

## REPORT 42

## COMMITTEE TO STUDY HOMOSEXUALITY

(Art. 53)

## DEAR BROTHERS:

Our study committee, appointed by the Synod of 1970 to advise synod what our church's position on homosexuality ought to be, presents the following two-part report.

The first part is a report of our study. We recommend that synod submit this part of the report to our churches as providing guidelines for our understanding of the problem of homosexuality and the formulation of a Christian position.

The second part presents pastoral advice regarding homosexuality in the light of the report which we recommend for synod's adoption as pastoral advice to serve the churches.

We request that the Rev. Clarence Boomsma, our secretary, be given the privilege of the floor when our report is being considered by synod.

## I. STUDY REPORT RE HOMOSEXUALITY

A. *Our Mandate and the Present Scene*

Our committee was appointed by the Synod of 1970 with the mandate "to study the problem of homosexuality and to delineate the church's position on this matter" (Acts, p. 121). In the "grounds" supplied for the mandate, synod declared that homosexuality "is a growing problem in today's society" and it therefore deemed it advisable to appoint a study committee to advise synod what the church's position ought to be.

The occasion for synod's concern with the problem of homosexuality was the reception of an overture from the Council of the Christian Reformed Churches in Canada (Overture 23, Acts 1970, p. 540). That Council requested synod "to appoint a study committee to prepare a report in which: a) the attitude of the Christian Reformed Church towards its homosexual members is critically examined, and b) proposals as to what our position re a) should be are submitted." In addition it asked that "proposals for setting up counseling and rehabilitative services for homosexuals, possibly in cooperation with other Christian groups" be presented. The Council adduced as grounds that "we do in fact have homosexual members in our churches" and that "there are different attitudes toward these members." The Council is convinced that we "ought to develop a genuinely Christian and rehabilitative attitude toward these members."

The Council in Canada became involved in the problem of homosexuality because legislative changes regarding homosexuality were under consideration by the government of Canada. The advisory committee

of the Council on "Contact with the Government: re Homosexual Acts" supported with Council approval the proposed changes in the laws of Canada. It supported the proposal that homosexual behavior between consenting adults in private should no longer be considered criminal offence. The ground on which the Council based its approval of the legislative changes was that "it is not the task of the government to legislate private morality" and in support of this position it cited Article 36 of the Belgic Confession. While the Council went on to say that the new legislative "provisions change the conditions under which the sinful act of homosexuality is deemed punishable by law," it wished to be clearly understood that by its support of these changes, it was not expressing "approval of the act of homosexuality itself." In fact, the Council refers to the act of homosexuality as "sinful."

The Canadian Council's involvement in the question of homosexuality and synod's concern about the problems of homosexuality must be seen in a larger context. In recent years there has been an increasing tolerance toward homosexuality and lesbianism. This fact came into focus in 1957 when the Wolfenden Report was published in England. This report was the result of a study by a committee under the chairmanship of Sir John Wolfenden, appointed by the British Home Secretary. The most significant statement of this thorough study was the recommendation: "That homosexual behavior between consenting adults in private be no longer a criminal offence." The report further advised "that questions relating to 'consent' and 'in private' be decided by the same criteria as apply in the case of heterosexual acts between adults." This recommendation was adopted and it subsequently became the law in England and Canada, as well as in at least two states of the United States. As a matter of fact, this position is practised in almost every city today, regardless of the law. Vice-squads and prosecutors take the attitude that if the homosexual is not disturbing others by his sexual acts there is little point in arresting and prosecuting him. Various reports, both secular and ecclesiastical have appeared recommending this procedure. In general, it may be said, there remains three areas in which the law prosecutes the homosexual: when youths are corrupted (pederasty), when the acts are offenses against public decency (indecent exposure), and when others are exploited for the purpose of financial gain (prostitution).

With the growing tolerance toward the private practice of homosexuality as evidenced by legislative changes as well as by the suspension of law enforcement, there has been a growing awareness of homosexuality in society. Reports, books, magazine articles, stage plays, movies, radio and television programs have all contributed to a new openness and public acknowledgement of homosexuality and have evoked a widespread discussion of its problems. No doubt all of this is part of the "sex revolution" that has been taking place in recent years. As a consequence of this "revolution" there has been a changing attitude toward the homosexual, from disapproval and condemnation of both his person and practice, to a growing acceptance of his person and an approval of homosexual behavior.

Homosexuals have become more vocal than hitherto in acknowledging

their condition and defending it and their life-style. Radical gay activist groups have been organized in nearly every city. Through their publications they are urging homosexuals to take pride in themselves and to deny that their condition is an illness or abnormality. They are working to repeal laws that discriminate against them and to win social acceptance of themselves as they are. They hold that it is up to the individual to choose his sex orientation, and they decry society's attempt to "change" him by punishment or treatment. In Los Angeles a church openly organized for homosexuals has attracted considerable publicity.

We assume it is the new openness and awareness of homosexuality and the changing social attitudes toward it that synod had in mind when it declared that homosexuality is a growing problem. We know of no evidence supporting the position that the number of homosexuals is actually increasing.

When synod mandated us "to study the problem of homosexuality and to delineate the church's position on this matter" it did not tie us to the specific proposals of the Canadian Council's overture. It simply gave us a general area to explore. It will be apparent to synod that the subject of our study is so broad and involved and the literature on it so voluminous, that we could not enter exhaustively into every aspect of the problem. We have assumed that synod was concerned that we should study the problem as it relates to and involves the church and the Christian. To this our report is limited. In it we are summarizing the fruit of our study and presenting in comparatively brief scope the position we recommend to synod and the advice that we think should be passed on to the churches. We are including a list of books at the end of this report that we believe are valuable for those who wish to study the subject in greater detail.

#### *B. Definition of male and female homosexuality.*

The Scriptures teach us that God created us male and female, but it is important to observe that it is by a process beginning at birth with our physical differentiations that we develop through childhood and adolescence to an identity of ourselves as males and females. Through this maturation process, involving chemical and psychological changes, most of us come to an awareness and acceptance of the opposite sex and of the relationship of our sexuality to the sexuality of the other. This leads us to erotic feelings that motivate us to seek gratification in sexual union. This normal pattern of growth leads to the sex orientation known as heterosexuality. Sexuality is, of course, much more than a physical differentiation producing physical attractions. It is the desire to give and receive in intimacy so that the "aloneness" of a person is abrogated in the love relationship between man and woman as Genesis 2 teaches us. Sexuality is a mysterious and basic dimension of human existence and of great importance to us as persons.

Homosexuality is the condition in which the process of maturation does not result in an adult who is heterosexual, that is, sexually orientated to the opposite sex: it is instead the condition in which an adult's sexuality is directed to his own sex. It is well to keep the wider dimension of sexuality in mind as we evaluate the phenomenon of homosexuality.

The direction of the homosexual's desires is not to be regarded as merely physical attraction. His desires cover the whole range of the rich interpersonal relations associated with the heterosexual form of sexuality, including love, understanding, friendship, the desire to belong to someone and to develop one's humanity in constant companionship with another human being. What is different for the homosexual is that these feelings are experienced with respect to a person of the same sex.

