

158th GS Minutes, JULY 4, 1980, pp. 43-50

REPORT OF THE STUDY COMMITTEE ON HOMOSEXUALITY

The Rev. Egon Middelmann presented the following report as amended by synod (see **ACTION** taken below, p. 50):

PASTORAL CARE FOR THE REPENTANT HOMOSEXUAL

Fathers and brethren:

The study committee on homosexuality is pleased to report to the 158th General Synod. As I had indicated in my letter to the 157th General Synod, the committee was concerned to provide aid to our denomination in the area of pastoral care for those struggling in the area of homosexuality in and outside of our congregations. We have purposefully restricted our discussion of the biblical data. There are many good books and articles dealing with the pertinent biblical texts and there seems little dispute within our denominations.

I. Theological Considerations

(For your own study on the subject of homosexuality you might consult the following passages: Gen. 1:26ff, Gen. 18:20, 19:4f, Lev. 18:22, 20:13, 1 Sam. 18:3f and 20:41, Rom. 1:26f, 1 Cor. 6:9ff, 1 Tim. 1:8ff).

A Some Theological Reflections on Romans 1:18-32:

In any discussion of the issue of homosexuality, the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans will be important as a guideline for our thinking and acting. Paul reminds us that mankind stands under the wrath of God due to the theological chaos caused by man's unwillingness to acknowledge "God's invisible qualities" and man's desire "to suppress the truth by their wickedness." Man responds to the wrath of God in self-pity in that finite man creates his own gods (22f). By falling down

before them, man tries to come to grips with who he perceives himself to be justifying his fallen existence with regret. We frequently see sinful man sadly admitting to himself and to others that he is who he thinks he has to be.

At the end of the chapter, v. 32, we see man's response to the wrath of God take a different form, that of defiance and pride. "They not only condone to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them." In this context fallen man will seek to justify his behavior by calling upon psychology, situation ethics, and sociology in an attempt to assert not merely the inevitability but also the beauty of his lifestyle.

Into this climate of self-pity and defiance the church has to speak about the work of propitiation and expiation in Jesus Christ. Only if we trust that the wrath of God is borne by Jesus Christ we are able to call man out of his response of despair and hardness of heart. On the basis of the gospel of the atoning work of Jesus Christ, sinful man can learn to define himself again in terms of his creator. This concern Jesus expressed in Matthew 19:4ff. Jesus wanted the Pharisees to return to the original intent of God's creation. "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning" (19:8). In light of man's renewed confidence in God, he can see him self as created as "male and female," reflecting the image of God. Scripture sees in the polarity and correspondence of male and female, the original image of God.

Jesus can also speak of other forms of human existence, "for some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by man; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven" (19:12). There can be significant and beautiful relationships between members of the same sex (1 Sam. 18:3ff and 20:41) or members of the opposite sex. But Scripture does not perceive these to find their fulfillment in sexual union. It is at this point where homosexuals misunderstand their own identity. They have to be challenged to grow and to define themselves again according to their creator.

B. Theological Chaos Leads to Ethical Chaos

Having stated the reasons for the wrath of God being poured out on all mankind, Paul points to the ethical outworkings of man's rebellion. In verses 24, 26, 28 of Romans 1, Paul reveals the judgment of God manifesting itself in His giving man over to his sinful desires. We find a progression in the text from a generalized indictment of the Gentile world all the way to a total ethical chaos. Having "exchanged the truth of God for a lie" they are handed over "to sexual impurity" (25).

Romans 1:26ff zeroes in on homosexual practices as a major manifestation of sinful man's attempt to distort the creator's intent. But homosexuality is not singled out as the worst of all manifestations of sin as we can see in Jesus' indictment against the unbelief of Capernaum (Matt. 11:23). Finally, in Romans 1:28ff we see the ultimate outcome as total break-

down of ethical norms. Paul reminds us that whenever man bows before the imaginations of his heart, he inevitably ends up in a chaotic ethics. It is important to note that sinful man does not necessarily consciously conspire the ethical chaos. He might well perceive his ethical choices as inevitable and logical outgrowth of being “human.” But Paul uncovers this “inevitability” as the judgment of God calling to repentance.

