

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

PASTORAL CARE FOR HOMOSEXUAL MEMBERS



FOREWORD

Dear reader:

This booklet contains the reports on homosexuality prepared for Synod 1973 and Synod 1999 of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The 1973 report focuses mainly on the biblical teaching regarding homosexuality. On the basis of the biblical teaching the church also articulated its moral and pastoral advice regarding homosexuality. The 1999 report focuses primarily on the church's role in providing pastoral care to members who are homosexual as well as to their families and fellow church members.

The 1999 report is a work in progress (pp. 31-73). The councils of Christian Reformed churches are invited to respond by April 1, 2000, with their suggestions for improvements to the report. Each page in this booklet has two page numbers. The number at the bottom of the page is the report's original number from the *Acts* or *Agenda*. The numbers on the sides of the pages are the pagination for this booklet.

Copies of this booklet can be purchased for \$2.00 from CRC Publications (1-800-333-8300) and can be found on the CRC web site at the following address: <http://www.crcna.org>.

This booklet has been prepared to facilitate discussion and to enhance ministry. We trust that you will find in these reports a true reflection of the teaching of Scripture as well as an encouragement to minister compassionately. May these reports and the ministry they encourage truly bring honor to the name of our triune God.

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 of Synod 1970*, 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 of Synod 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 offense. 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 practiced 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 remain 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 acknowledgment 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 "aleness" 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 personal 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 bisexual, 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 percent of American males have more homosexual experiences than heterosexual for at least part of their lives, and that 2 percent 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 *homosexualism* 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 homosexualism. This difference between *homosexuality* as a condition and *homosexualism* 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 from 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.¹

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

¹We 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*, in *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 Zegf 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 are 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, inasfar 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 arise 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 homosexualism, 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.²

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).

²Bailey, 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 noncultic (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 11, 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 keyword '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 cults 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 relate 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 does not distinguish between homosexuality and homo-sexualism 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 homosexualism. 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” (v. 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” (v. 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” (v. 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, 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 homosexualism, 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 homosexualism to cultic instances of it any more than we may restrict his condemnation of prostitution to its occurrences within pagan cultic practice. Homosexualism 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 antisocial 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 does he give 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 homosexualism 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 homosexualism?

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 1:14, where he speaks about what nature teaches regarding the length of a man's and a woman's hair. In Romans 1 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 left-handedness, 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 10:68; 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 reauthorized 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 56:35).

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 worshiping 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 are 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 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 life-style 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, 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 homosexualism. 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 "afame 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 afame 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; 19:39). 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 forgo 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 extramarital 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 recommend³ 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.

³Books 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—*Wag Zegt de Bijbel over Homofile*, 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 received 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 godless 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 are not healed and who must accept the limitations of their homosexuality, the church must minister in the same spirit as when it ministers to all who are not married.
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 officeholders to the responsibility they bear toward homosexuals in the fellowship. He can encourage an understanding of and compassion for persons who live with this sexual disorder 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

Note 1:

In addition to the above recommendations, which were adopted by Synod 1973, the following explanatory note was added to the pastoral advice:

For a proper reading and understanding of the pastoral advice it is imperative to observe the following definitions:

“A homosexual” is a person who has erotic attractions for members of the same sex. Such a person may or may not actually engage in homosexuality. “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.”

“Homosexuality” is a condition of personal identity in which the person is sexually oriented toward persons of the same sex.

“Homosexuality” is explicit (overt) homosexual practice.
(*Acts of Synod 1973*, p. 51)

Note 2:

In response to an overture which raised concerns about the church’s position regarding homosexuality, Synod 1994 adopted a recommendation which reaffirms the decisions of Synod 1973 and provides some interpretation of certain aspects of the pastoral advice given in 1973. The wording of that recommendation is as follows:

That synod, in response to concerns raised in Overture 18, reaffirm and encourage the churches to use the recommendations adopted from Report 42 in 1973, noting the following specifics (all page references are to *Acts of Synod 1973*):

- The distinction between homosexual (the person), homosexuality (the condition), and homosexualism (the practice) is helpful (p. 52, 3, c).
- Homosexuality is a sin which requires repentance (“the homosexual must be admonished and encouraged not to allow himself [/herself] to be defeated by lapses in chastity [thought, word, and deed] but rather to repent and thereafter to depend in fervent prayer upon the means of grace for power to withstand temptation” (p. 52, 3, d).
- Recommendation 3, a (p. 51) assumes a general responsibility for a homosexual condition owing to membership in “the human race which lies in sin and is under the curse of sin” (p. 623), while only addressing the particular responsibility if one makes “a willful contribution . . . to his [/her] condition” (p. 623).
- As for all sinful conditions and sin, hope arises in that “the gospel of God’s grace in Christ is to be proclaimed . . . as the basis of . . . forgiveness, the power of . . . renewal, and the source of . . . strength to lead a sanctified life” (p. 52, 3, d).
- [T]he church must exercise the same patient understanding of and compassion for the homosexual in his[/her] sins as for all other sinners” (p. 52, 3, d).

(*Acts of Synod 1994*, p. 448)

I. Mandate and grounds

The Committee to Give Direction about and for Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members was appointed by Synod 1996, which approved the following mandate and grounds:

That synod appoint a study committee to give direction about and for pastoral care of homosexual members in a manner consistent with the decisions of Synod 1973 (*Acts of Synod 1973*, Report 42).

Grounds:

1. Since the recommendations of Report 42 are now a generation old, it is time to review how effectively they encourage the churches in providing ministry to their homosexual members.
2. Christian homosexuals are beginning to turn away from their isolation, despair, and practice (homosexuality) and are beginning to turn to the church for a sense of community. Many ministries to homosexuals have developed in the years since the 1973 report on homosexuality was written. The churches of our denomination would be well served by a study to evaluate these ministries and give direction to our churches on the subject of homosexuality.
3. This study could help us to understand to what degree the pastoral recommendations of Report 42 of Synod 1973 have been effectively carried out and to uncover reasons why this may or may not be so.
4. This issue is too big for any of our churches or classes to deal with individually. Several classes and congregations have conducted such studies (e.g., Classes Alberta North, Grand Rapids East, and Toronto and the council of First CRC, London, Ontario). But these local studies have not exhaustively studied all the available ministry possibilities.

(Acts of Synod 1996, pp. 572-73)

II. Membership and experience of committee

The study committee as originally constituted consisted of nine members from diverse occupational backgrounds, including ministry and pastoral care, medicine, education, psychology, and theology. Well over one hundred years of professional experience was represented on the committee, and within that pool of experience most members had some experience and many committee members had considerable experience with homosexual persons and issues. Three members had participated on classical committees to study the issue of homosexuality and the church, one member was a parent to and experienced the death of a gay son, and many members have been in positions of knowing gay and lesbian individuals through personal relationships and counseling or treatment situations.

III. The process of the committee

Once established, the committee determined that its initial approach should be one of listening, information gathering, study, and deliberation. Thus, much early committee time was spent asking questions of and listening to individuals and couples with whom the committee had asked to meet or who had asked to meet with the committee. Those met were from diverse locations in the United States and Canada, the majority being members of the Christian Reformed Church.

When meeting with guests, the committee was particularly interested in hearing about the guests' experiences with the church, including in what ways the church had ministered to them and in what ways they thought the church had failed them. Though the guests had many occasions to develop and follow their own agendas, the committee attempted to focus discussion upon the following questions:

- A. In what ways has the church ministered to you to encourage you, sustain your faith, and nurture you in your Christian life?
- B. Who have been the most help to you in dealing with your homosexuality, the church (that is, other Christians) or others?
- C. What have you looked for from the church and not received?
- D. In your judgment what changes must occur for the church to become more effective as God's agent of redemption for homosexual persons?
- E. Is there anything else you want to tell us that you think will be helpful for us in giving guidance to the church regarding her ministry?

Many hours were spent listening to and interacting with many spiritually devout, dedicated church members who expressed much gratitude for what God has done in their lives. They described not only their pain, loneliness, and isolation as gay church members but also their hope that the church can become more of a place where they feel they can belong and openly participate.

IV. Information from churches/pastors

A. Introduction

In January 1997 the committee sent the following survey questionnaire to all Christian Reformed pastors both in parish ministries and in specialized ministries:

1. How would you rate your knowledge of the report on homosexuality presented to Synod 1973?
 - I know the report very well.
 - I know only a little about the report.
 - I know only that a distinction is made between "homosexuality" and "homosexuality."
 - I know almost nothing about the report.
 - Other
2. Do you think many members of your congregation know about the report?
 - Many/A few know it well.
 - Many/A few don't even know it exists.
 - Some/Most know the CRC's position but not the report itself.
 - Other

3. Have the pastoral recommendations which Synod 1973 adopted from that report been effectively carried out in your congregation?

___ Yes
___ No

4. If your answer to 3 is No, would you please tell us what factors have prevented you or the council from implementing the recommendations.

5. If your answer to 3 is Yes, would you please tell us what means have been used and what program(s) has worked. For example:

- a. Have you developed any educational materials for your congregation regarding ministry to homosexual members?
- b. Have you or a staff person designed a ministry for homosexual members which has worked or is working effectively?
- c. Have you or a staff person designed a ministry for homosexual members which did not work effectively?

PLEASE SEND US AS MUCH INFORMATION AND MATERIAL AS YOU CAN WHICH WILL HELP US DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE MINISTRY PLAN.

This survey was not intended to be highly scientific, but it was hoped that it would be useful for obtaining some basic information about pastors' and churches' awareness of the issues involved, including an awareness of the synodical report of 1973. Furthermore, we hoped to discover what various churches were doing in ministry with homosexual members.

Subsequent to the original mailing of the survey to ministers in congregations and specialized ministries, a Korean translation of the survey was sent to Korean pastors and churches in the CRC. Additionally, representatives from the committee met in February 1998 with the multicultural directors of CRC Home Missions. This group represented the Chinese, Korean, Native American/Navajo, and African American communities within the CRC.

B. Responses to inquiries

Of approximately 950 questionnaires mailed to ministers, 501 were returned, for a response rate of 53 percent, an excellent return for this type of survey. The later mailing of 62 questionnaires to Korean pastors and churches yielded 26 responses, a return rate of 41 percent. Four additional surveys were conducted with the multicultural directors of Home Missions. Overall, 1016 questionnaires were distributed, and 531 were returned, a response rate of 52.3 percent.

C. Clergy knowledge of the 1973 synodical report

Of those clergy responding to the survey, a large majority indicated that they know of the 1973 report, and many (395, or 74 percent) said that they know the report well or very well. A significant minority of ministers (131, or 25 percent), however, indicated that they know only that the report made a distinction between homosexuality and homosexualism or know almost nothing about the report. It appears that most CRC pastors are quite familiar with the 1973 report but that a significant minority may need education about it.