The distinction between the two conditions of heterosexuality and homosexuality is not clear-cut. Some persons are completely heterosexual, never having homosexual feelings, while others are exclusively homosexual, feeling no attraction for the opposite sex. But there are varying degrees of both conditions in many adults. Some persons are predominantly heterosexual but occasionally have homosexual feelings that they may or may not allow to come to expression in practice. Again there are those who are primarily homosexual, but are able to engage in heterosexual acts. Such persons, known as bi-sexual, may marry and have children but continue to experience erotic attraction for members of their own sex. A precise definition of homosexuality is impossible, and to say who is homosexual and who is not is a matter on which there is no unanimity.

It should be observed that homosexuality is not confined to certain types of vocations and professions, although homosexuals for various reasons may be more attracted to some vocations and professions than to others. The condition is not limited to certain strata of society, nor is it limited to any race, culture or type of society. It was known in ancient times and in every subsequent era. It may come to expression in the early life of a person, but then again it may be latent in the earlier years and manifest itself in middle age or even later. Homosexuality develops in Christian homes as well as in non-Christian homes and religion is no barrier to its presence.

It is conservatively estimated that 7% of American males have more homosexual experiences than heterosexual for at least part of their lives, and that 2% of the male population is exclusively homosexual throughout their life span. Figures for lesbians are somewhat less than for males. For convenience sake we are and will be referring to both male homosexuals and lesbians as homosexuals and use the masculine pronouns to refer to both in our report. No one knows the number of homosexuals in our denomination, but even if we take the most conservative statistical estimates we may conclude that our report concerns several thousand members who are living with this condition.

An important distinction that must be made is the difference between *homosexuality* as a condition of personal identity and *homosexuality* as explicit homosexual behavior. That is, we must distinguish between the person who is homosexual in his sexual orientation and the person who engages in explicit sexual acts with persons of the same sex. It is a well-known fact that men who are basically heterosexual in their personal identity, when separated from women for long periods of time may nonetheless engage in homosexual practices until they have opportunity for heterosexual experiences again. This is not uncommon in prisons, re-

formatories, and the armed services. We may assume this occurs because sex is a strong drive that seeks satisfaction and is social in its very nature. But persons who engage in homosexual acts under such circumstances are not usually considered homosexuals, i.e. as being in the condition of homosexuality.

On the other hand, it must be pointed out that there are people who have strong erotic attractions for members of the same sex who nevertheless never engage in homosexual acts for various reasons, such as, for example, their religious convictions. They are homosexuals, that is, they are constitutionally (by either biological or psychological conditions or both) predisposed to homosexuality, but do not engage in homosexuality. This difference between *homosexuality* as a condition and *homosexuality* as its practice is an important distinction for our study.

### C. *The cause of homosexuality*

A homosexual (male or female) is an adult who is motivated by a definite preferential erotic attraction to members of the same sex. The question arises: what causes this condition? Why do some persons develop constitutionally at variance with their physical gender, resulting in a disordered sex orientation?

Experts are not agreed on what the causes of homosexuality are and today probably most of them, if not all, admit that we cannot give a definitive account of why the condition develops. In fact, its origin is so unclear as to be finally a mystery. The general opinion tends to play down genetic factors, but that it may have an inherited basis cannot be completely eliminated. The view favored by modern research is that the condition is precipitated in the early life of a person by environmental factors. Studies of homosexuals repeatedly show abnormalities in the parent-child relationship in which the child does not develop a normal identification with the parent of the same sex. It is also possible that some chemical or hormonal imbalance or some other as yet unknown physiological factor not necessarily genetic in origin is involved. It is also very possible that the cause is the result of a combination of various factors. The fact is that homosexuality is deeply rooted in the complex development of personality during the formative years of a person's growth.

It is important to understand that homosexuality is not the result of any conscious choice or decision on the part of the person to be homosexual, just as the heterosexual person does not become heterosexual because at a certain age he determines to be so. Whether a person becomes homosexual because of some innate condition or because of his early environment and his response to this environment, or because of a combination of these, the fact is he is not responsible insofar for his resulting homosexuality. This is an important point for both the homosexual himself to understand and for those who know the homosexual. Having said this we must recognize that there are those with mixed homosexual-heterosexual drives who may have encouraged their homosexuality by willful choice and insofar bear responsibility for their condition.

As the cause of homosexuality is uncertain, so is the possibility of correcting it. Experts again differ in their judgment about the help that can be given to a homosexual by which he may be redirected to a heterosexual orientation. The possibility of change depends on the degree of homosexuality to begin with, the age of the person involved and thus the duration of his problem, the amount of experience he has had, and the motivation within the person himself to want to change. There are of course many homosexuals who have come to accept their homosexuality and do not desire to have it redirected. It is encouraging to learn that more recently psychiatrists are reporting more successes in their therapy of homosexuals.

#### D. *The plight of the homosexual*

It is imperative for us to enter sympathetically into the plight of the homosexual. It is one of the great failings of the church and Christians generally that they have been lacking in sympathy and concern for the plight of the homosexuals among them. Fortunately the attitude of condemnation and discrimination that has multiplied the misery of these often unhappy people is changing now that we are learning more about their condition, but we have far to go in achieving a Christian awareness of the homosexual's problems and his need for love and acceptance as a person.

The plight of many homosexuals is a tragic one. The homosexual is caught in the dilemma of a disordered sex relationship between his own body and his person. In the case of the male homosexual for example, he is physically a male and yet he recognizes that he is not attracted to the female form for which his body is adapted. This disharmony within himself is accentuated by what he has been taught by society to expect of himself as a male, but what he does not experience himself to be. As a result he disapproves of himself, experiencing not only guilt for his feelings, but disrespect for himself as a person and a deep sense of his inferiority and, often, his feeling of degeneracy. Knowing of society's disapproval of him he experiences a dreadful loneliness and a deep fear of being exposed and rejected. He must live a lie, unable to be himself in society, hurt again and again by the judgments he hears about homosexuality that reflect on his person. Is it any wonder that the homosexual's life contains great potential for demoralization, despair, self-hate and personal disintegration? It is understandable that a homosexual runs the risk of more unhappiness and is more likely to become alcoholic and mentally ill than others. It is not surprising that many young homosexuals leave their homes, their churches, their communities and flee to the cities where they can live with others of their own kind and openly be what they are. And many find that that society brings no happiness and affords them no future.

It must be said that much of the suffering of the homosexual is caused by the strong disapproval and often harsh condemnation that society imposes upon him. If anyone judges the matter of homosexuality lightly and speaks easily of it, it only reveals that he has never experienced the tragedy and agony of the person who is struggling with his condition. It is true that some, maybe many, homosexuals have been able to accept

their sexuality and live comparatively happy and constructive lives, although times of agony and painful adjustment have marked their lives. Much probably depended on the support and acceptance they were able to find from their family and some friends.

We can have only the greatest admiration for those in the church who have lived with their condition in loneliness, but have called upon the grace of God to enable them to live constructive Christian lives in spite of their problem. They are among the true saints of the church and deserve the greatest respect of their fellow-believers.

Before we consider how the church should look upon the problem of homosexuality and serve those who suffer this condition, we must ascertain the teaching of the Scriptures.