C. Call to Repentance

Paul’s reasoning in Romans 1 points to man’s responsibility and God’s desire for man to return (*metanoia*). As we relate to sinners in general and to homosexuals in particular it is important to remember that God, even after the Fall, relates to us as those who are able to respond to him, as responsible people. While psychological insight will be helpful to understand, care for, and help the homosexual, it must not lead us to deny his responsibility for his “unnatural” desires and actions. Psychologists, and many Christian psychologists would agree, believe that the homosexual inclination is a response to very early learning experiences. It would be misleading, therefore, to think of the homosexual as necessarily having made “conscious choices” in favor of the homosexual inclination. But the gospel reminds us that God addresses man as responsible human beings not merely on the level of “conscious choices.” David, in his heterosexual promiscuity, is an encouraging example in that he not merely confesses his responsibility for his conscious choice as far as Bathsheba is concerned. He takes full responsibility for himself, even for his sinfulness “from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). Instead of excusing his sin on the basis of the predisposition from the time of birth, he responds to the mercy of God by accepting his whole existence as his own. Only if the homosexual can understand the vast mercy of God can he discover the responsibility for his total life. The mercy of God will allow him not to seek refuge in self-pity of defiance, but in the renewing grace of God. In sanctification we want to see healing in our misdirected desires as well as actions. But as with other sins, like heterosexual promiscuity, coveting and greed, the homosexual cannot be expected to see his desires changed immediately or totally. Along with the homosexual we all will recognize ourselves in the words of Paul: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

D. Call to Obedience

The repentant homosexual brother or sister has to be encouraged to join the rest of us to follow Jesus who “though he was a son, learned obedience from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8) and to realize that even Jesus learned obedience by offering up “prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death” (Hebrews 5:7). Obedience is essential to our growth. It will begin with refraining from acting our desires. It will not rest until ultimately even our sin-

ful desires are transformed into restored humanity at Christ's return. In the meanwhile we and our brothers and sisters will encourage one another in exploring the depth of the promise "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28).

II. The Repentant Homosexual Brother-and-Sister in our Congregation

A. Our sensitivity to the holiness of God can easily become a problem to us if it overshadows our relating to one another as sinners saved by grace. It will be important to be aware of the danger of creating an atmosphere in which the individual member finds it more and more difficult to reveal himself as one in need of the grace of sanctification. A helpful balance is struck in our confession as it speaks of sanctification:

1. . . . "having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they are more and more quickened and strengthened, in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

2. This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part ..." (WCF, XIII, 1 and 2).

Our congregations have to be encouraged to grow in the grace of God by accepting themselves as those needy of daily repentance and of a "continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ" (WCF, XIII, 3). In the context of our concern for the homosexual in our congregation this emphasis on growing in grace is all the more important as we frequently neglected setting before him a realistic hope, solidarity in sanctification, and promise of acceptance. In the political/ethical climate of our time, our congregations have at times acted more out of fear and lack of compassion than offering long term friendship, care, and openness, necessary for encouragement of those who struggle along with the rest of us in this long and never-ending path of sanctification.

B. Problems the Homosexual Faces

In order to be helpful to our churches and to their ministry towards the homosexual it might be helpful to be aware of the following difficulties our brothers and sisters are facing.

1. Loneliness: to the extent that sexuality is a primary aspect of humanness, there can easily be a feeling that an important aspect of oneself has been "cut out" of one's life. As God's image is reflected in the male/female correlation, the deepest human relationship seems "denied" to the homosexual. The isolation is also accentuated by feeling unable to share the problem and therefore being locked up in a central area of one's life.

2. Fear: as a result of the loneliness and the prevalent climate as perceived by the homosexual an oppressive sense of fear can manifest itself: the fear of "coming out" or being "found out," the fear of loss of job, reputation, the fear of any close relationship with those of the opposite sex caused by a sense of "inevitable" failure, the fear of developing close friendships with persons of the same sex.

3. Bitterness: a sense of frustration towards God as God's commands are frequently perceived as being arbitrary.

4. Confusion: even if a brother or sister is growing in sanctification, it is not clear to him how he or she can be used in our congregation.

C. How Our Congregations Might Be of Help

(Apart from or in addition to professional resources)

1. "Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers" (Hebrews 2:11). We have to learn to accept one another as sinners saved by grace. It will not be helpful to focus primarily on the particular manifestation of sin in our brother or sister. We have to persistently help him to rediscover himself from God's perspective. We all are responsible for our desires and actions. At the same time God loves us on the basis of the free, inexhaustible, and all-embracing sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The lack of appreciation of the core of the good news of Jesus Christ is the root of our lack of faith, hope and therefore joyful obedience.