It also appears that included in the group which needs to become aware of and educated about the report are pastors from some ethnic-minority groups and others who may have joined the denomination after the 1973 report was published in the *Acts of Synod*, the only place where it can be found.

D. *Multicultural directors' responses*

When the committee met with the multicultural directors of Home Missions, it was particularly interested in their responses to the following three questions:

1. What is the dominant attitude in the churches of your ethnic group toward persons who are homosexual?
2. How do your churches respond to people when they know or suspect their homosexual orientation?
3. What kind of ministry would or do your churches extend to them?

There is some recognition of homosexuality and knowledge of the 1973 report in most of the ethnic-minority churches of the CRC. The dominant attitude of these churches resembles that of the other churches—generally, that homosexual behavior is sinful and wrong. There appear to be variations in the degree to which various ethnic minorities might embrace members who are known to have same-sex attractions. Specific ministries to individuals with same-sex attractions do not appear to exist in the ethnic-minority churches of the CRC. However, some groups tend to accept known gay and lesbian individuals more readily within their community than others do. Similarly, there appears to be some variation among ethnic-minority church groups in the degree to which issues of and individuals with same-sex attractions are discussed openly. For example, some Chinese churches are quite familiar with the 1973 report and have held study groups using it, whereas some other ethnic-minority churches regard homosexuality as taboo and the issue as unmentionable.

E. *Congregational knowledge of the 1973 report*

Because of the structure of the questionnaire, it is difficult to derive a clear picture of congregational knowledge of the report. The questionnaire called for the opinion of the pastor regarding the congregation and did not request quantifiable data. A review of survey responses seems to suggest that pastors believe their congregations to be largely unaware of the 1973 report because it is available only in the *Acts of Synod 1973*, and the sense of this committee is that very few congregation members have actually seen the report. Responses to the survey also suggest that, if people are aware of the report, they have only a cursory knowledge of the specifics of the report. Those who have some knowledge of the report appear familiar with the distinction which the report makes between a state of being and a behavior, but they have no knowledge of, for example, how the report goes beyond that distinction to discuss the responsibilities of the church to its homosexual members.

F. *Effectiveness in carrying out the guidelines of 1973*

A variety of pastoral guidelines were presented in the 1973 report, and because of this variety it appears to have been difficult for pastors to know just how effective they have been in carrying out the guidelines. Or perhaps the definition of effectiveness may differ from individual to individual. Of the questionnaires returned by those pastors who serve in churches, 17.5 percent responded that the guidelines had been effectively carried out in their congregations, 65.3 percent replied that they were not effectively carried out in their

congregations, and 17.1 percent expressed uncertainty or a mixed response to the question.

Some respondents who answered affirmatively to the question of whether the 1973 guidelines had been effectively carried out indicated ways that they had attempted to implement the guidelines, usually through education, counseling, preaching, or programs. For some the education involved church councils, for others it involved the adults of the congregation, and for still others the youth groups of the church were involved. Several pastors indicated they had been involved in counseling gay and lesbian individuals. Many pastors claimed to have mentioned homosexuality in a sermon, and some reported that they had preached sermons on the topic. Others indicated they had addressed the issue of the God-glorifying use of sexuality and that rather than simply condemning one way of dishonoring God, they had focused on a more positive and biblical perspective on sexuality. Finally, several pastors mentioned that members of their congregations had been involved in ministering to individuals with AIDS, and a few indicated that their churches had established a specific ministry to persons who are homosexual. Several of those respondents who said that the guidelines had been effectively carried out did not indicate how that had occurred in their ministry or in the churches which they serve.

Responses indicating that the 1973 guidelines have not been effectively carried out in congregations were by far the most numerous. Respondents gave the following as some main reasons for the lack of effectiveness in implementing the pastoral guidelines of the 1973 report (number of responses in parentheses; some respondents gave more than one reason):

1. Lack of need (242)
2. Fear of the topic (88)
3. Feelings of inadequacy for the task (63)
4. Lack of perceived need (30)
5. Disagreement with the 1973 report (18)

A smattering of other reasons were given less frequently:

6. Hasn't been a priority
7. Overwhelmed with too many other issues
8. General insensitivity
9. Lack of familiarity with what the recommendations are
10. Avoidance
11. Not planned
12. Apathy
13. Hesitancy of people facing the issue in their own lives
14. Haven't studied it
15. The climate is not hospitable to public acknowledgment, let alone discussion.
16. General skepticism with regard to CRC synodical reports
17. Do not like to focus or magnify any one sin
18. Until the issue is personalized with real people we know, the topic is likely to create more division than healing.

It is noteworthy that 77 percent of respondents in this category indicated lack of need as a reason why the guidelines had not been effectively imple-

mented, though it is also important to add that a number of pastors added the word *perceived* to the phrase “lack of need.” It may be that needs in fact exist but that pastors are unaware of the needs of gays and lesbians in their congregations or even of the presence of gays and lesbians.

For the 17.1 percent of respondents who expressed uncertainty or ambivalence about their response to Item 3 (Have the pastoral recommendations which Synod 1973 adopted from that report [*Acts of Synod 1973*, pp. 50-53] been effectively carried out in your congregation?), a number of reasons were given. Some ministers had been in their congregations for only a short time. Others indicated that they had addressed homosexuality in a sermon or classroom setting but had not met with any homosexuals and did not know of any gay or lesbian persons in the congregation and so were confused as to whether or not they had effectively carried out the pastoral guidelines. Though most pastors acknowledge that there may be homosexuals in their congregations, some had not studied the matter further or held discussions with the congregation or the council because they did not feel an immediate need, some cited pressing needs in other areas, and several mentioned that silence on the issue was the preference of their congregation. A few mentioned that the congregations which they serve have members who are generally believed to be homosexual but had adopted a “don’t ask/don’t tell” policy. Finally, some pastors mentioned that they had not developed specific ministries for homosexual persons because they felt this would be singling out one particular area of need. One pastor wrote, “We developed no specific ministry to homosexual members nor to the divorced, abused, depressed, etc.”

Survey results paint a picture of lack of awareness, denial, and systematic neglect of homosexual members by pastors, councils, and congregations, with only a few exceptions, and suggest that, though a majority of ministers feel at least fairly knowledgeable about the 1973 report, they do not believe that their parishioners have much familiarity with the report. It appears that most people in the CRC have only a cursory knowledge of the details of the report and that even those who believe they are quite familiar with the position of the CRC have not been familiar with the pastoral recommendations for ministry and the responsibility of the churches to homosexual members.

Though some ministers felt that the pastoral recommendations of the 1973 report had been effectively carried out in their congregations, the overwhelming majority were of the opinion that they had not been effectively carried out and gave various reasons for that lack of effectiveness. Such factors as perceived lack of need, fear, social attitudes, feelings of inadequacy for the task, and lack of prioritization of the needs of this group seem to have produced a general stance of avoidance, a denial of needs, and an overall atmosphere of silence. These have rendered ministry to homosexual members largely nonexistent and, at best, ineffective for the most part. Clearly, survey results indicate that the church as a whole has not adequately responded to the needs of its gay and lesbian members.

V. A summary of 1973 through 1998

In 1973 the Christian Reformed Church committed itself to a vigorous pastoral agenda toward gay and lesbian persons. In light of the gay and lesbian assignments required by the report—change or celibacy—the Christian Reformed Church promised the kind of pastoral care and gracious fellowship

that would help homosexual persons pursue those assignments with strong and deliberate support. The pastoral guidelines to which synod committed its pastors are these:

- a. 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. —*Adopted*
- b. 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 wholeheartedly received by the church as a person for whom Christ died. —*Adopted*
- c. Homosexuality—as explicit homosexual practice—must be condemned as incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture. —*Adopted*
- d. 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. —*Adopted*
- e. 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 godless life-style is alien to a Christian. —*Adopted*
- f. 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 are not healed and who must accept the limitations of their homosexuality, the church must minister in the same spirit as when it ministers to all who are not married. —*Adopted*
- g. 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. —*Adopted*

- h. 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 this 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 officeholders to the responsibility they bear toward homosexuals in the fellowship. He can encourage an understanding of and compassion for persons who live with this sexual disorder and dispel the prejudices under which they suffer. —*Adopted*

- i. 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. —*Adopted*
 - j. 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. —*Adopted*
 - k. 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. —*Adopted*
- (Acts of Synod 1973, pp. 51-53)*

These guidelines speak of

- the whole-hearted embrace of the church
- patient understanding of and compassion for the homosexual in his/her sins as for all other sinners
- the loving support and encouragement of the church . . . to include homosexuals in its fellowship so that they are not tempted by rejection and loneliness to seek companionship in a gay world
- pastors informing themselves about homosexuality . . . and encouraging an understanding of and compassion for persons who live with this . . . and dispelling the prejudices under which they suffer

Over the years, the church at large has not attempted to create these kinds of conditions on anything like a broad scale. For this reason alone, it would be fitting for the CRC to seek God's forgiveness.

VI. Recommendation

Seeking the forgiveness of God as a church, however, is more complicated than we wish, for while the church as a whole has been quite silent, there is and has been within the church a community that is very familiar with the 1973 report. This community within the CRC community is well acquainted with all of it—the exegetical foundations, the pastoral promises—and has been for many years. This community is made up of the persons among us who are the subjects of the report as well as many of their family members and other supportive friends. This community is made up of persons who love the Lord deeply. Many of them have spent agonizing years struggling with their sexual identity. Many of them have thoughtful questions about the 1973 report. All of them have been waiting, waiting for their church to keep something of its promises. They have been waiting a long time.

Meanwhile, most of what they experience from their churches is not at all in line with the grace written into the pastoral promises of 1973. Therefore, we as a committee ask synod to call the churches to repentance for their failures, as expressed in this prayer:

Lord, our gracious God,
 We have sinned against you.
 We have not done the things we ought to have done.
 We have not kept the promises we made.
 Instead of trying to become a place where persons who love you
 and are homosexual could find a gracious dwelling,
 We confess that we have continued to build walls.
 We have avoided them.
 We have been cruel.
 We have called names and used insulting language.
 We have wished that they would just go away.
 Truly, Lord, there is little health in us.
 We have wronged these children of yours,
 these brothers and sisters of ours,
 And we repent of our sins.
 We are sorry for what we have done
 and for what we have left undone.
 Lord, forgive us our sins through the blood of Jesus.
 Dear heavenly Father, we love you.
 We love you for keeping your promises,
 And we want to be like you.
 We want to keep our promises.
 Help us, Father, to do so.
 Help us to love our gay and lesbian sisters and brothers.
 Help us love with words and deeds.
 Strengthen our resolve to listen to their stories,
 to share their pain,
 to learn from others,
 to walk together on life's journey.
 Lord, we have questions.
 We do not know everything.
 Give us the grace not to act otherwise.
 Give us the humility to attend to what we do know.
 We do know that life is more complicated than we wish.
 We do know that we need your forgiveness for the past
 And your grace for the future
 As we continually struggle to be the church,
 Faithful to your Word,
 Faithful to each other.
 In Christ. Amen.