#### E. *The teaching of the Scriptures*

It is all-important for us as Christians and as a church to learn what the Bible teaches us about the subject of homosexuality. We present in brief what we believe the Scriptures tell us, in the light of our reading of the Bible and in the light of the various studies made by biblical scholars who have dealt with the relevant scriptural passages which bear upon our problem.<sup>1</sup>

##### 1. *Old Testament Data*

*Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-24* In the opening chapters of the Bible we have the account of the creation of the world and of man's place in that world. Man is made male and female, a physical differentiation according to Genesis 1 by which man and woman are able to multiply and propagate the human race. But turning to Genesis 2 we learn that the male-female polarity is by no means only for the purpose of biological reproduction. The account stresses the role of sex differentiation for the purpose of fulfilling the individual man's fundamental need for companionship and personal wholeness. Woman is created as a complement to help man so that the two cleave to each other in love and form a unity in marriage. This is the created order in which male and female polarity form an integral part of being human. In the light of the created order heterosexuality is the pattern of human existence. Homosexuality, therefore, must be seen as a disordered condition, in which the reproductive

<sup>1</sup> We present the principal studies used by our committee in formulating this part of our report, in addition to commentaries, etc.

Bailey, Derrick Sherwin—*Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, Longmans, Green, 1955

Cole, William Graham—*Sex and Love in the Bible*, Association Press, 1959

Jones, H. Kimball—*Toward a Christian Understanding of the Homosexual*, Association Press, 1966

Rapport aan de Generale Synode van Dordrecht 1971-'72 *Over Mensen Die Homofiel Zijn*, Kerk Informatie van de Gereformeerde Kerken, 1972 NR 1

Ridderbos, S.J.—*Bijbel en Homosexualiteit*, *Bezinning* Vol. XIV, No. 3 (1959) pp. 137-152

Thielicke, Helmut—*The Ethics of Sex*, Harper, 1964

Treese, Robert L.—*Homosexuality: A Contemporary View of the Biblical Perspective*, Glide Urban Center

Van Veen, Jan—*Wat Zegt de Bijbel over Homofiel*, Dekkers, 1972

function of sex cannot be fulfilled and the companionship of sex cannot be properly achieved in the union in which a man cleaves to his wife.

Homosexuality must be interpreted as a consequence of our broken world due to the invasion of sin in the creation. It is an evidence of the disharmony and disorder that sin has brought into every area of man's existence, including his sex life, and in which all men share. Homosexuality therefore is one of several disorders of man's sexual nature, along with problems such as impotence, frigidity, and hypersexuality. It is the result of sin in the world as in blindness, lameness, and retardation. But as the victims of these consequences in a broken world are not personally responsible for their handicapped conditions, neither is the homosexual responsible for his disordered sex orientation, his sexual handicap, insofar as it was not of his choice and decision. To lay blame on the homosexual for his condition can be as cruel and unjust as to blame the cripple for his deformation.

It is well to bear in mind, however, that a comparison between such defects as blindness and lameness on the one hand, and homosexuality on the other, only partially applies. A physically blind person, for example, is deprived of the function of sight, but the homosexual is not deprived of the function of sexuality. On the contrary he constantly experiences the full range of feelings associated with human sexuality, extending all the way from a feeling of mild interest in another person to that of the most intimate personal attachment. The point of comparison employed above applies only in that the homosexual is handicapped in experiencing a normal sex relationship.

Responsibility and the possibility of personal guilt for the homosexual arises at the point where he must decide what he will do with his sexuality. It is here that the Christian homosexual must ask what God's will for him is in the same way as the Christian heterosexual must ask what he must do in obedience to God with his sex drive. Obviously for the heterosexual there are restraints that are often hard to bear. To take but one example, he may not gratify himself with his neighbor's wife, however appealing she is to him. The homosexual is presumably placed under similar restraints. What is the will of God for him, a victim of the broken world? What do the Scriptures say? What significance does redemption through Christ have for him? How does the New Testament law of love to one's neighbor bear on homosexuality? What counsel must the church of Christ give to him? How shall they support, help, and admonish him in his disordered state? These are the questions he asks and which we need to ask.

We now turn to those Old Testament passages which on the surface at least deal directly with both homosexuality and homosexualism.

*Genesis 19:4-11.* That the story of Sodom and Gomorrah deals with homosexuality, that is homosexual acts, is accepted by nearly all Old Testament scholars. The men of Sodom were demanding that the two guests be brought out in order that the Sodomites might "know" them, a "knowing" that Lot considers a great wickedness. We believe it is particularly evident that the word "know" here refers to sex relations from

the offer of Lot to give the depraved men of Sodom his two virgin daughters to "know" in the place of his guests.<sup>1</sup>

From this story read as an isolated incident we cannot conclude however that homosexuality is here condemned. The evil that the men of Sodom were planning with Lot's guests was sexual assault and violence, which is always wrong, also in heterosexual contexts. From this account therefore it does not follow that homosexuality under other circumstances is wrong. It may be observed that it is less than likely that all males of the city were homosexuals as we have defined them. The desire to "know" at least in part arose from simple lust in general and the desire to practice a sexual variant with the strangers, revealing the perversion of the whole population.

We may not conclude from this account that it was only because of the sexual depravity in Sodom and Gomorrah that these cities were destroyed. All the passages of Scripture that make reference to Sodom speak of a wickedness that included a general corruption and degeneracy. (*Genesis 13:13; 18:20; Deuteronomy 32:32; Isaiah 1:10; Jeremiah 23:14; Lamentations 4:6; Ezekiel 16:46ff; II Peter 2:6; Jude 6, 7; Revelation 11:8*). The incident related in *Genesis 19* typified the depravity of the city which caused it to fall under the judgment of God and be destroyed, but the rest of Scripture does not single out the sexual degeneracy of Sodom as a form of evil worse than other sins.

In the light of the whole Old Testament view of homosexuality, however, it is reasonable to suppose that by the inclusion of this episode the writer of *Genesis* did wish to disclose the wickedness of the city by recording the double affront of homosexuality and sexual advances on unwilling guests.

The story in *Judges 19* bears similarities to the account of *Genesis 19* and since it adds nothing to our purpose requires no further discussion.

*Leviticus 18:22; 20:13.* Both of these passages clearly forbid sexual intercourse between males, both texts calling such acts an abomination. The passage in *20:13* prescribes the death penalty for those who take part in such practices. While that demonstrates the seriousness that attaches to homosexuality in the Old Testament it must be noted that the same penalty is exacted for other sexual offenses such as bestiality (*18:23*), adultery (*18:20*), and incest (*20:12*).

The difficulty that confronts us with these texts is the question in what distinguishable respects they are normative for us. It is the difficulty we encounter with much of the Old Testament legislation. For there are three aspects to Mosaic regulations: the ceremonial or cultic, the civic, and the ethical. In Israel these three aspects are intertwined to form one whole, and therefore the problem that the Christian Church has wrestled with ever since its beginning is the unraveling of the ethical from the cultic and civil to determine what is binding for us (Cf. *Belgic Confession, Article 25*).

<sup>1</sup> Bailey who argues against this interpretation on the basis of use of the word "know" ignores the use of the same word in the immediate context where the meaning is unmistakable. (p. 2f).

