1996/november11/6td035.html>, (accessed 22/7/2011).

⁸⁸ Shuman, “Eating Together,” 407.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 407.

⁹⁰ Pierre W. Whalon & Peter C. Moore, “Toward an Adequate Moral Evaluation of Homosexuality / Response” *Anglican Theological Review* 79.4 (1997): 526-549.

to a culture of performance and quench a spirit of confession, on the other hand, it is unloving to allow people to continue in sin.

Membership/Fellowship/Community

The pastoral tension here is between holiness and discipline on the one hand, and forgiveness and patience on the other. Whether or not a church has an official 'membership' roster, what is needed is a communal posture which best expresses both truth and grace.

On the one hand, to belong to the body of Christ is to belong to a cruciform community, which is on a journey of becoming like Christ (Colossians 1:28-29). It should come as no surprise that this journey of transformation includes areas of sexuality. On the other hand, to belong to the body of Christ is to belong to a community characterised by love which *gently* restores those caught in sin (Galatians 6:1).

For those struggling to be celibate, the response would be the same as that of any person struggling with any sin: loving, caring and corrective guidance through appropriate relationships. For those who insist that homosexuality is morally acceptable as an identity and behaviour, the response would be a loving 'no' to any official kind of membership, but this 'no' must be accompanied by a heartfelt 'please' and/or 'yes' to ongoing relationship and dialogue.

The point must be pushed further. Being welcoming, not only to those who are like you, but to those with differences (including differences in sexual attraction), is one of the most vital postures for Christians to adopt. It is the single most powerful thing we must do in the context of an issue which is so pastorally urgent. Without compromising Christians must be intentional to "welcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed you, to the glory of God (Romans 15:7)."

Pastoral Counselling

Though pastors should seek to wisely discern when they should refer individuals to a professional counsellor, pastoral counselling provides a unique context in which both truth and grace can be shown. The clear goal of Christ-likeness must be communicated in a spirit of gentle patience.

In terms of method, helpful modalities are offered by Gary C. Collins,

- 1) Determine Counseling Goals
- 2) Instil Realistic Hope
- 3) Share Knowledge
- 4) Show Love and Acceptance of the Person
- 5) Encourage Behavior Change

6) Recognize That Counseling May Be Complex and Time Consuming⁹¹

and James Berkley:

- 1) Reasonable Confidentiality
- 2) No Condemnation
- 3) Accountability
- 4) Team Counselling⁹²

Quantifying results may prove difficult, but change is possible. The recent and significant study of Jones and Yarhouse shows that, contrary to common dismissive reports, there is very real evidence that real change of sexual orientation through religious reparative therapy is a reality.⁹³ They are realists, however. Change “may well be impossible for some by any natural means. Yet the position that homosexuality is unchangeable seems questionable in light of reports of successful change.”⁹⁴

Ecumenism

Inter-Church dialogue is simply an essential task for the Church. Meetings, conversations, conferences, books and many other kinds of efforts must continue to be made in order to understand one another, display Christian unity to the world as much as possible, and most of all learn how to care for real people with real hurts, fears and concerns.

The heartfelt appeal of Zahniser & Cagle is beautifully expresses a humble commitment to dialogue and genuine openness:

“...you are our brothers and sisters in Christ, we love you unconditionally, and we welcome you into our churches, communities, and homes. We recognize that our understanding of the Bible is not complete, [...] and we acknowledge that it is possible that the Holy Spirit is at work to transform our Christian ethic... We need you to help us seek greater understanding, and we are willing to respect and to learn from your experience, as well as to examine our own sin and complicity in perpetuating homophobia and discrimination. Please forgive us for the ways in which we have failed you. Will you help us to learn how God works to bring about redemption and wholeness in the lives of people with homosexual desires and identities, and will you help us to learn better how to participate in such

⁹¹ Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide, revised ed.* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988), 288-290.

⁹² James D. Berkley, *Called into Crisis: The Nine Greatest Challenges of Pastoral Care* (The Leadership Library, vol. 18), (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 103-07.

⁹³ Stanton L. Jones & Mark A. Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays?: A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change In Sexual Orientation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007).

⁹⁴ Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 148; see entire section, 117-151.

redemption? We hope that you will join us in a commitment to love one another and to follow Jesus, wherever he might lead.”⁹⁵

Conclusion

Our analysis has enabled us to see that any and all simplistic views at the ‘Orientation’ stage (both in and out of the Church) need to be deconstructed and brought through a ‘Disorientation’ stage to a healthier ‘Reorientation’ understanding. But far more important than gaining an improved understanding of homosexuality, we also are equipped and challenged to a) wisely and winsomely converse with people of different views than ourselves, and b) lovingly yet faithfully welcome those with different sexual desires to be transformed, along with us, by both the truth and grace of God.

Sadly, Lindsay Curnow and Juliet Leigh, the vandalised lesbian couple whose story we began with, have decided to move to an area where they will feel safer.⁹⁶ This couple, and the community that supported them, are part of a world which is looking and waiting for their attackers and any like them to grow beyond their ‘homophobia’. It must be a change that happens from within the Church. Whilst a ‘Reorientation’ understanding cannot undo the violence this couple endured, it is nonetheless vital toward the task of making such crimes less common, and expressing the transforming welcome of God to all.

⁹⁵ James H. Zahniser & Lisa Cagle, “Homosexuality: Toward an Informed, Compassionate Response” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 36.3 (2007): 323-348.

⁹⁶ Imran Ali, “Mangawhai Lesbian Couple Move Business After Attacks”, *The Northern Advocate*, March 10, 2011, <http://www.northernadvocate.co.nz/news/mangawhai-lesbian-couple-move-business-after-attac/1047403/>, (accessed 3 August, 2011).

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