VII. The process

Our mandate is not completed by confession. We hope to submit a broad report touching on matters such as the spiritual ministry of the church, justice issues, transformational ministries, and ministry to families. It is our intention to submit this report to Synod 1999 for information and to ask synod to make

the report available to the churches for study and response. After the churches have been given opportunity to study the report and respond, the committee will reconvene to consider the responses and to alter the report accordingly. Once completed, we will submit our final report to Synod 2001. Because of this plan, we request that synod extend our mandate until Synod 2001.

It is our desire to gather information from the churches to contribute to the work of our committee. We do not want this report simply to remain the work of our committee; we truly hope and pray that it will become a reflection of our commitments as a denomination. Please pray for the committee as it continues its work and for the churches of the Christian Reformed denomination as together they reflect on ministry to and with persons who are homosexual.

Committee to Give Direction about and for
Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members

Rose Alons

Mary-Lee Bouma

Cornelius J. De Boer

Melvin D. Hugen, chairman

John Kreeft (deceased)

Yong-Ju Oh

Herman Van Niejenhuis

Robert Van Noord

Gerald L. Zandstra

I. Introduction

Part 1 of the report of the Committee to Give Direction about and for Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members was sent to the churches in October 1998. That part concluded by identifying the process being recommended as well as the additional matters to be dealt with in the second part of the report. The committee herein offers the completion of its work in the confidence and hope that it will assist our churches in ministering more effectively in the name of Christ.

II. The spiritual ministry of the church

The church ministers through the teaching and proclamation of the Word of God, through worship, through prayers, through the holy sacraments, and through pastoral visits. The church ministers in these ways to all its members. It proclaims the gospel, making known that we are all saved by grace through Jesus Christ. It calls us to faith and to commitment. It calls us to an obedient life and to gratitude to God. More specifically, among other things, it teaches us about ourselves and about our sexuality, its purposes and its boundaries. The church instructs, guides, comforts, and sometimes admonishes, even rebukes, when we are not obedient to the commands of our Lord.

All of this is ministry, essential ministry for all persons, including those who are homosexual. When the church reminds us of our brokenness and tells us not to trust our own spirits but to trust the Spirit of God, who speaks through the Scriptures, it is ministering to us about our sexuality. And when the church invites us to come to the table of the Lord as repentant sinners, we are once again *one in the Lord* in spite of all our differences and in spite of our sins. This is ministry, essential ministry, also to persons who are homosexual, ministry that helps them find their place within the body of Christ.

The church does not always create special ministries for specific groups of people—for example, parents who have lost children in death or persons disabled by accident in their youth—even though these people have specific angularities to their spiritual needs. The church ministers to these as well as others through all the regular ministries that Christ has assigned to it.

In addition to all of these regular ministries, the church must sometimes focus its ministry on the specific needs of certain people. That is what the 1973 report on homosexuality spoke about. But that kind of ministry has often not been done. However, since much of it is private, more of it may be taking place than we think, though it is known only to those involved. Because many persons who are homosexual have not made this fact known to the church out of fear about the response they might receive, the church has had no opportunity to minister to the specific needs of these people.

As a committee we heard wonderful stories from some homosexual persons about how other members of the church have supported them, encouraged them, helped them overcome their shame, and admonished them when they needed admonition. However, more commonly we heard stories of the church's silence and lack of ministry, stories which indicate an unwillingness on the part of the church to talk with them about their homosexuality and their spiritual struggles.

When considering a specific ministry to persons who are homosexual, we do well to remember that there is no such person as "the homosexual." Same-sex attraction in no way defines the personality, morality, life-style, occupation, or family history of homosexual persons. They are as different from each other as heterosexual persons are. Some are moral; others are not. Some are caring, loving people who love the Lord with all their heart and soul and mind, and others are not.

Ministry, especially pastoral care, must be specific to each person. Prejudgment is prejudice. Making pastoral assumptions before meeting a person and hearing her or his story is not only poor pastoral care; it also violates an officebearer's subscription to the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 43), which reminds us not to "judge anyone unheard." In spite of their individual differences, both the conversations we have had with persons who are homosexual and literature we have read about homosexuality identified several common spiritual issues among homosexual persons.

III. Common spiritual issues among homosexual persons

A. *Shame*

Persons who experience same-sex attractions have some common experiences that require the ministry of the church. The first and in many ways the most significant of these is their experience of themselves as different, as abnormal, as being not the way most others are. Since their differentness is related to their sexuality, it is a very personal and private matter. Their early responses to this growing awareness, usually in early adolescence, include a wish to keep it concealed and an attendant fear of exposure. They sense that, if others would know, they would lose esteem, be judged negatively, and perhaps would even be ridiculed and rejected. These early shame responses sometimes lead to an intrapsychic denial of the same-sex attraction, which can persist well into adulthood.

The process of becoming self-aware is often a complex experience. For many it begins at an early age and gains definition as they grow older. They may discover that they are attracted to persons of the same sex as well as to persons of the opposite sex and that the balance between these two shifts as they mature. If, as they grow older, their same-sex attractions become dominant, the outcome is often a deep loneliness and a sense of isolation. They develop a deep sense of not belonging, even though they may have a caring family and good friends. Beneath all such relationships is the sense that, if others knew about their sexuality, they would think differently about them, esteem them differently, and perhaps not accept them. Keeping this part of themselves hidden produces a sense of falseness, a lack of honesty and a phoniness, and at the same time a strong sense of shame about who they are in a very deep part of their personality.

They may feel enormous shame simply for experiencing the attraction itself. This shame can be pervasive. It often isolates the person from genuine community, from any sense of belonging, even from the sense of belonging to the family of God, the church. It affects their sense of self, including their sense of being a new self in Christ, and often leads to depression and suicidal thought. This is a shame about something they did not choose and about something they did not do. It is a shame they do not deserve. Yet it is a shame that erodes their sense of well-being and their sense of love and grace.

Shamed persons need the very community they fear. Persons who live with the poison of shame have a deep spiritual need for community, for deep and intimate personal relationships in which they love and are loved and in which they are valued by others. They need the relationships of shared lives, relationships in which they know and are known, known even in the brokenness of their sexuality, and yet are loved and valued.

B. Identity in community

The church of Jesus Christ has the antidote to this shame. In the church God gathers his people into a new community and gives them a *new* identity. Believers are a new creation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the bride of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the body of Christ. Individually they are children of God. The church has this identity because of the actual, historical reality of Christ's death and resurrection. "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (II Cor. 5:17). Neither who we are nor what we have done excludes us from this new community. Together we have been forgiven and accepted by God, and our shame has been taken away. In turn we must create an accepting, forgiving community of the unashamed.

As adopted children in the family of God we share these family characteristics with each other:

1. Everyone in the new community is fallen. We are all broken and weak. Each of us is a sinner, and we deserve some of the shame we have.
2. On the cross Christ bore the shame as well as the guilt of everyone in this new community. ". . . upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (II Cor. 5:21).
3. Everyone in this community participates in Christ's holiness. "And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified" (I Cor. 6:11). We are now, by God's definition, a clean, pure, unashamed, holy community.

This new community must practice these commonalities:

1. We no longer see each other as persons who are guilty of idolatry, theft, greed, drunkenness, sexual immorality, slander, or swindling. Although that is what we were, we are now clean and holy (I Cor. 6:11). We give up these old judgments about others.
2. Because Christ has borne the weight of our brokenness, our weaknesses, and our sins, we can acknowledge them with each other. "But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another"

(I John 1:7) because “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

3. In this community we experience the power of healing prayer, following the advice of James when he says, “Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed” (James 5:16).
4. In this community we treat each other not only with justice but also with grace and mercy.

Our very humanity depends upon our connectedness. To be disconnected, isolated, alone in the universe is to lose our very humanness. We were made to live in community, and without it we die. Even broken community is better than no community, but the best community of all is a reconciled, redeemed community where each thinks of the other as better than her/himself and where the last shall be first and the first last.

All of us have this same need, and if we do not find such community within our families and within the church, we are likely to seek it elsewhere. Persons who experience same-sex attractions sometimes seek it within the gay and lesbian communities of larger cities. The cry for acceptance voiced by many homosexual persons is a cry for community.

C. Identity

“Who am I?” is a question all people ask, especially adolescents growing into adulthood. It is a question that has deep spiritual significance. As John Calvin said in the foreword to the *Institutes*, “Who am I?” and “Who is God?” are the two major spiritual questions every person must answer. He also observed that the two questions are related. No one can answer one question without answering the other.

How we label or identify ourselves often defines us. Our identity tells us to what community we belong, how we are to live, and to some extent what our purpose or meaning is. Persons who experience same-sex attractions often identify themselves in terms of this aspect of their personality, just as a person who is crippled is tempted to identify herself as “the cripple” or a person who is athletically gifted as “the athlete.” Emotional impairments such as depression, schizophrenia, or uncontrolled anger have the same power to define identity. They have this power partly because of the pervasiveness of these issues in a person’s life and partly because other people tend to identify certain people according to these characteristics. This tendency to reduce a person to some aspect of her or his person is dehumanizing and unchristian.

Taking on an identity may make an individual less flexible and more static than that person might otherwise be. Especially for young people, “coming out” may concretize their sexual identity while it is still being understood or being formed. Taking on a gay identity as secular culture defines it may mean the uncritical acceptance of one’s desires and attractions and allowing those desires to shape behavior. Therefore, lesbian/gay/bisexual support groups which do not foster spiritual transformation and a new identity can erode both faith and obedience.

Some persons who experience sexual attractions to others of the same gender feel a need to tell family and friends, coworkers, employers, and the community that they are gay or lesbian. There seem to be many reasons they do this:

1. To be known and accepted completely as they are.
2. To live honestly, not inauthentically.
3. To find and be supported by others who have experienced similar painful struggles.
4. To raise the issue publicly, promote a positive image of homosexual persons, and engage others in discussion.

The ministry of the church to persons with same-sex attractions begins with enfolding these persons into community while at the same time sounding the message of the gospel that our sexual identity is not our deepest and true identity. We need to challenge the idea that one's sexuality is the predominant definer of who a person is. Our sexuality must not own us more than we own it. One's core identity must not be hostage to one's sexual identity or sexual orientation.

The enduring message of the gospel is that male or female, American or Canadian, homosexual or heterosexual, crippled or blind—none of these adjectives defines who we truly are. These words describe some aspect of ourselves, but they are adjectives, not nouns. Even our moral behavior no longer defines us when we are born again in Christ. Listen carefully to the Word of God on this subject:

Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. *And this is what some of you used to be.* But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

(1 Cor. 6:9-11, NRSV, italics added)

Acknowledging the struggles and temptations and moving toward this new identity in Christ allow one to be honest, to receive the love of the Christian community, and, above all, to have hope. This is no easy task. This change of identity is part of what the Scripture calls “becoming a new person in Christ.” This becoming is not an instantaneous, one-time event. It begins with an act of grace received in faith, but it is also a process. One needs to grow into this new identity so that it shapes one's self-image, one's way of thinking, one's way of responding, and one's behavior. When the church enfolds homosexual persons into its fellowship, they are empowered to live beyond their sexual identity.