It would appear obvious that in 20:13 the death penalty was a civil requirement which clearly is no longer in force in the Christian era. There remains the question whether the offense itself is a moral or a merely cultic offense. Different scholars give different answers to that question. Some maintain that the prohibition of homosexuality was instituted because of the cultic practices of Israel's pagan neighbors and was intended to forbid Israel's participation in such heathen worship practices. That male prostitution was practiced among the neighbors of Israel and strictly forbidden to Israel is seen in Deuteronomy 23:17. If this was indeed the intent of the legislation then it is addressed against a specific (cultic) type of homosexuality, and it may be questioned whether homosexuality in non-cultic (e.g. moral) contexts is condemned by these passages. In favor of this interpretation we must call attention to 18:21 which clearly refers to the pagan ceremony of sacrificing children to Molech, whatever form these sacrifices took. It is also pointed out by scholars that 18:23 may have reference to cultic practices. It may have reference to an Egyptian goat cult (Keil and Delitzsch on the Pentateuch, Volume II, p. 418). From Canaanite literature we also know that the god Baal was thought to copulate with a heifer and it is possible that a Baal priest symbolically acted out this fertility rite. If 18:23 has reference to either or both of these cultic rites then 18:22 (our passage) is bracketed by cultic and not necessarily moral prohibitions.

We are not persuaded however by the argumentation that 18:22 is merely a cultic prohibition. The text appears in the context of laws regulating marriage, family, chastity, incest, etc. which certainly involve ethical demands, as for example 18:20 which forbids adultery with a neighbor's wife. The supposition that 18:23 is cultic in orientation is admittedly speculative. The interposition of verse 21 may possibly be accounted for "by remembering the condemnation of idolatry under the figure of unfaithfulness to the marriage ties" (Cambridge Bible, Leviticus, p. 105). Martin Noth suggests that "perhaps it was only the key-word 'seed' which brought this verse into the present context" (Old Testament Library, Leviticus, p. 136). The context would favor an ethical interpretation of the passage.

The argument from context, however, is lessened if those interpreters are right who believe that verses 21-23 are meant to be an appendage and thus are not directly and intimately related to what precedes. But we would point out that the ethical dimension in the prohibition against the sacrifice of children to Molech is surely not missing. For along with the religious opposition to the Canaanite fertility cultus this prohibition must also have been based on moral considerations and must have aimed at the prevention of the destruction of the family. What immediately follows in verses 24-30 stresses that the judgment upon the inhabitants of Canaan was because of their iniquity in practicing such things. We need not assume that because an iniquity is practiced as a cultic rite it is any less a moral issue.

In conclusion, while we grant that a cultic interpretation may be given to 18:21-23, to do so to the exclusion of the ethical aspects of the prohibitions appears to us unwarranted, and we therefore hold that 18:21 forbids homosexuality and the same is true of 20:13.

On the other hand we must recognize the temporary character of much of the Old Testament legislation. One can hardly ignore the fact that the prohibition of homosexuality appears in the context of a regulation prohibiting intercourse during a woman's menstrual period (18:19), a regulation which is not generally considered to be morally binding today. In how far the prohibition of homosexuality is binding on us is therefore a question that remains.

There are other Old Testament passages that bear on the subject of homosexuality: Genesis 9:21-27 which deals with homosexual incest; Deuteronomy 22:5 which opposes transvestism; Deuteronomy 23:17 which forbids male prostitution; I Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:40 which relates the attempts of the kings of Judah to abolish male cultic prostitution and the like.

All scholars are agreed that the Old Testament condemns homosexuality, although they are not all agreed on the rationale for such condemnation, and on what ethical force it has for all forms of homosexuality as we know it today.

In summary we conclude that homosexuality is forbidden in the Old Testament. It is forbidden to those who engage in it by mutual consent as is clear from Leviticus 18 and 20. We must observe, however, that the Old Testament did not distinguish between homosexuality and homosexuality any more than it distinguished for example between kleptomania and stealing when it prohibited stealing. Whether the judgment which the Old Testament makes on homosexuality would be the same if such a distinction had been known we cannot say at this point. But therefore we cannot simply apply the Old Testament prohibition without considering whether our knowledge of homosexuality may not modify to some degree our moral judgment about the homosexual practices of such persons.

The question we must now face is how the New Testament views the problem of homosexuality and its practice (homosexuality).

## 2. New Testament Data

There are three references to homosexuality in the New Testament, all of them in the epistles of Paul. All scholars are agreed that the Apostle considered homosexual practice (homosexuality) as sin, a mode of behavior which is on par with adultery and murder.

*I Corinthians 6:9, 10.* In this passage Paul publishes a catalog of sinners in which he lists homosexuals along with those who are greedy, immoral, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, revilers, and robbers. He declares that these people will not inherit the kingdom of God. The Revised Standard Version translates two Greek words denoting homosexual practices into the one word "homosexuals," the word *malakoi* referring to passive male partners and the word *arsenokoitai* indicating the active partners in such acts. It has been suggested that the use of these words stresses the activity rather than the condition of homosexuality. But Paul does not make the kind of distinction we have made earlier between homosexuality and homosexuality. He speaks only of those who practice homosexual acts. From this text it is clear that Paul considered

homosexuality as seriously wicked, though no more sinful than the others mentioned in his list.

In this connection it may be noted that Paul adds "and such were some of you." Knowing how widespread overt homosexual practices were in Corinth we may suppose there were those in the church who had engaged in such practices. But they too were forgiven, washed, sanctified, justified in "the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (vs. 11). Then Paul goes on to emphasize that the new freedom in Christ does not permit a Christian to abuse his body immorally, for it is a member of Christ, it is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and therefore Christians must glorify God in their bodies. He explicitly singles out joining one's self to a prostitute as contrary to the Christian's new status. He would, we may be sure, have said the same about homosexuality.

*I Timothy 1:10.* In this text Paul again includes homosexuals *arsenokoitai* translated in the Revised Standard Version as "sodomites," in a list of those who violate the law of God. This passage adds nothing new to our study.

*Romans 1:26, 27.* This is the classic passage that deals with homosexuality. It must be observed at the outset that it is not discussed as a subject on its own, i.e. as a particular problem in the church to which Paul is writing. He deals with it incidentally in the course of his argument that the perversion of the divine relationship results in a perversion of human relationships.

Paul is arguing that the wrath of God is revealed against all men who have denied their proper relationship with God their Creator. He is thinking here of the heathen who do not have the Old Testament but nonetheless have that revelation of God in creation which leaves them without excuse. Refusing to heed the revelation of God in the creation they have turned to idolatry, exchanging "the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles" (vs. 23). As a consequence of their sin against their Creator they have been given up by God in his wrath to "impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves" (vs. 24). Then follows the pertinent passages, which emphasize and elaborate the meaning of verse 24: "For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanging natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error." Obviously Paul regards homosexuality, as he knew it, as evidence of moral perversion in the most intimate of human relationships. He speaks of it as an impurity or uncleanness. He considers it a dishonoring of the body and the result of dishonorable passions, and a shameless practice, that is, lacking in proper shame. It is an exchange of the natural use of sex for the unnatural. Homosexuality is the penalty for man's apostasy from the true worship of God resulting in the depravity of those who engage in it.

It has often been noted that Paul moves directly from idolatry to homosexuality which suggests that he may have had in mind the depraved cultic practices of the pagan world. This may be true, but we may not restrict Paul's judgment against homosexuality to cultic instances of it any more than we may restrict his condemnation of prostitution to its occurrences within pagan cultic practice. Homosexuality had a long history in the hellenistic world. It was already practiced and approved by Plato five hundred years earlier and it was engaged in apart from cultic worship. We may also note that immediately following verses 26 and 27, Paul declares that the basic cause of all the corruption in the pagan world was idolatry and he then proceeds to mention such anti-social sins as follow from defection from God, such as covetousness, malice, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, etc., none of which can be equated with cultic practice.

We conclude that the New Testament passages which make reference to homosexual behavior are in harmony with the judgment of the Old Testament: homosexual acts are sinful.