2. As our sins reflect actual and/or perceived unfulfilled desires and hurts we have to encourage our brothers and sisters in the grace and power of the sanctifying Spirit. Those who have opportunity to be of help have to identify as those who are on the same road of sanctification. He who knows that he transgressed the 10th commandment will want to live in a solidarity of sanctification with him who transgressed the 7th commandment:

Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to
me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways. (Psalm 51:11-13)

3. We cannot presume to know in what way God is going to help our brother and sister grow in grace. But we do have the confidence that God desires our growth in grace and holiness. We should not, therefore have fixed ideas in what way sanctification will express itself in any particular person. Change from homosexual desires to heterosexual attraction is only one possible expression of sanctification. 2 Corinthians 12:9 indicates one other way in which God might show his strength in our weakness (cf. also Matthew 19:12 and the promise of Isaiah 56:3-5).

4. We have to understand sexuality in the broader context of agape and eros and not exclusively in the context of the sex act itself. The homosexual brother and sister has to learn how to relate with individuals of the same sex (friendship) and the opposite sex. In both cases he has to learn how to relate with agape and eros and therefore as a total human being. He has to learn that the sex act is not a necessary expression of humanness. Jesus' relationship to Mary Magdalen (John 11:2, 12:3) and David's to Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:41) are positive role models of affectionate and loving relationships.

5. We have to help him or her who might easily feel excluded from God and the fellowship of Christians to be a regular part of our congregation. Our brothers and sisters need friendship, trust, and discipline.

Only with prayer, fasting and the means of grace of word and sacrament can they with the rest of us grow into a more and more obedient and fulfilled life. Friendship is all the more important as we will frequently have to ask our brothers and sisters to separate themselves not only from a certain pattern of behavior but from a total and all-determining lifestyle.

6. If he who once was involved in homosexuality is growing in grace to such an extent that he can “walk with exemplary piety before the flock” there ought not be any reason for a generalized exclusion from church office. Judgment must be made in individual cases by the session and/or presbytery, keeping in mind those aggravations that make some sins more heinous than others (cf. LC 151 as quoted by the 152nd General Synod in its report on divorce and remarriage as it applies to church office, p. 136.)

7. We have to publicly and privately protect those struggling with homosexuality in and outside of our congregations “in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, . . . to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever” (WCF XIII, 3). Especially, misconceptions and distortions about the supposed impact of homosexuals on our society, however popular they might be, have to be corrected by us who try to be representatives of the God of Truth.

III. Thoughts on Political Issues Concerning Homosexuality

Over the last few years the gay rights movement as well as several conservative political action groups have focused on the “political/legal rights” of the homosexual. In order to help sessions and congregations to think through their possible involvement in these questions, this study wants to provide three different ways of approaching the subject.

Model A. The Christian should not get involved in this particular political question in order not to prejudice his active personal evangelistic and friendship outreach to the gay community.

Model B. Christian moral values are God-given and true and since Christians are committed to that truth and have an obligation to be the salt of the earth in a corporate sense, Christians should attempt whenever possible to have their ethical system established in the legal structure of society. Since homosexuality is clearly wrong it must be legislated against.

Model C. Christian morals are God-given and true and Christians do have a corporate obligation to be involved in social and political action and cannot simply retreat into an individualistic witness approach (*contra Model A*). But at the same time Christians should make a distinction between public law in its concern for limiting the results of the Fall and the holiness of God as represented in the biblical teaching. (cf. the relationship of God’s stance against divorce and the public law in the Old Testament permitting and regulating divorce, Matt. 19:1 ff).

Those who would think along the lines of Model B will have to ask themselves why they would strive to impose biblical morality on the ac-

tivity of homosexual and not pursue with even greater vigor the much more prevalent immorality of divorce, child abuse, wife beating, etc. Should political expediency be a major motivating force, then Christians would be open to the charge that they only legally pursue those who are a minority.

Those thinking along the lines of Model C would have to be concerned to find ways to assure the freedom for the public teaching and living of biblical norms while they, at the same time, would be committed to protecting the homosexual from harassment in the area of his political, economic and social life.