D. Temptation and sin

The desire for sexual union outside of marriage is rightly understood in Christian moral teaching as temptation. There are many kinds of sexual temptations, some of them mutually exclusive. Nearly all human beings experience sexual temptations at various times in their lives, with various degrees of intensity. But temptation is not the same as desire, attraction, or even arousal. Temptation is the urge to do what we know to be wrong. Sometimes strong, sometimes persistent, sometimes seemingly irresistible, such an attraction, no matter how beautifully it is pictured and how vital it seems to our life and happiness, is an attraction to sinful behavior.

Good ministry requires that we be clear that temptation is not sin. Whether gentle and fleeting or persistent and consuming, even if it brings us to the edge of disobedience, temptation is neither sinful nor shameful. Scripture clearly teaches that our Lord was tempted in all ways even as we are, yet he did not

sin. We must be clear that temptation becomes sin only when we give some form of assent to it, some kind of saying yes. We know that we can commit adultery in our hearts as well as with our bodies, but that too involves some form of assent. Sometimes we *fall* into sin; sometimes we *yield* to temptation; sometimes we *intentionally and deliberately* sin. Whatever the degree of willfulness, sin needs both forgiveness and cleansing.

But what does a tempted person need? What a tempted person needs is both strength to resist and a way of escape. In our weakness we need to be empowered. Ephesians 6:10-18 shows the way. We do not overcome temptation. Christ has done that for us. We put on his truth and righteousness, and, when we are fully clothed with what he has done for us, “having done everything,” we stand firm. We do not fight the devil. Christ has done that for us. We are “strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.” If we struggle in our own power, we lose. If we rest in his, we can stand firm.

Believers must pray to be delivered from temptation, as modeled by the Lord’s Prayer: “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.” We need to pray as a community, the community of the tempted ones who pray for one another. We cannot stand against the fiery darts of the evil one alone. We need other Christians. We need their prayers.

Let us not be too quick to say that “God allows no one to be tempted beyond what he is able to bear.” However true, such a statement is a bit like saying to a parent who has lost a child, “All things work together for good to those who love God.” It shows an insensitivity about, a lack of empathy with, those who suffer and struggle.

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E. *The gift of celibacy (self-control)*

In the seventh chapter of Corinthians (vv. 1, 8-9, and 32-35) the apostle Paul recommends singleness as a preferable state for Christians. These passages clearly teach that one need not be married in order to have meaning in life or to fulfill one’s purpose or role in this world. In fact, marriage is often detrimental to serving the Lord. The reasons advanced are that being married in times of great trials is very difficult and that marriage belongs to the order of things that are passing away (Matt. 22:30 and I Cor. 7:29-31). When the kingdom fully comes, marriage will be no more. According to I Corinthians 7:29-31, those who are citizens of the kingdom begin to live in the new fellowship that replaces marriage. This Scripture passage teaches that it is not wrong to marry but that singleness is preferable.

But what are single persons to do about their sexuality? What are youth between the ages of 12 or 13 (the age of sexual maturity) and 26 or 27 (the median ages of first marriages) to do when they “burn with passion”? This is a very important question for *all* adult single persons—unmarried, divorced, or widowed—as well as for celibate homosexuals. Persons who are homosexual, like other adult singles, often struggle intensely with their sexual drives. On the one hand, their sexual drive impels them to seek a deeply intimate personal relationship with another, but at the same time, Scripture forbids such sexual intimacy with persons of the same sex. Their sexuality attracts them only a little or in some cases not at all to persons of the opposite sex.

For Christians the problem is compounded by Jesus’ statement to his disciples about marrying or staying single. When Jesus told them that divorce is contrary to the will of God except in instances of unfaithfulness of one

spouse, the disciples responded, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." To this Jesus replied,

Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.
(Matt. 19:8-12)

Who are the ones "who can accept this"? What did our Lord mean by "only those to whom it has been given"? Is renouncing marriage (making oneself a eunuch) for the sake of the kingdom of God potentially possible for anyone? None of these questions is answered in this passage in Matthew or the parallel passages in Mark 12 and Luke 20. However, the apostle Paul, when speaking of married people who mutually decide to forgo sexual relations in order to devote themselves to prayer, states that they should do so for only a limited time so that Satan will not tempt them because of their "lack of self-control." He adds, "I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind" (I Cor. 7:7).

The church has understood these passages as teaching that some people have a gift that allows them to forgo sexual relations. Such persons may choose not to marry. What then of those who do not have such a gift, such a charisma, from God? What if marriage is not possible or not permissible for them, for whatever reasons? In particular, what about those who are sexually attracted to persons of the same sex? If marriage is not possible and they do not have the gift, or charisma, necessary to control their sexuality, what are they to do? It is this dilemma that has led many Christian writers, including many ethicists, either to allow for or to argue for a same-sex equivalent to marriage. For example, Lewis Smedes, in the revised edition of *Sex for Christians*, writes,

I still believe that the Creator intended the human family to flourish through heterosexual love. I still believe that homosexuality is a burden that homosexual people are called to bear, and bear as morally as possible, even though they never chose to bear it. I still believe that God prefers homosexual people to live in committed and faithful monogamous relationships with each other when they cannot change their condition and do not have the gift to be celibate. My mind has not changed in any basic way since I set these opinions to paper nearly two decades ago.
(P. 239)

The question of what to do about sexuality is no mere question of theological theory. It is, rather, a sometimes desperate question of a Christian who is homosexual, struggling to be obedient to her or his Lord. It is also an urgent pastoral concern (see Report 42, *Acts of Synod 1973*, pp. 628-31, where both the pastoral dimensions and the ethical issues are explored in detail). If a person lacks self-control but marriage is not possible or is in some way an obstacle to serving God, is sin then the only option?

What is this *gift*, or *charisma*, of which Paul speaks in I Corinthians 7:7? It is commonly called the gift of celibacy. Scripture, however, nowhere uses that term. Rather, in the immediate context (I Cor. 7:5) Paul calls this ability to deny oneself sexual relationships "self-control," saying some people have it and others lack it.

Galatians 5:22-23 speaks of self-control as one of the fruits of the Spirit: "By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things." Self-control is listed along with such virtues as love, joy, peace, and gentleness among the things which are produced by the Holy Spirit in those who belong to Christ. A "fruit of the Spirit" is not the same as a "gift of the Spirit," but some of these Christian virtues are also described as gifts, or charisma, of the Spirit. For example, in I Corinthians 12 and 13 Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, including the gifts of faith, hope, and love. Both love and faith are fruits of the Spirit and gifts of the Spirit, so it is not strange for Paul to speak of a gift (self-control) that is also a fruit of the Spirit.

At the conclusion of his teaching on gifts, Paul instructs us to "strive for the spiritual gifts" (I Cor. 14:1). We may seek them and pray for them. Gifts are not some power or special ability that God either gives or doesn't give to us without possibility of change. In many places in the New Testament the Holy Spirit promises to give Christians whatever they need in order to obey and serve God. Christians who lack self-control of their anger or their sexuality must seek it and ask God for it. Married as well as singles need self-control, including self-control of their sexuality, for a well-disciplined life.

Finally, Scripture is clear that even though virtues such as love and faith are both fruits of the spirit and gifts of the Spirit, they are also commanded of us. We are called to love and to believe and are held responsible when we do not. The fact that both are gifts of the Spirit does not relieve us of responsibility. No one may argue that he is relieved from the obligation to love or to believe because he does not have that gift of the Spirit.

So, too, with self-control. It is a gift of the Spirit, one of the fruits of the Spirit, and a command to be obeyed. Scripture speaks of it in Titus 2:11-15: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to *live lives that are self-controlled*, upright, and godly. . . . Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority"; in I Peter 1:13: "Therefore prepare your minds for action; *discipline yourselves*; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed"; and in II Peter 1:5-6: "For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and *knowledge with self-control*, and self-control with endurance"

The argument that one is excused from the obligation to be sexually chaste if one does not have the gift of celibacy (or self-control) rests on questionable grounds.

How then do we learn self-control?

1. We must seek it, desire it, and pray for it, alone and with others.
2. We must believe that God gives us what we ask in Jesus' name.
3. We must know our own weakness, know that we are fully capable of falling into sin. We must "beware when we think we stand, lest we also fall." We must let this knowledge of weakness and vulnerability lead us to trust in God's power.
4. We must practice self-control. Learning self-control in other aspects of our lives is a virtue that shapes our character and enables us to say no. Or, to put it differently, self-indulgence is the enemy of self-control.

5. We must learn to flee temptations like pornography, which is not only dangerous but addictive.
6. We must be accountable to fellow Christians. For example, a person striving to learn self-control should find a partner or small group with whom to meet regularly for support, prayer, and monitoring each other's behavior.
7. We must learn to live one day at a time, for "tomorrow will bring worries of its own" (Matt. 6:34).
8. We must talk about our temptations. Hiding them and keeping secrets gives them a power that can be broken only by allowing others to bear our burdens with us.

F. Sexual brokenness and healing

God promises the healing of all our diseases, of whatever distorts our lives, of that which troubles our relationships, and of that which destroys shalom—whether physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. He tells us that healing and the gospel go together. The power of God is shown in changed lives, changed in all sorts of ways. When Jesus, the firstborn of the Father, came into the world, the new creation was made manifest. Those who believed in him became new people, and those who were sick were healed.

Christ commissioned the apostles (Luke 9:1-6) and later the seventy (Luke 10:8-9) to preach the gospel and heal the sick. The book of Acts repeatedly demonstrates the connection between the proclamation of the gospel and healing (e.g., Acts 3:8-12; Acts 4:29-30). Among the gifts of the spirit given to the church is the gift of healing (I Cor. 12:9). And James commissions the church to a ministry which pairs the forgiveness of sins and healing.

All Christians experience God's healing hand in many ways in their lives. Nearly every small illness has the potential to develop into a serious, even deadly, illness. Again and again God hears our prayers and heals us and those we love. It is, however, important to remember that God does not promise to heal us every time, from *all* our diseases and from *all* our brokenness throughout our lives. In fact, he tells us the opposite in Scripture. Some brokenness and some disease will not be healed until we come into his presence. Some live with the pain of unhealed brokenness throughout their lives.

Sometimes healing comes as a direct answer to prayer and sometimes, perhaps most often, through the healing services of medicines, counselors, and surgeons. So, too, with sexual brokenness. We need to turn to God for healing, but he often answers our prayers through the ministry of others. An important part of the church's ministry is the communication of hope, but it must be a realistic and well-grounded hope. The church must communicate all that God promises but also no more than he promises.