But again we need to ask whether the judgment of Paul applies to those who are homosexuals as we have defined them, i.e. those who are constitutionally homosexual in their sex orientation. Does the exchange from the natural to the unnatural which Paul deems dishonorable apply to such persons? A person who is homosexual, we have seen, has a disordered sex condition, so that what is "natural" to him is to have sex relations with a member of his own sex, and what is "unnatural" for him would be to have heterosexual relations. Is Paul not speaking of those who willfully exchange sex relationships and willfully give up their natural relations? What then of those for whom it is not a case of willful exchange or willful giving up of the natural? The male homosexual does not exchange his passion for a woman for passion for a man, nor gives up the natural attraction for a woman, for he does not have such passions, such are not "natural" to him. How then ought we to regard the acts of those who engage in what according to the creation order is judged "unnatural," but is in fact "natural" for them in their disordered condition?

We face the seriousness of our problem at this point. We must deal with the biblical data most seriously to learn God's will for us in this matter if at all possible, but at the same time we must be aware of the serious problem of the homosexual and be assured that we do not lay down prohibitions for him unless such prohibitions are clearly warranted from Scripture.

#### F. *The Hermeneutical Problem*

We must now ask the question in how far the judgment against homosexuality as seen in the explicit passages of Scripture is applicable to the problem of homosexuality today. There are several reasons why we must raise this question.

1. It is a good principle of interpretation that specific texts must always be read in the light of the Bible as a whole. To wrench a text out of its context and apart from the rest of the Scriptures is to do violence to the Word of God. A simple example can illustrate this important

principle. In Psalm 115:17 we read "the dead do not praise God, nor do any that go down into silence." Again in Ecclesiastes 9:5 we are told: "the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward." From these passages we might readily conclude that at death we are annihilated or at least that the soul is in unconscious state as some sects do declare. It is immediately clear to us that these passages must be read in their context and in the light of the whole of the Bible before we conclude what appears to be their plain teaching. It is also necessary for us to see the biblical data we have reviewed above in the light of the entire Scriptures before we make a final judgment.

2. There are many examples in the New Testament of regulations from the Old Testament that were abrogated by the coming of Christ and by the introduction of the new covenant, as is plainly taught for example in the book of Hebrews. But the church has also recognized that some New Testament regulations were of a temporary character applicable to a given situation in that era, but cannot be imposed on the church of today. As an example we need only to mention the familiar texts that require women to remain silent in the churches (I Corinthians 14:34), to wear a veil when praying (I Corinthians 11:6). In the case of these two texts the church has had to wrestle, and still does, to discover the permanent truth that lies back of the explicit regulation which is considered not binding on us today. In each instance it is the task of the church to make its judgment in the light of the whole of Scripture, i.e. to determine what is normative for us and what is not. We need to ask whether the prohibitions against homosexuality were of a temporary character or must be considered binding on us.

3. We need to remember that the Bible itself recognizes that the ideal cannot always be achieved in our sinful world and that therefore, exceptions are to be made. To kill is evil, but wars, self-defense and capital punishment are recognized in the Scriptures as exceptions to the commandment: "thou shalt not kill." Marriage is between one man and one woman as long as both shall live, but the Bible concedes that divorce may be allowed. Lying is contrary to the ninth commandment, but Rahab is rewarded for her falsehood on behalf of Israel. The Hebrew midwives are blessed of God for refusing to obey the order of Pharaoh to put to death all male infants even though they lied to the King of Egypt to spare their own lives (Ex. 1:15-21). Homosexuality is condemned, but are there any exceptions? A heterosexual who cannot exercise self-control is told that it is better for him to marry than "to be aflame with passion" (I Corinthians 7:9 R.S.V.). What must the homosexual do who is aflame with passion and cannot marry? Is there room for some kind of exception in his case?

4. A difficult but not irrelevant consideration for our study is the question in how far we may and must give weight to what we have learned from the creation itself through modern science when we are interpreting Scripture. Is it not our responsibility to bring the two together insofar as possible? Must we not recognize the authority of scientific truth even though we recognize the priority of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and in the Scriptures?

For example in Matthew 17 we have the account of the healing of the epileptic boy. The passage states that Jesus rebuked the demon and it came out of the lad and he was cured. It would be improper for us to conclude that epilepsy is always caused by demons and that the proper cure of epileptics is exorcising the demons out of them. We know from medical science that epilepsy is a physical condition to be corrected or controlled by medication or surgery. Science has prevented us from drawing what might otherwise seem a reasonable conclusion regarding epilepsy from the scriptural narrative.

As we have seen in the earlier part of this report, we have learned from the sciences that homosexuality often is a condition which is rooted deeply in biological and psychological aberrations that create a disorder for which the individual can be held only partly responsible, if at all. What bearing has this information on our problem of seeking to determine the moral status of homosexuality?

In the light of these considerations we must now turn to a theological-ethical approach to the question of how we as Christians ought to regard homosexuality and its practice.

#### G. A theological-ethical approach

In order to properly evaluate homosexuality and homosexualism, we must bring three factors into focus: the explicit teaching of the particular Old and New Testament passages we have already considered, the message of the Bible as a whole in its bearing on the subject, and the light which modern science sheds upon it.

1. We begin with a consideration of the biblical understanding of the place and role of sex in human existence.

Paul in the first chapter of Romans sees homosexual acts as contrary to nature. We are not to suppose that Paul is here initiating a natural law theory such as was developed in the Middle Ages, in fact, his references to nature are in some instances no more than a reference to reigning customs or generally accepted notions as for example in I Corinthians 11:14 where he speaks about what nature teaches regarding the length of a man's and a woman's hair. In Romans one we may believe he is declaring that homosexualism is a distorted use of the increased sex differentiation. Homosexuals exchange the natural for the unnatural.

Accordingly homosexuality must be considered a disorder, a distortion of the sex differentiation implanted in the human race. This disorder is the consequence of the sin in which all men share. The homosexual, as constitutionally predisposed to erotic attraction to members of the same sex, bears the disorder of our broken fallen world in his person. The measure of his moral responsibility depends upon what willful contribution he has made to his condition. For the rest, the responsibility is partially on those who may have contributed to his disorder during his maturation, and on the human race which lies in sin and is under the curse of sin.

In opposition to those who wish to maintain that homosexuality is merely an accidental variation in nature such as the color of one's hair or lefthandedness, it must be said that Scripture clearly teaches that

man was originally created "male" and "female." The fact that a male homosexual can only fully experience his "maleness" in relation to another male and a female homosexual only in relation to another female is therefore a reversal of the created order. Although not explicitly stated, this may well be the reason why homosexual acts are forbidden and are considered loathsome in Leviticus 18 and 20. It is explicitly stated that their practice defiles those who practice them (Leviticus 18:24-30).

Turning to the New Testament we find the creation order of Genesis reaffirmed several times: by Jesus in Matthew 19:5, 6, and in Mark 10:6-8; by Paul in Ephesians 5:31 and I Corinthians 6:16. In the light of this constant reaffirmation we may assert that homosexuality is a disorder of human nature and more than a mere variant. Although the exact point of comparison ought to be properly observed, as we noted above, we may say that both from the perspective of Scripture and the general conclusion of modern research, homosexuality is a disordered condition and a handicap comparable to other abnormal physical and psychological conditions.