IV. Resources

A. Bibliography (this is deliberately only a very select list of books. If one is interested in further study one might want to consult the bibliographies in most of the books mentioned).

Davidson, Alex, *The Return of Love*, London: Inter-Varsity Press; 1970. Helpful insights into the emotional life of Christians struggling with homosexuality.

Lovelace, Richard, *Homosexuality and the Church*, Old Tappan, N.J.: F.H. Revell, 1978. A very helpful book written by the floor-leader of the biblical view on homosexuality in the UPCUSA debate on this issue.

McNeil, Father John, *The Church and the Homosexual*, Kansas City: Sheed Andrews McMeel, Inc., 1976 (also paperback). An insightful presentation of a gay activist position with extensive discussion of the biblical material.

Schonauer, Betty, et al. *Healing for the Homosexual*, Oklahoma City, Presbyterian Charismatic Communion, Inc., 63 p., 1978.

Thielicke, Helmut, *The Ethics of Sex*, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964 (also paperback).

Weltge, Ralph W., "The Paradox of Man and Woman", in *The Same Sex: An Appraisal of Homosexuality*, Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969.

White, John, *Eros Defiled: The Christian and Sexual Sin*, Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., 1977. Not merely concerned with homosexuality.

B. Articles

Christianity in Crisis, "Homosexuality and the Christian Tradition," No. 34, August 1974.

Consultation on Homosexuality, An Evangelical Perspective, Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns, 50 Buckwalter Road, Spring City, PA.

Eternity, "A Christian View of Homosexuality," August, 1972.

Healing for the Homosexual, Presbyterian Charismatic Communion, Inc., Oklahoma City, OK 73112, 1978.

HIS, Monthly Magazine of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, February, 1978, Vol. 38, No. 5.

Joy! A Homosexual Search for Fulfillment, Correspondence between Barbara Evans (the subject) and Pat Boone. Carol Stream, Ill: Creation House, 499 Gunderson Drive, 60187.

The Bulletin, Publication of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies, Livonia, MI., Vol. 4, 1978.

The Other Side, A Magazine of Christian Discipleship, "The Gay Person's Lonely Search for Answers," Issue 81, June, 1978.

The Reformed Journal, Vol. 28, Issues 1 and 5.

C. Organizations

Exodus International

P.O. Box 4272

Minneapolis, MN 55414

Coordinates local ministries by ex-gays to the gay community. The organization is willing to be of help to local congregations in their attempt to reach homosexuals.

Members of the study committee have had contact with the following local ministries:

King's Ministries
Bill Pruessing
30 West Bayaud
Denver, CO 80223

Jesus Outreach
704 Country Club Rd.
Fairmont, WV 26554

Outpost
P.O. Box 4222
Minneapolis, MN 55414

Spatula
Barbara Johnson
2230 Lake Forest Circle
LaHabra, CA 90631

Theophilus
P.O. Box 592
Las Vegas, NV 89101

(SPATULA ministers to parents
and loved ones of gays).

AID Ministries
P.O. Box 135 Fairfield,
OH 45014 (513) 721-5755

Come Out and Live (COAL)
c/o New Life Evangelistic Center
1411 Locust
St. Louis, MO

V. RECOMMENDATION: That Synod commend the above study to our sessions and congregations as an aid for their ministry to those struggling with homosexuality.

I would like to thank the other members of the study committee, Dr. Robert Reymond, Dr. Gene Holeman, and Dr. Jack Van Der Slik, who gave me good advice both in writing and in person. I was encouraged by helpful letters and comments written by members of several of our presbyteries and congregations.

Respectfully submitted,
Egon A. Middelmann, Chairman

The orders of the day were called for and the meeting was recessed at 12:15 with prayer by the Rev. Robert Auffarth. The afternoon meeting was called to order by the moderator at 1:30 p.m. and opened with prayer by the Rev. Paul Doepeke.

ACTION:

After several motions to refer or to table the report, the recommendation was adopted, as amended, to read "that the synod commend the above study, entitled 'Pastoral Care for the Repentant Homosexual,' with the deletion of Section III, to our sessions and congregations as an aid for their ministry to those struggling with homosexuality."

The assembly sang the hymn, "We've a Story to Tell to the Nations," and was led in prayer by the Rev. Al Lutz.