Many persons with same-sex attractions testify to the healing they have experienced. This healing comes in many forms and various degrees: (1) diminished inclinations, (2) a greater measure of self-control, (3) a supportive Christian community that brings peace and wholeness into their lives, (4) strength and support in a continuing struggle throughout their lives, (5) a greater attraction to the opposite sex, (6) and in some cases the ability to marry and have a family.

All persons must be encouraged to seek whatever healing God may provide for them. They should seek it both through the common ministry of

their congregations and through the specialized ministries for persons who are homosexual. Most of the specialized ministries to persons who are homosexual are related to Exodus International, a worldwide coalition of Christian ministries that offer support to men and women seeking to overcome homosexuality. Many of these ministries also offer specialized support to spouses, families, and friends. These ministries include support groups, individual counseling, literature, and other resources. Ministries associated with Exodus International differ from one community to another, so pastors making referrals are encouraged to contact local groups and become thoroughly acquainted with them. Information about the ministry of Exodus, including a complete list of referral groups, is available from Exodus International—North America, P.O. Box 77652, Seattle, WA 98177 (206-784-7799).

IV. Guidelines to evaluate ministries

Many parachurch organizations and associations of churches now minister to people who experience same-sex desires. Obviously, this committee cannot evaluate every existing ministry. These programs range from those which are unhealthy and destructive to those ministering grace and healing. Even programs bearing the same name vary from region to region. Therefore, pastors and congregational leaders should carefully evaluate a ministry before referring a member to it.

A. Common features of effective ministries include the following:

1. Acceptance and affirmation, seeing every human being as one who is created in God's image and therefore having worth and dignity.
2. Hope for healing with an understanding that sanctification is a process and that wholeness is a lifelong journey.
3. A setting which makes intimate nonsexual relationships between people of the same and different genders possible.
4. Accountability in holy living and help in cultivating a new mindset.
5. Understanding of the distinction between godly sorrow for sin, which leads to repentance, and the shame of church or societal disapproval.
6. Belief that in Jesus' resurrection God has given power to break the power of sin and the cycles of sinful behavior.
7. Help in dealing with anger against God, against society, and specifically against those who have hurt, abused, and misused.
8. Worship which is God-centered, joyful, and hopeful.
9. Supportive small groups in which there is healing prayer and confession of sin.

B. A few cautions regarding ministries for homosexual persons

1. Beware of ministries which promise complete or immediate change in desires and orientation.
2. Beware of ministries which offer little or no hope for change in desires and orientation.

3. Beware of programs which mandate gender-specific behavior or tell participants they must learn to display certain “male” or “female” traits. In other words, be cautious about ministries that place any emphasis on male and female roles which have no biblical foundation.
4. Beware of ministry models which do not respect individual Christians’ abilities to hear and respond to God’s voice and which do not recognize people’s decision-making abilities.
5. Beware of inflexible, legalistic models of ministry, for example, any ministry requiring individuals to follow a prescribed pattern of steps to ensure results.
6. Beware of ministries which too quickly identify same-sex attraction as irreversible homosexuality.

V. Compassionate ministry and the local church

Referrals are no substitute for the ministry of the local congregation, and referrals are rarely successful unless they are made in the context of a compassionate church. Each congregation must do its own ministry. But what can a church do which has no specialized ministry in this area? What good news, what gospel, does it have to extend to persons who struggle with same-sex attractions?

First, the church must remember that gospel, not law, has the power to redeem our lives and make us whole. Saying no is not enough. The church must reach out with love and compassion, creating a fellowship of mutual honesty, caring, and support.

Christian ministry begins with compassion. Just as Jesus was moved by the cry of the blind man on the way to Jericho, by the widow following the body of her son, by the lepers who cried out from the crowd, and by the tears of the woman who washed his feet, so too we must first be moved in our deepest feelings by those who struggle with same-sex attractions.

Compassion is what we feel when we are in touch with the pain of others even though their situation may be very different from anything we have experienced. Compassion is born of imagination, the ability to put ourselves into their situation and know what it is really like. Only when we know our own brokenness, our own pain, and our own temptations can we begin to identify with others and feel compassion. That compassion is the motivational power for ministry. It moves us to reach out and do what we can. It also helps overcome their shame, the shame they do not deserve.

Compassionate ministry seeks to incorporate those with same-sex attractions fully into the body and life of the church, satisfying their need for community, for intimacy, for oneness with others, and their need to serve their Lord. Much of their sexual struggle lies here. What they need and what sometimes gives desperate urgency to their need is not genital sex but to love and to be loved, to know and to be known, to feel worthwhile about themselves.

Compassionate ministry begins with lifting the taboo. Love and compassion will help us overcome our apprehension about same-sex attractions or about those persons who experience sexuality this way. We need not stop our ears or avert our eyes. We must break down the conspiracy of silence and the

walls of separation, which convey judgment, alienation, exclusion, and loss of hope to our brothers and sisters in Christ and to those outside of Christ who have been shut out of the church.

We must pray for all who struggle with sexual temptations, some with attraction to persons of the same sex, others to persons who are not their spouses, and still others with deep dark secrets about their sexuality and their sexual behaviors. We must speak of who we are in Christ and how little being male or female, black or white, Cuban or American, homosexual or heterosexual says about who we are. We must bear one another's burden, support one another in the Christian life, strive to live in holy obedience, hold out hope to one another, and seek healing from all our impairments.

When we do these things, we will meet our Lord, for he has said, whatever you do to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you do to me.

VI. What the local church can do

While many congregations will find it useful to be able to refer their members to helpful parachurch ministries, every church can minister to its attendees who experience same-sex desires. Some congregations will develop full-orbed ministries specifically designed for those who are seeking healing in the area of their sexual practice and desires. Other congregations may be able to offer a single helpful ministry in this area. Local congregations may not be able to replicate every program that the specialized ministries provide. But every congregation can create a hospitable climate and an inclusive environment for those who experience same-sex desires.

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A. Creating a hospitable climate

1. **Use language which assumes and describes the church community as the family of God.** The church is a new community of Jesus Christ's followers, who are single, married, and from all varieties of backgrounds. In other words, teach that the church is not simply a collection of biological families or parts of families. Because the church is a new community, it needs to provide a home, a haven, for its members.
2. **Model and encourage intimate nonsexual relationships with people of the same gender and the opposite gender,** in other words, brother-brother, sister-sister, and brother-sister relationships. Church leadership should demonstrate and refer to friendships of all sorts with all ages and both genders. Such friendships can be fostered by, but are not limited to, various small-group Bible studies, ministry teams, prayer partnerships.
3. **Provide an environment for confession of sins and accountability to other Christians.** In small-group settings as well as in public worship, provide a safe place to share struggles, confess sins.

B. Some practical ways to make the ministry of the whole church more inclusive of those who experience same-sex desire

1. **In congregational prayers** include the health and well-being of the single Christians' relationships as well as the health and well-being of the congregation's marriages and families. For example, leaders could pray for faithfulness and commitment in friendships and for love and forgiveness

toward housemates as well as for patience and understanding in marriage and families.

2. **During liturgical confession** refer by name to specific sins, including homosexual practice. Use Scripture and prayers which refer to the fact that Christians are tempted by, struggling with, and trapped in a variety of sins. Train liturgists/worship leaders to use language which demonstrates that every kind of sin displeases God and that no sin is beyond God's forgiveness, that God's power can break the power and the cycles of sin.

Mention sinful practices of attitude and thought as well as of behavior and speech, including such things as gossip, slander, theft, murder, violence. Among sins confessed should be those often perceived as ordinary and mundane as well as those which may be seen as dramatic.

3. **In preaching** talk about a variety of sexual sins, including all sexual practice outside of marriage (premarital, extramarital, same-sex). Give examples of God's grace and comfort to those who struggle with brokenness and also examples of people who have been freed from the power of homosexual sin.
4. **Encourage small groups** which are made up of singles and couples, are mixed in age, or are arranged geographically in addition to or instead of small groups which are only couple-oriented, geared to singles, and/or age specific.

C. Ministry that local churches have offered

The following are some examples of congregational ministries that various Christian Reformed members have found helpful in their struggle with same-sex desires:

1. Prayer partnerships with others within the congregation.
2. Congregational members who told the individuals that they prayed for them.
3. Biblical teaching on the sinful nature of homosexual practice, on God's forgiveness, and on God's power for the believer to resist sin.
4. Practice of and training in classic spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, corporate worship, and service.
5. A setting where it was known that other church attenders also experienced same-sex desires.

VII. Pastoral care to families

Although the mandate given to this committee focuses on ministry to the homosexual member, there is a broader challenge to the church. The reality of homosexuality impacts not only individuals but also other family members. Parents, siblings, and spouses experience emotions which are evident in times of crisis. In the pastoral advice given in Report 42 of the *Acts of Synod 1973*, ministry to family members is included as well as ministry to homosexual persons. Ministry will be hampered if family members do not experience pastoral care from the church.

When families are confronted with the reality of a loved one's homosexuality, the struggles that ensue often involve shock, denial, anger, shame, blame, grief, heartache, and depression. The journey may be a long and lonely one if burdens cannot be shared. The church needs to respond with compassion. A church which responds with grace will more likely be able to hear and minister to the needs, fears, and concerns of the homosexual and his/her family than a church which responds with shame.

In his book *Windows of the Soul*, Ken Gire speaks of the power of story. He gives a personal illustration which speaks to how the church can also be there for family members even when there isn't complete understanding:

If a story is to follow us home, find entrance through some door of our heart, it must be asked, consciously or unconsciously, two questions: What does this story have to say? And what does it have to say to me?

A few years ago when reading Norman Maclean's story *A River Runs Through It*, I wrestled with those questions. . . . What was Norman Maclean's story saying?

It was saying, I think, that the ones we most want to help are the ones we are often least able to help. It is a story about connecting with the people closest to us, how difficult that is to do, and how heartbreaking it is when, for whatever reason, we can't seem to do it.

If that was what the story was saying, what was it saying, if anything, to me?

I read *A River Runs Through It* at a time when I was trying to connect with someone I lived with and loved and should have understood but suddenly didn't, with someone I wanted with all my heart to help but even with all my heart, couldn't. It filled me with grief and sadness and questions like ones the father asked his son in Norman Maclean's story.

"Are you sure you have told me everything you know about his death?" he asked.

"Everything."

"It's not much, is it?"

"No," I replied, "but you can love completely without complete understanding."

"That I have known and preached," my father said.

When I read those words, it was as if the father had preached them to me.

"*You can love completely without understanding.*" The words echoed in me as if off the walls of an empty cathedral in which I was the only person sitting in the pews.