There are however several other scriptural considerations to which we must give our attention before we evaluate this form of sexual aberration.

We cannot ignore the fact that the New Testament projects a view of sex which is not found in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament it was normal for a man to be married and raise children. This state of affairs was intimately related to God's design to form unto himself a people who would be the bearers of his redemptive concern for all men and thus the vehicle for the coming of his kingdom. The Old Testament concept of the people of God was inseparably identified with the physical race of Hebrews. This intimacy is seen in the imprinting of a religious rite on the male reproductive organ in circumcision. Celibacy was an abnormal state and marriage was commanded by God for the Israelite in order for him to fulfill his redemptive purpose for God.

In the New Testament however there is room for the unmarried state as a special form of existence for service in Christ. Jesus in Matthew 19:12 speaks of those who are eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom, referring to those who choose celibacy for Christ's sake. And the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 7:1, 8 commends the unmarried state for those who are able to bear it. In this connection it is also well to remember Jesus' statement in Matthew 22:30 that "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven." From an eschatological perspective the differentiation and use of sex does not demand that believers marry. The New Testament does not tie the coming of the kingdom to marriage as closely as does the Old Testament. Sex has been relativized by the New Order introduced by Christ; in the Kingdom of God there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28). For the sake of the kingdom a man must be prepared to forsake house and wife and children (Luke 18:29). And such will receive their reward (Luke 18:30).

Thus in the New Testament church we see the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that eunuchs, who according to Deuteronomy 23:1 were barred from the assembly of the Lord, will be received in the house of God and know a higher fulfillment than in family relationships (Isaiah 56:3-5).

Sex therefore, has been so far relativized by the redemptive order that abstinence from sexual relations can be a feature of a good and proper Christian life. In Christ the unmarried, the heterosexual and homosexual are offered an alternative to the married state in the companionship provided by the redeemed community. Thus in the New Testament one of the purposes of sex—the achievement of personal wholeness—can be realized, at least in a significant sense, in Christ.

Homosexuals who are in their disordered constitution unable to fulfill the creation ordinances of sexuality need not be considered lesser persons in the New Testament church or the kingdom of God. In Luke 14:21 Jesus teaches that those forbidden from the service of the worshipping congregation of the Old Testament people (Leviticus 21:18-21), are welcomed in his kingdom.

Sex, nonetheless, has not been negated as a way of life as is abundantly evident from the New Testament. The unity and equality of the sexes in Christ may not be understood as doing away with the distinction between male and female. As Karl Barth has said in commenting on Galatians 3:28: "If they are one in him standing upon an equal footing, this means that they are what they are for themselves as they are ordered, related and directed to each other" (Church Dogmatics III, 4, page 164). The option of celibacy is only for those able to bear it. Those unable to exercise self-control should marry, says Paul in I Corinthians 7:9. Sex and marriage remain an important part of the Christian's life and responsibility. Paul declares: "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband . . . Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again" (I Corinthians 7:3, 5).

The choice for the Christian is between marriage and celibacy. Sex relations outside of marriage are forbidden in the Scriptures. The Old Testament norm is that a man should leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife. The prohibitions of the Pentateuch specify in detail various ways in which this norm may be violated and the judgments that are to be imposed for such infractions of the law. According to the New Testament the Christian is justified by faith and is freed from the law, but this freedom is not freedom from the will of God. As Paul says in Galatians 5:13, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another." In the realm of sexuality this means that a man become free to be a man in relationship with a woman: free to be in obedience to God's purpose.

From the biblical understanding of the place and role of sex as we have outlined it above, several moral consequences follow:

a. Sex is a vital and significant part of human existence. But in the light of the Scriptures and especially the New Testament, which relativizes sex from the perspective of the kingdom of God, the Christian must resist the temptation to glorify sex as it is exalted in modern American society. The heterosexual unable to marry for one reason or another, and the homosexual because of his sexual inversion need not conclude that their lack of sexual fulfillment is as tragic as the modern emphasis on sex would imply.

b. From the viewpoint of the New Testament the inability of the homosexual to enter into a marriage relationship does not bar him from meaningful living in Christ, and the opportunity to be accepted as a person any less than that accorded the unmarried heterosexual.

c. In the light of the foregoing, the church and Christians generally have a great responsibility to the unmarried among them, heterosexual and homosexual. The church is required to be the body of Christ in which the unmarried may find fulfillment as persons in the fellowship and companionship of the congregation of believers. The church should recognize that being unmarried the single members are free to be "anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord" (I Corinthians 7:32). Therefore they must be given opportunity within the fellowship of believers to serve the body of Christ and experience the love and acceptance of the body of the Lord.

Within this fellowship of love the homosexual who has also been justified and sanctified by Christ (I Corinthians 6:11) must be accepted in his homosexuality, so that in the congregation he does not need to wear a mask and conduct himself like a hypocrite, living in constant fear of discovery and exposure. Nor, when his identity is known, should he receive the painful rejection and diminution homosexuals so often experience. He deserves the same acceptance, recognition, compassion and help that is given to any person.

Unfortunately the homosexual has not experienced this kind of love and acceptance of his person in either the church or society. It has been said that the homosexual has been far more sinned against than he has sinned. In the light of our understanding of homosexuality today, Christians bear a great burden of guilt relative to such persons.

d. Since, as we have seen, homosexuality is a disorder, and the gospel of Christ is the good news of God's saving concern through Jesus Christ, the church which is his body must be concerned to undo the results of sin everywhere. When John the Baptist asked Jesus, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Jesus replied, "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matthew 11:5). Christ came to bring healing and hope to a disordered world lying in sin. The church is his body to bring healing and hope in his name. This responsibility of the church extends to the homosexual too, who, we have seen, bears the disorder of our broken world in his person. What this means in a practical way we shall suggest later.

e. It follows, from the recognition that sexual inversion is a disordered sex orientation, that the Christian homosexual ought to seek in whatever

ways are open to him the healing of his disorder. If Christ came to forgive our sins, and heal our brokenness because of sin, we, as children of God in Christ, are duty bound to seek healing and restoration wherever and however we can.

This means that the homosexual who is a Christian will not adopt the interpretation of sexual inversion that the "gay activists" now give it, when they commend and celebrate homosexuality as a desirable condition and glorify the lifestyle of homosexual behavior. Instead, the homosexual must make use of the means of grace, the pastoral care of the church, and the therapy available to him from scientific sources.

2. We must now consider the problem of the homosexual who is in the unhappy dilemma of not being able to marry because of his homosexuality, but at the same time experiences all the desires and drive for sexual fulfillment that brings the heterosexual to marriage.

Of course, the first responsibility for the homosexual is to exhaust the possibility of sexual reorientation through all available means. But as we have learned, the success of being redirected in sexual orientation depends upon how deeply rooted and firmly fixed the condition is. There are those whose inversion is not changed by the application of present knowledge and therapy. In I Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul proclaims that those who had engaged in homosexual practices were also among the saved in the name of Christ and in the Spirit. We may believe that they were liberated from their homosexual behavior. But it does not follow that if there were constitutional homosexuals among the saved in Corinth, that they were also liberated from their inversion and became heterosexual in their sexual propensity. Many Christians who are sexually inverted know that their problem is not removed by prayer, any more than Paul's thorn in the flesh was removed in answer to his prayers. This is not to deny the value of prayer and the means of grace to enable a homosexual to resist the temptation of engaging in homosexuality. Christian commitment will help him live a continent life, and may strengthen him as he seeks to be orientated to heterosexuality. But to expect the means of grace and prayer to redirect a firmly fixed homosexual is to expect a miracle.

We may draw a parallel at this point with alcoholism. A person who is once an alcoholic is always an alcoholic. His condition according to present knowledge cannot be corrected. The only solution to his condition is total abstinence. So too in the light of our present understanding there are many whose homosexuality is so firmly a part of their personality that they will always be homosexuals. Having drawn the parallel between the alcoholic and the homosexual (male and female) it is also important to point out the differences between alcoholism and homosexuality. An alcoholic bears responsibility for having become an alcoholic by his drinking habits. Having become an alcoholic, however, he has lost his ability to use alcohol responsibly, and so afterwards is unable to regain his ability to be responsible in its use. But in the beginning a misuse of his responsibility contributed to his alcoholism. In the case of the homosexual, however, his personal responsibility for his condition is in many instances minimal.

A second distinction to be drawn between alcoholism and homosexuality is that in the case of the alcoholic he does not need alcohol in order for him to be a fulfilled person. In fact, drinking impairs his ability to be a well-ordered individual. By not drinking he is not a deprived and handicapped person. A homosexual, on the other hand, like almost all human beings, has a need for the fulfillment of sexual relationships. For him not to have sex relations is to be deprived of that which his body craves, a deprivation of which he is constantly aware. He therefore lives in a circle of frustration caused by unfulfilled physical desires and the unfulfilled need for interpersonal love and companionship. To demand continence of a homosexual is demanding much more than to require abstinence of an alcoholic.

What then do we say to the homosexual who cannot relate to a member of the opposite sex but at the same time is "afire with passion"? In the case of the heterosexual who cannot exercise control of his sexual need, i.e. finds continence too difficult, the advice of the apostle Paul is that he should marry, for "it is better to marry than to be afire with passion" (I Corinthians 7:9). This advice will not do for the homosexual, of course, because marriage is not an option for him. But if homosexual acts are in every situation prohibited, what must he do in his dilemma? Is celibacy the only option open to him?

This brings us to consider whether the prohibition of homosexuality as prescribed in the Bible is indeed applicable to the person whose condition is that of homosexuality which cannot be changed. Without question the prohibitions are binding on those who willfully engage in homosexual acts out of lust or out of the perverted desire for sexual experimentation and variety. Homosexuality is also prohibited to the homosexual who seeks gratification of his passion or lust in casual relationships, in the same way that heterosexual relationships outside of marriage are forbidden. The question is whether there are any circumstances in which the confirmed homosexual can have sexual relations as the heterosexual has relations in marriage. In other words, is there any exception to the prohibition of homosexuality for the homosexual? Does the fact that he is so disordered in his sexual orientation that it is 'natural' for him to have erotic propensities for a partner of the same sex, so change the moral situation that he is thereby licensed to fulfill his sexual need in a way that is 'natural' to him? It is important for us to explore this possibility lest we do the homosexual brother or sister a serious injustice by committing the error of the Pharisees who according to Jesus "bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders" (Matthew 23:4).

Can we therefore make any exception for the homosexual in his agonizing dilemma? The question is a legitimate one. We have pointed out in the section of our report dealing with the hermeneutical problem that the Bible recognizes that the ideal for man cannot always be achieved in our sinful world and therefore exceptions are made. Can there be an exception for the homosexual in his dilemma?

In seeking for an answer to this question it is important to understand why exceptions are justified according to the Scriptures. Only then can

we consider whether an exception to the prohibition of homosexuality can ever be consistent with the purpose for which exceptions are made.

It might be argued on the basis of Moses' exception in the instance of marriage that by allowing divorce because of the hardness of men's hearts a principle is enunciated in the Old Testament which allows for exceptions because of man's imperfections and personal limitations to achieve the ideal. Under such a principle it might be suggested that homosexuality as the only course open to a homosexual caught in the dilemma of the biblical disapproval on the one hand, and his own agonizing drive for sexual union on the other, might under some conditions be justifiable.

But Jesus repudiates the exceptions of Moses regarding marriage save in the extreme case of unchastity (Matthew 5:31, 32; 19:3-9). Moses granted the right of divorce as a civil law recognizing the facts of human existence, but Jesus calls his followers to obey the moral law as the pattern for them to observe. "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Jesus does not recognize man's weakness or man's self-interest as valid reason for exception in the case of marriage as the disciples immediately understand (Matthew 19:10). It must be noted that Jesus allows the one exception to the marriage ordinance in the situation in which the husband may not be able to fulfill his obedience to the will of God because of the actions of another over whom he has no final control.

Exceptions to moral prohibitions are allowable when two factors are present: first, circumstances beyond the control and responsibility of the individual, and secondly, moral demands that supercede the moral prohibitions that are at first appearance germane. Thus the aggression of an invader may make it impossible not to kill. The Nazi program against the Jews made it morally wrong for Christians hiding Jews to speak according to fact when questioned by Nazi authorities. We are to obey those who have the rule over us, but our obedience to God may exempt us from obeying rulers (Acts 4:19). The exceptions to moral prohibitions are permitted in order that a person may be obedient to a higher moral demand than that of the immediate demand. Exceptions are intended precisely to free one in the circumstances beyond his control to be obedient to the will of God.

But the exceptions, apart from the situation of external pressures and the obedience to higher demands, are not granted for personal relief from obedience or for achieving personal advantage. Scripture does not release a man from obedience to a moral requirement merely to lower the cost of discipleship or to lighten the burden of the cross he bears. Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow him in obedience.

Thus a single person who is in the dilemma of not being able to marry and yet lives with the tensions of the drive for sexual union is not free to commit fornication. The single man or woman, the widower and widow, are not allowed exceptions to continence because of their personal need and discomfort. They may be in circumstances beyond their control but they are not thereby freed from the prohibition of sex relations apart from marriage, for obedience to the demand for continence

does not require them to forego obedience to a higher moral demand. Again, for example, a married man whose wife is unable to grant him conjugal relations because of her illness or absence (as when a husband is in military service away from home) is not free to fulfill his sexual propensity in extra-marital relationships by way of exception.

Much as we may sympathize with the individual, married or unmarried, who cannot fulfill his or her sexual needs in the marriage relationship because of the cost of discipleship, we cannot do other than maintain what we judge to be the teaching of the Scriptures in which God has revealed his moral demands. It is the task of the church to "teach them (disciples) to observe all that I have commanded you," says Jesus (Matthew 28:20). The task of the church is to come with compassion to those who bear a heavy cross and encourage them with the means of God's grace; bring them the saving word of forgiveness when they stumble and fall; admonish them in love so they may repent and be renewed; embrace them in the warmth of Christian fellowship so they may find strength and support to bear their burden.

Must we not conclude that the same judgment must be made in the case of the confirmed homosexual in his difficult dilemma? As a human being his entire person experiences the natural drive and need for sexual completeness, but due to conditions to a large extent, if not entirely, beyond his responsibility, he cannot relate to a member of the opposite sex in sexual fulfillment, and in fact feels drawn to members of his own sex. Marriage as an answer to his problem is not a viable option. The biblical injunction against homosexuality, as we have seen, forbids his entering a sex relationship with another person with the same propensity. His dilemma is comparable to that of the unmarried heterosexual who cannot obtain sexual satisfaction in marriage.