It was not required of me to understand. It was required of me to love, and to go on loving, completely. (Pp. 78-80)

Loving even when we do not completely understand—may that be our attitude as the church ministers to family members as well, helping them to love completely without complete understanding, and loving them completely even when we are without complete understanding.

A. *Role of the pastor*

The pastor is the key to ministry from the church. Pastors are in a position to instruct their congregations and to alert members and officeholders to the responsibility they bear toward homosexual persons in the fellowship of believers. Pastors need to prepare their congregations to minister to serious needs. They have the opportunity to help create empathy among the members. Pastors may be limited in how much time they can personally spend in one-to-one contacts, but they should be able to put people in touch with resources as well as with two or three people who will walk with the hurting family members.

Authentic community needs not only to be taught but also to be caught—that is, to be modeled by pastors. Pastors should also encourage an understanding of and compassion for homosexual persons, while dispelling prejudices under which they suffer. One way to do so is through preaching and encouraging the use of resources for reflection, discussion, and study in small groups. One example of an excellent resource is *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World* by Dr. Richard Mouw. This is an excellent book for those who wish to know how it is possible to hold on to their convictions and still dialogue with and show Christian love to those with whom they differ. Mouw writes, “It is important to distinguish between beliefs and behaviors with which we disagree and the very real human beings who believe and behave in those ways. We need to be very clear about our disagreements without responding irrationally to homosexual persons” (pp. 87-88). Mouw stresses in another place that “the whole point of the biblical perspective is to promote a sexuality that is kind and reverent. So it is important that we present the biblical viewpoint kindly and reverently to those with whom we disagree about sexual standards. Not to do so is to undermine our own message. Sexual civility is an important way of living out our commitment to the gospel” (p. 94).

Another resource is the Pastoral Message from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Its pastoral recommendations are given here:

With a view toward overcoming the isolation that you or your son or daughter may be experiencing, we offer these recommendations to you as well as to priests and pastoral ministers.

To parents:

1. Accept and love yourselves as parents in order to accept and love your son or daughter. Do not blame yourselves for a homosexual orientation in your child.
2. Do everything possible to continue demonstrating love for your child. However, accepting his or her homosexual orientation does not have to include approving all related attitudes and behavioral choices. In fact, you may need to challenge certain aspects of a lifestyle which you find objectionable.
3. Urge your son or daughter to stay joined to the . . . faith community. If they have left the church, urge them to return and be reconciled to the community
4. Recommend that your son or daughter find a spiritual director/mentor who will offer guidance in prayer and in leading a chaste and virtuous life.
5. Seek help for yourself, perhaps in the form of counseling or spiritual direction, as you strive for understanding, acceptance and inner peace. Also, consider joining a parents' support group or participating in a retreat designed for [Christian] parents of homosexual children. Other people have traveled the same road as you, but may have journeyed even further. They can share effective ways of handling delicate family situations such as how to tell family members and friends about your child, how to explain homosexuality to younger children, how to relate to your son or daughter's friends in a Christian way.
6. Reach out in love and service to other parents who may be struggling with a son or daughter's homosexuality. Contact your parish about organizing a parents' support group. . . .
7. As you take advantage of opportunities and support, remember that you can only change yourself; you can only be responsible for your own beliefs and actions, not those of your adult children.

8. Put your faith completely in God, who is more powerful, more compassionate and more forgiving than we are or ever could be.

(Pp. 290-91)

To church ministers:

1. Be available to parents and families who ask for your pastoral help, spiritual guidance and prayer.
2. Welcome homosexual persons into the faith community. Seek out those on the margins. Avoid stereotyping and condemnations. Strive first to listen. Do not presume that all homosexual persons are sexually active.
3. Learn about homosexuality and church teaching so that your preaching, teaching and counseling will be informed and effective.
4. Use the words *homosexual*, *gay*, *lesbian* in honest and accurate ways, especially from the pulpit. In various and subtle ways you can give people "permission" to talk about homosexual issues among themselves and let them know that you're also willing to talk with them.
5. Maintain a list of agencies, community groups and counselors or other experts to whom you can refer homosexual persons or their parents and family members when they ask you for specialized assistance. Recommend agencies that operate in a manner consistent with [church] teaching.
6. Help to establish or promote existing support groups for parents and family members.
7. Learn about HIV/AIDS so you will be more informed and compassionate in your ministry. Include prayers in the liturgy for those living with HIV/AIDS, their caregivers . . . and their families, companions and friends. . . .

(P. 291)

As pastors become aware of such guidance and intentionally speak, teach, and model the core ideas mentioned here, family members will be encouraged and strengthened as well.

56 *B. A circle of support*

Families need a circle of support. This should be a small circle. This should be a place where they can be completely open. This support group can blunt the sting and share the burden. The complexity of issues and emotions which are dealt with by family members will require ongoing support from others.

Families may not have the opportunity to make the choice of "coming out." The homosexual member may already have made that decision for the family. Because family structures vary, there are cultural implications involved. Various ethnic groups may deal with the issue of homosexuality differently.

Confidentiality is absolutely essential when family members share their burden with others. This confidentiality must not be broken.

C. Continuing ministry

A continuing ministry is necessary for families, especially if their loved ones continue to practice homosexual behavior. It is often hard enough for family members to share with others that a loved one has a homosexual orientation. This becomes even more complex if that loved one is engaged in explicit homosexual practices. Sometimes churches have been helpful in shouldering the burden of family members who are initially trying to come to terms with the sexuality of their loved one. However, long-term sustaining support is often lacking, especially if little or no change is seen in the loved one's condition or behavior. The circle of support may then narrow to include

only those who are willing to commit to the family for an extended period of time.

Family members often feel ill at ease about how to address a number of situations. Are they to inquire about their loved one's sexual activities? If so, how? What if the family member wants to have a friend or partner come along on the family vacation? What if the loved one has gone through years of counseling and finally agonizes to the conclusion that his/her orientation is unalterable? How do family members decide what level of friendship is acceptable for their loved one? Should family members shun friends or partners of their loved one, or should they interact with them as they would with friends of another family member? These can be real issues with which families struggle. When the church provides a long-term sustaining presence, regardless of the outcome, it demonstrates the unconditional love of Christ.

Some Christians do not support a homosexual person's family members who attend their church if the homosexual person shows any sign of developing a relationship with a same-sex friend. They believe that if they show any sign of understanding or compassion to the individual or even to that individual's family members, they are condoning the behavior and therefore participating in the sin. This perspective lacks an appropriate idea of boundaries. Individuals can be a supportive presence for family members even if they don't agree with all of the decisions that are made. By acknowledging the complexity of the issue, they can empathize with the burden family members experience and can walk with them instead of shunning or shaming them.

Ministry to family members over a long period of time will begin to realign the family members' focus so that they will be able to move on eventually. Over time, the fact that their loved one is homosexual will not be the all-consuming focus of their lives. However, even after years have passed, there may be times when family members will need to talk. Members of the support group need to be sensitive to those times and should from time to time initiate the subject by asking, "How is it going? How are you doing?"

The church may provide ministry through the establishment of small groups (in some churches these are called I.C.U.'s—Intensive Care Units). Members of such groups commit to confidentiality and long-term support if necessary. Membership in an I.C.U. must be voluntary for successful ministry.

Family dynamics are different from family to family, but it is not uncommon for tensions to arise within the family because of differences about how to respond to or interact with a homosexual loved one. It is not uncommon that families become polarized, one part of the family taking a hard-line, condemning stance, another part of the family taking the other extreme in hopes of keeping the peace of all the family members at whatever cost. Such intrafamily tension may result in temporary or, at times, long-term periods of distance or even of estrangement in relationships. The body of Christ must be willing to show compassion and to foster a spirit of love and understanding when there is family disunity.

Families dealing with homosexuality may need support groups and may also need guidance in their choices. Family members often pass through a maze of circumstances about which decisions have to be made. A listening, supportive presence can help family members think through the situation. Oftentimes having a listening ear can help family members come to decisions with which they feel comfortable.

Family members also may struggle with their relationship with God, especially if there is little or no evidence of behavioral change in their loved one. Believers who are aware of this struggle should take the initiative to ask family members from time to time how this situation has affected or is affecting their relationship with God. There is a variety of pastoral approaches which can be implemented in helping family members work through periods of anger or disillusionment with God.

Though most of the literature on homosexuality speaks of situations involving a son/daughter or brother/sister, there are also instances when a spouse discovers that his/her life partner is gay. These are particularly difficult situations because they involve the breaking of trust. Issues of autonomy and mutuality are also affected. The dynamics of these complex situations often differ, depending upon whether there are children born to the couple and whether this discovery is revealed in a gradual way or through a crisis situation. Sometimes the homosexual person may wish to remain married. Most often professional help is needed in such situations because of the depth of the hurt and brokenness of the relationship. Anita Worthen and Bob Davies in *Someone I Love Is Gay: How Family and Friends Can Respond* specifically address common issues which arise in such cases.

D. *A haunting fear*

In all families touched by homosexuality, there is one overwhelming fear that grips the heart of parents, siblings, and spouses—the fear that the homosexual loved one may be or may become infected with the HIV virus and develop AIDS. This fear is very real and may grow if the loved one continues to be sexually active. The ache and terror are insistent. The cruel hands of fear tighten their grip and refuse to relinquish their hold. Families need accurate information concerning this issue. It is important that family members learn how HIV is transmitted and how it is not transmitted, stages of HIV disease, various treatments, and the side effects of such treatments.

E. *A healing ministry*

For many families the homosexuality of a loved one can become an all-consuming focus. Some family members have difficulty in focusing on other aspects of life. The healing ministry of the church involves helping family members come to terms with and transcend their loved one's situation. To the extent that the church family can empathize and support family members, healing in the form of release from shame can occur, and a sense of shalom can be restored. This does not mean that all issues will be resolved for families with homosexual loved ones. It does mean, however, that family members can come to a point of transcending the situation and finding some meaning and purpose in living through this experience. For some this may mean getting to know their son/daughter, their brother/sister, or even their spouse on a deeper, more authentic level than ever before. Others have shared that through their experience they were able to get to know and support those who have had a similar experience. Sometimes family members transcend this situation by getting the opportunity to tell their story in an educative way to others. Some family members may even become involved in starting a support ministry for family members in their church or local community. Families can be helped to move on, to find gratitude in their lives again, and to give

themselves to others again. There is a sense of healing and release in embracing the knowledge that God knows and lifts up those who are brokenhearted.

F. Concluding prayer

It does not take complete understanding and outstanding expertise to minister to family members of a homosexual person. Sometimes those who know their own brokenness are in the best position to walk alongside of these family members. We can learn much from each other, and God can use all persons, broken though they are, as vehicles of his grace. As William E. Amos, Jr., once wrote, "God has chosen the fragile vessels of people to be vehicles of grace and messengers of God's ministering presence and mercy" (*When AIDS Comes to Church*, p. 29).

As we think of the struggle of family members to come to terms with and transcend the reality of a loved one's homosexuality, we are reminded again of how each of us needs humbly to ask for God's guidance. Ken Gire gives us this prayer for our mutual edification:

Please God,

Reveal to me through stories something of what it is like to walk around in someone else's shoes. Show me something about myself in the stories I read, something that needs changing, a thought or feeling or attitude. Deliver me from myself, O God, and from the parochial and sometimes prejudiced views I have of other people, other nations, other races, other religions. Enlarge my heart with a story, and change me by the characters I meet there. May some of the light from their lives spill over into mine, giving illumination where there was once ignorance, interest where there was once indifference, understanding where there was once intolerance, compassion where there was once contempt (P. 82)

VIII. Justice issues

A. Justice and grace

In its mission statement the Christian Reformed Church pledges,

As people called by God . . .
We pursue God's justice and peace
In every area of life.

As a closing section to this report, we ask the church to reflect on the pursuit of God's justice and peace with respect to homosexuality.

Why is this emphasis in our mission statement? Put simply, we serve a God who is just. Actually, God *loves* justice! He *is* righteous! He wills for his creations that which is right and true and fair. Scripture proclaims and echoes this from start to finish:

"For I the Lord love justice." (Isa. 61:8)

For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds (Ps. 11:7)

"The Rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are just.
A faithful God, without deceit, just and upright is he." (Deut. 32:4)

And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty,
your judgments are true and just!" (Rev. 16:7)

Justice and righteousness are at the very heart of God. They should also be at the very heart of his imagebearers. Scripture proclaims this loudly and clearly as well:

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream. (Amos 5: 24)

They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. . . . Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For [you] tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. (Matt. 23:4, 23)

Scripture repeatedly characterizes God as epitomizing justice and righteousness, and Scripture repeatedly calls us to reflect him in these attributes as we deal with others (and with his whole creation).

It is worthy of note that in Scripture, companion words are regularly paired with the word *justice*. For example, the word *righteousness* is often nearby, if not parallel with *justice*, and that combination feels sensible. Righteousness underlines justice, or at least our sense of what true justice is. However, there are also companion words to the word *justice* that seem less sensible: *love*, *kindness*, *mercy*, and *faith*, for example, or even our mission statement's word: *peace*. What are we to make of these?

We know, of course. We know that if God were *only* just, or *simply* just, if God delivered only what we deserve, not one of us would be available for the business of reflecting him! For we are sinners—all of us—and “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Thank God that “he does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities” (Ps. 103:10). Thank God that he has given us his gracious and free gift: “eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

In other words, God adds something to justice, something amazing, something utterly mysterious, something impossible for us to comprehend, because it runs counter to our imperfect sense of justice, something unfathomably merciful, something called grace. God gives us the mercy we do not deserve. And, once again, God calls us, the recipients of his lavish grace and mercy, to reflect him:

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:36)

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic. 6:8)

“. . . justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practiced. . . .” (Luke 11:42)

This is the Word of the Lord.

B. Working toward justice and grace

When we ask how we can apply these concepts of justice and grace to the way we minister to and with persons who are homosexuals, we hear echoes of *both justice and grace* in the following Pastoral Guidelines, to which we committed ourselves in 1973:

- a. 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.
- b. 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 wholeheartedly received by the church as a person for whom Christ died.

- c. Homosexuality—as explicit homosexual practice—must be condemned as incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture.
- d. 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.
- e. 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 godless life-style is alien to a Christian.
- f. 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 are not healed and who must accept the limitations of their homosexuality, the church must minister in the same spirit as when it ministers to all who are not married.
- g. Christians who are homosexual in their orientation are like all Christians called to discipleship and 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.
- h. 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 initially 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 officeholders to the responsibility they bear toward homosexuals in the fellowship. He can encourage an understanding of and compassion for persons who live with this sexual disorder, and dispel the prejudices under which they suffer.
- i. The church should promote good marriages and healthy family life in which 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.
- j. 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.
- k. 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.

(Acts of Synod 1973, pp. 51-53)

Justice is a very broad landscape, and its terrain is difficult. There are more questions than answers here, and several factors militate against our being just. As humans, we have a natural inclination to look for simple and quick answers to difficult and emotional issues, and this tendency can lead to a premature drawing of lines and a lack of compassion in our responses. Besides, many heterosexuals have a natural tendency to feel uncomfortable when dealing with anything homosexual. This natural unease is augmented by the way Scripture speaks of homosexual acts. The Bible we read and value as our rule for faith and life speaks plainly and harshly about homosexual acts. This fact tends to make it difficult for some even to imagine being helpful toward homosexuals and understanding of their issues. Furthermore, we are surrounded by raucous demonstrations of homosexuality: gay-pride parades, in-your-face homosexuality, highly inflamed confrontations between gays and antigay crusaders. All of these things can make it very tempting to steer clear of anything homosexual. As Reformed Christians we have attempted to be slower to draw lines, more understanding of gray areas, less interested in making quick judgments. We are gifted by God with intellectual honesty, committed by the hope within us to becoming more and more comfortable with being uncomfortable. We are a people committed to reflecting God's justice and mercy.

When issues of justice for gays and lesbians are put before us as citizens, what is actually at issue? Often the issues are human-rights issues or equity issues: the political, civil, and social rights of every citizen.

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Political rights safeguard the ability of citizens to take part in and be responsible for the political direction of a country. Civil rights protect freedoms such as freedom of speech, religion, association, and so forth, by the state or by other bodies of society. Social rights ensure access to such essentials as housing, adequate food, employment, income, health care, and education.

(“Legal Equality: A Public Justice Response to Discrimination against Gays and Lesbians,” CIL Foundation 1996, p. 4)

Which of these would we want to deny to homosexual persons? On what basis? Would our being proactive for a kind of justice for persons with whom we have large disagreements be seriously misunderstood? Would that be a problem? If so, to whom?

These kinds of scenarios are not usually simple. Often they are, or feel to us as though they are, part of a larger political gay/lesbian agenda. Perhaps that is true. Perhaps if we give an inch, we will lose a mile. Perhaps. But shouldn't we entrust the future to the God who holds it and who calls us to “do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with our God”?

As Christians we must learn to exercise justice and grace when we disagree. We have different views on the subject of homosexuality. Some would ban all who understand themselves to be homosexual, whether celibate or not, ban them to some kind of outer darkness. Others believe that we have badly misread the Scriptures since 1973. Some believe that the biblical norm for sexual behavior is genuine intimacy rather than heterosexuality. How should we deal with such divergent views? Homosexuality is a volatile issue in our circles and in the broad evangelical church world today. Emotionally charged

issues tend to bring quick reactions, personal attacks, threats to secede, and so forth. But Scripture says, “You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness” (James 1:19-20).

Attitudes soften when people can present their views without being interrupted, when a person’s reasons for adopting certain beliefs are truly heard. Often other people are driven by life experiences far different from our own. Can we calm down enough to hear the stories of others? Can we listen to each other without simply looking to win a debate?

In the present atmosphere it is possible for people to lose their livelihood when they espouse a view on homosexuality different from that of the majority. Sometimes a more accepting view has developed reluctantly when one’s own child is gay. How should we deal with such differences in a way that is just and gracious? Are divergent views intolerable in this area? Is this the place where the line must be drawn for the sake of orthodoxy and job security?

Many of us may never have a significant and personal emotional experience with homosexuality. We may never have a family member or close acquaintance challenge us to carefully review what we thought were simple issues, simple distinctions. However, we may sometime be part of the leadership of a church or classis where significant situations regarding homosexuality arise, situations that feel quite personal to us.

IX. Scenarios for further discussion and reflection

Rather than simply state answers to specific questions and situations, we invite the Christian Reformed churches to engage in some thought and reflection to help our denomination in its ministry to and with homosexuals. We encourage the churches to discuss the following situations in their councils and in educational settings.

A. A homosexual in a same-sex partnership wishes to participate in the Lord’s Supper celebration. How should we pastorally apply the recommendations of the 1973 report?

B. A nonpracticing homosexual wishes to serve as a Cadet counselor. What should we do?

C. What do we say to parents who ostracize their homosexual child or treat the child as if she has died? What do you say to a homosexual member who has cut off all relationships with his or her family?

D. What should members of the Christian Reformed community say to their legislators regarding the issue of same-sex spousal rights? What about companies that provide benefits to same-sex partners of employees?

E. How should we respond to members of the CRC whose views differ from those espoused by the 1973 report on homosexuality, either accepting same-sex unions or rejecting homosexual persons? How should we respond to persons in leadership positions?

F. What needs to be done in our congregations to foster an atmosphere in which effective ministry to and with homosexual members can be carried out?

X. Recommendations

The committee recommends

- A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Dr. Melvin Hugen (chairman), Rev. Mary-Lee Bouma, and Rev. Gerald Zandstra as representatives of the study committee.
- B. That synod receive the committee's report (Part 1 and Part 2) and send it to the churches for their response.
- C. That, when the report is mailed to the churches, an accompanying letter request that each church hold an adult-education class to discuss the report, that each council review and discuss the report, and that each church submit a response by April 1, 2000, summarizing its discussions and reactions. The general secretary's office will be responsible for the mailings and for a follow-up note in April 2000.
- D. That *The Banner* be asked to include a series of articles regarding the report and its ministry suggestions.
- E. That the presently constituted synodical committee reconvene after the responses have been received to consider the responses and modify its report accordingly.
- F. That the committee submit its final report to Synod 2002 after distributing it to the churches in the fall of 2001, according to synodical regulations.

Grounds:

1. This process will allow churches to participate in the process rather than being passive recipients of a synodical decision.
2. The churches will take more ownership of that to which they have contributed.
3. One of the failures of the 1973 report was that it remained only a report in the *Acts of Synod 1973* without being widely known by the members of the Christian Reformed Church. The report of the committee of 1973 remained primarily the report of the committee. Synod served as the approving body, and the churches generally made use of the report only when a situation arose which required reference to it.