There is however one difference that we cannot ignore. What if a homosexual finds a person of the same sex with whom he could establish a life partnership, the equivalent of marriage for heterosexuals? Marriage is an option for an unmarried heterosexual who can find a life partner. Is "marriage" to a person of the same sex an option for a homosexual under the same circumstances? We ask this question apart from the practical and formidable difficulties of establishing such a relationship and the equally difficult problems of maintaining such an arrangement permanently.

Because Scripture does not allow exceptions to moral demands for reasons of personal relief and satisfaction it would appear that no exception to the law of chastity may be made in the case of homosexuals who "marry," even though we can sympathize with the desire of some of them to effect such a partnership on account of the fulfillment such an arrangement might bring. Such a homosexual life partnership arrangement, by way of exception, appears no more justifiable than the liaison of a married man with a mistress when he can have no conjugal relationships with an invalid wife.

The handicap of the sexual invert can no more justify his violating the moral order than those with other psychological handicaps are justified in committing immoral acts.

In view of the biblical position on homosexual practice, and in view of the fact that no exception to this position is scripturally defensible, obedience to God appears to require a homosexual unable to marry according to the divine ordinance to accept celibacy as his way of life and continence as his moral duty.

Love for the homosexual neighbor does not allow us to soften the severity of this demand. Love, it is sometimes said, seeks the fulfillment of the neighbor and is ready always to satisfy such wants as lie closer to the center of his being. When the satisfaction of these wants integrates his personality, reduces his suffering, and works no apparent social harm, love requires that this satisfaction be licensed; no veto from the side of law may here be tolerated.

It is not possible in this report to develop the intricate relationship between love and law, but it may be said that just as law needs love as a protection against harsh legalism, so love needs law as a protection against easy indulgence. Moreover, as has already been indicated, biblical injunctions and prohibitions are to be honored in every instance where they are not overborne by either external necessity or by a higher value. In the case of homosexuality there is no evidence that a person will in fact and from a long range perspective be helped by the practice of it, and it is clear both that the Bible condemns it and that love can discover no warrant in either necessity or value to make an exception to the prohibition against it. Obedience to the revealed will of God will bring its own reward.

## II. PASTORAL ADVICE RE HOMOSEXUALITY

In order that the churches may deal in a pastoral way with the problems of homosexuality we recommend that synod serve the churches with the following statements of pastoral advice.

1. Homosexuality (male and female) is a condition of disordered sexuality which reflects the brokenness of our sinful world and for which the homosexual may himself bear only a minimal responsibility.

### Books recommended for further study:

- Bailey, Derrick Sherwin—*Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, Longmans, Green, 1955  
 Bieber, Irving—*Sexual Inversion: The Multiple Roots of Homosexuality*, Basic Books, 1965  
 Cole, William Graham—*Sex and Love in the Bible*, Association Press, 1959  
 Hatterer, Lawrence J.—*Changing Homosexuality in the Male*, McGraw-Hill, 1970  
 Jones, H. Kimball—*Toward a Christian Understanding of the Homosexual*, Association Press, 1966  
 Oberholtzer, W. Dwight (ed.)—*Is Gay Good?* Westminster, 1971  
 Rapport aan de Generale Synode van Dordrecht 1971-'72—*Over Mensen Die Homofiel Zijn*, Kerk Informatie van de Gereformeerde Kerken, 1972, NR 1  
 Ridderbos, S.J.—"Bijbel en Homosexualiteit" in *Bezinning*, Volume XIV, No. 3 (1959) pp. 137-152  
 Thielicke, Helmut—*The Ethics of Sex*, Harper, 1964  
 Treese, Robert L.—*Homosexuality: A Contemporary View of the Biblical Perspective*, Glide Urban Center  
 Van Veen, Jan—*Wat Zegt de Bijbel over Homofiele*, Dekkers, 1972

2. The homosexual may not, on the sole ground of his sexual disorder, be denied community acceptance, and if he is a Christian he is to be whole heartedly embraced by the church as a person for whom Christ died.

3. Homosexuality—as explicit homosexual practice—must be condemned as incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture.

4. The church must exercise the same patient understanding of and compassion for the homosexual in his sins as for all other sinners. The gospel of God's grace in Christ is to be proclaimed to him as the basis of his forgiveness, the power of his renewal, and the source of his strength to lead a sanctified life. As all Christians in their weaknesses, the homosexual must be admonished and encouraged not to allow himself to be defeated by lapses in chastity, but rather, to repent and thereafter to depend in fervent prayer upon the means of grace for power to withstand temptation.

5. In order to live a life of chastity in obedience to God's will the homosexual needs the loving support and encouragement of the church. The church should therefore so include him in its fellowship that he is not tempted by rejection and loneliness to seek companionship in a "gay world" whose immoral life-style is alien to a Christian.

6. Homosexuals, especially in their earlier years, should be encouraged to seek such help as may effect their sexual reorientation and the church should do everything in its power to help the homosexual overcome his disorder. Members of the churches should understand that many homosexuals, who might otherwise seek therapeutic aid, are deterred from doing so by the fear of detection and consequent ostracism. Christian acceptance and support can in all such cases be a means toward healing and wholeness. On the other hand, to those who cannot be healed and who must accept the permanent limitations of their homosexuality, the church must minister in the same spirit as it ministers to widows, widowers, and the unmarried.

7. Christians who are homosexual in their orientation are like all Christians called to discipleship and to the employment of their gifts in the cause of the kingdom. They should recognize that their sexuality is subordinate to their obligation to live in wholehearted surrender to Christ.

By the same token, churches should recognize that their homosexual members are fellow-servants of Christ who are to be given opportunity to render within the offices and structures of the congregation the same service that is expected from heterosexuals. The homosexual member must not be supposed to have less the gift of self-control in the face of sexual temptation than does the heterosexual. The relationship of love and trust within the congregation should be such that in instances where a member's sexual propensity does create a problem, the problem can be dealt with in the same way as are problems caused by the limitations and disorders of any other member.

8. It is the duty of pastors to be informed about the condition of homosexuality and the particular problems of the homosexual in order

that the pastor may minister to his need and to the need of others, such as parents, who may be intimately involved in the problems of homosexuality. The pastor is also in a position to instruct his congregation in appropriate ways about homosexuality and to alert members and office holders to the responsibility they bear toward homosexuals in the fellowship. He can encourage an understanding of and compassion for persons who live with this handicap, and dispel the prejudices under which they suffer.

9. The church should promote good marriages and healthy family life in which the relations between husband and wife and between parents and children are such that the psychological causes that may contribute to sexual inversion are reduced to a minimum. Parents should be encouraged to seek Christian counsel and help when they see signs of disordered sexual maturation in their children.

10. Institutions and agencies associated with the church that are in a position to contribute to the alleviation of the problem of homosexuality are encouraged to do so by assisting ministers to become better informed, by offering counseling services to the homosexual and his family, and by generally creating a Christian attitude in the churches as well as in society as a whole.

11. The church should speak the Word of God prophetically to a society and culture which glorifies sexuality and sexual gratification. It should foster a wholesome appreciation of sex and expose and condemn the idolatrous sexualism and the current celebration of homosexuality promoted in literature, the theater, films, television, advertisements, and the like.

Homosexuality Committee  
 Ralph Heynen, Chairman  
 Clarence Boomsma, Secretary  
 Robert Baker  
 Melvin D. Hugen  
 Hudson Nyenhuis  
 Henry Stob