Committee to Give Direction about and for
Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members

Rose Alons
Mary-Lee Bouma
Cornelius J. De Boer
Melvin D. Hugen, chairman
John Kreeft (deceased)
Yong-Ju Oh
Herman Van Niejenhuis
Robert Van Noord
Gerald L. Zandstra

Appendix A

Suggested Reading

- Alexander, Marilyn Bennett, and James Preston. *We Were Baptized Too*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996. (This book will help the church recognize that gay and lesbian Christians aren't strangers "out there" somewhere, but they are our beloved sisters and brothers in Christ. While many will not agree with some of the conclusions drawn, this book may help people to empathize with the reality of homosexuality among believers.)
- Bawer, Bruce. *A Place at the Table*. New York: Simon, 1993.
- Dallas, Joe. *Desires in Conflict*. Eugene, OR: Harvest, 1991.
- . *A Strange Delusion*. Eugene, OR: Harvest, 1996.
- Davies, Bob, and Lori Rentzel. *Coming out of Homosexuality: New Freedom for Men and Women*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993.
- Dew, Robb Forman. *The Family Heart: A Memoir of When Our Son Came Out*. New York: Ballantine, 1994. (This book details a mother's journey especially well. Though she ends with a different position from our own denominational stance, this work captures one family's experience and gives insight into some of the perceptions and struggles which occur when a family member comes out of the closet.)
- "God Loves Our Gay Son." *The Banner* 11 Apr. 1994: 12-13.
- Homosexuality: Seeking the Guidance of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Church in America, 1998. (A five-part study for small groups or church-education classes. The last half of this publication is an appendix which details the synodical statements and decisions made regarding homosexuality in the Reformed Church in America from 1978 to the present. Available from RCA Distribution Center, ph. 1-800-968-7221.)
- Johnson, Barbara. *Where Does a Mother Go to Resign?* Minneapolis: Bethany, 1994.
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Appendix B

Biological, Psychological, and Exegetical Issues

I. Summary of biological research

Since 1973, biological research into homosexuality has looked into the following areas: possible differences in brain structure between heterosexuals and homosexuals, genes that might be associated with homosexuality, possible inheritance patterns of homosexuality, and prenatal hormone influences.

The most widely discussed work involving brain structures was that of Simon LeVay, who in 1991 reported on a comparison of certain brain-stem structures of nineteen homosexual men who had died of AIDS, sixteen heterosexual men (six of whom had died of AIDS), and six heterosexual women (one of whom had died of AIDS). He found that the third interstitial nucleus of the hypothalamus (INAH3) of homosexual males was on average structurally more like that of heterosexual females than like that of heterosexual males. This was not the first report of a possible difference in brain structure in homosexuals, but it captured much media attention. These findings should be treated as preliminary for the following reasons: they have not been replicated by other researchers, the sample size was small, the sexual orientation of heterosexuals was assumed if their hospital chart did not mention homosexuality (even though six of the men died of AIDS), and the changes may have developed over an individual's lifetime from other causes. LeVay himself said the work was preliminary and that it only opened the door to other studies of brain cells and chemicals and their relationship to homosexuality. He also stressed that from his study one could not conclude that the differences in brain structure caused homosexuality or were caused by it. Similar comments can be made about other studies of brain structure by such researchers as Swaab and Hofman (1988, 1990), Allen and Gorski (1991, 1992), and Demeter et al. (1988), for example.

Technology capable of studying gene sequences made possible the publication of two papers (Hamer et al., 1993; Hu et al., 1995) investigating the genes of families of homosexuals. The homosexual men selected for the first study came from families whose pedigree indicated transmission of homosexual orientation through the maternal side of the family, that is, via the X chromosome. It was found that thirty-three of the forty pairs of homosexual brothers shared similar gene sequences in the Xq28 region of the X chromosome. The

second study found that heterosexual brothers did not share this Xq28 sequence. Although the studies were technically of high quality, they have not been replicated. The men chosen for the studies were a highly selective sample, not randomly chosen. Thus, the studies' results can be applied only to homosexuals selected in this way, not to the general homosexual population. Most important, the fact that homosexual brothers share a gene sequence does not necessarily mean that this gene sequence causes homosexual orientation. In fact, the second Hamer article states, "... the Xq28 region was neither necessary nor sufficient for a homosexual orientation." Finally, a more recent study (not a gene analysis) by Bailey et al. (1995) found that homosexual fathers have a higher proportion of homosexual sons than heterosexual fathers do. This finding would contradict the maternal-transmission hypothesis of Hamer and Hu.

Although for a time it was thought that genetics is not involved in homosexuality, Bailey and Pillard (1991) published a paper indicating a 52 percent concordance for male homosexual orientation in identical twins, 22 percent for fraternal twins, 9.2 percent for non-twin brothers, and 11 percent for adoptive brothers. In a second study Bailey et al. (1993) reported similar values for female sexual orientation. Bailey's results were replicated by Whitam et al. in 1993. However, King and Mc Donald (1992) found concordance rates in identical twins of only 25 percent (10 percent if one excludes bisexuals). Much lower concordance rates were also reported by the Minnesota Twin Project (1986). The particularly high rates of concordance in the Bailey studies may have been influenced by the recruitment methods used, which consisted of advertisements which may not have blinded volunteers to the purposes of the study. Subjects were self-selected rather than randomly selected.

The studies of prenatal hormone influences are generally indirect and heterogeneous. There are considerable difficulties in applying the results of studies on the offspring of female rats exposed to prenatal hormones to human homosexuality. These difficulties range from the incomparability of human and rat homosexual behavior to the very high (nonphysiologic) hormone doses used in these studies. Some cite the brain-structure studies already mentioned above to support the idea that prenatal hormones affect the development of sexual orientation. The assumption is that the structures are different from birth and that they are sensitive to hormonal influence—neither of which has been demonstrated. A third thread in prenatal-hormone-influence research is derived from accidents of nature and therapeutics. Human female fetuses exposed to too much of the male hormone testosterone (produced by adrenal tumors) look female and can reproduce, but their adult behavior is masculine. Some of these fetuses become lesbian or bisexual adults. A recent study found that children of mothers exposed inadvertently to synthetic estrogen during their pregnancy are somewhat more likely to become bisexual or lesbian. A fourth argument advanced in favor of the prenatal-hormone hypothesis is that boys who demonstrate effeminate behavior are more likely to become homosexual (Bailey et al., 1995).

The biological research since 1973 is still preliminary and fragmented. There is no generally accepted hypothesis regarding the development of homosexuality. The synod report of 1973 stated, "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. . . ." The research done since 1973 would

support that idea, but it does not provide a clear picture of how nature and nurture might interact to produce homosexuality.

II. Psychological perspectives

Many studies have been published since 1973 which provide information regarding the gay and lesbian population. And, as often is also true of other disciplines, psychological research and theory have provided a variety of results and conclusions. There is some agreement on a general description of homosexuality as a romantic attraction and sexual desire toward a same-sexed individual which sometimes leads to sexual behavior with a person of one's own gender. It is viewed as an orientation which includes the entire range of interpersonal relations (i.e., love, understanding, friendship, belonging, and companionship) and is not just a physical attraction.

Many experts believe that dichotomies such as homosexuality and heterosexuality are too simplistic and that there are varying degrees of sexual orientation, including bisexuality. Based upon observations made in his treatment and research center, Kinsey (1948) developed a continuum of sexual orientation which consisted of a seven-point scale ranging from 0 to 6, where 0 represented exclusive heterosexuality and 6 represented exclusive homosexuality, with a range of orientations in between. Others (e.g., Masters and Johnson, 1966) have developed similar scales, which measure such factors as love, sexual attraction, fantasy activity, and self-identification. When used both singly and in combination with each other, these scales can be helpful for understanding the multifaceted and complex nature of sexual orientation. Additionally, it is possible for a person's ratings to change over time. These ratings are not necessarily rigid. For example, same-sex fantasy during one period of a person's life would not necessarily be an accurate predictor of sexual orientation at another time in life.

Though the homosexuality prevalence figure of 10 percent appears frequently in church documents and other writings, more recent studies and surveys have revealed that the actual rate of homosexuality as a stable life orientation in our culture is more likely below 3 percent for both genders combined. The 10 percent figure has been attributed to Kinsey et al.'s 1948 study of males, where they reported that 4 percent of white males were exclusively homosexual throughout life after adolescence and that a total of 10 percent of white males were mostly or exclusively homosexual during at least a three-year period between the ages of 16 and 55. In fact, the rate of males who engage in sustained homosexual practice over a significant period of adult life is probably less than 5 percent of the male population, and the rate of men who manifest a sustained and exclusive commitment to homosexual practice is certainly less than 3 percent (Jones and Yarhouse, 1997). Female homosexuality continues to be estimated at approximately half or less than the male rates; it appears to characterize less than 2 percent of the female population. Thus, when the genders are combined, homosexuality almost certainly characterizes less than 3 percent of the population; the correct percentage may be even lower than 2 percent (Jones and Yarhouse, 1997).

The major professional societies of the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry do not define homosexuality as a mental illness or disorder. Both disciplines seem to believe that to do so would require demonstrating that homosexuals cope with life more poorly than heterosexuals do. Early studies

suggested that the incidence of mental illness was indeed higher among homosexuals, but subsequent examination revealed that the early studies used poor techniques, as the people studied were selected from prisons or were psychiatric patients. In 1957 Hooker reported research which was interpreted to indicate that adult homosexual males who were not in or seeking therapy were no more neurotic than heterosexual males. In 1973 Saghir and Robins extended the work of Hooker by using a much larger sample, including gay men, lesbians, and single heterosexuals. They reported that the majority of gays and lesbians studied were well-adjusted and productive.

Masters et al. (1992) inferred from Hooker's work that homosexuals are as emotionally healthy as heterosexuals, and that has been generally held to be common knowledge, whereas the factual basis for this assertion has come under more recent question. The conclusions drawn from both the Hooker and the Saghir and Robins studies have since come under serious criticism for their methodology (Jones and Yarhouse, 1997), with specific reference to subject selection and nonrepresentativeness of the sample. That is, in both instances, the subjects were specifically selected to exclude those with possible psychopathology. Consequently, the conclusions drawn are questionable. Jones and Yarhouse (1997) concluded that contemporary research continues to suggest higher levels of distress, at least, and likely also more severe difficulties such as major depression and suicidality for the gay and lesbian population. They stated that "scientific evidence falls far short of a convincing case that homosexuality in itself constitutes a psychopathological condition. The evidence also suggests that one would be on shaky grounds in proclaiming that there is no evidence that homosexuality is anything more than a healthy, normal lifestyle variant." Nonetheless, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1973, no longer considering it a disorder, and the American Psychological Association took a similar stance shortly thereafter.

A variety of myths, stereotypes, and erroneous ideas have arisen about gay and lesbian individuals over the years, and psychological research has been providing additional information over time. A common misconception, for example, has been that homosexuals are more likely to engage in child molestation (pedophilia). A significant body of research in the area of child abuse, including law-enforcement research, now exists which indicates that homosexual people are *less* likely to sexually approach children (Burgess et al., 1978) and that heterosexual men are more of a threat to children (Groth and Birnbaum, 1978).

It has been commonly believed that there is a gay/lesbian stereotype as well. In fact, gays and lesbians can be found in all strata of society. They are found among all races, cultures, religions, and occupations, although not necessarily in the same proportion. Gay and lesbian people exhibit a wide range of behaviors and values, just as heterosexual people do. Another common myth is that all gay men are effeminate and all lesbians are masculine. The fact is that few are gender atypical. In a 1980 study, Voelles demonstrated that no more than 15 percent of gay men are effeminate. Similarly, Storms (1980) found that the majority of homosexuals exhibit behavior consistent with their gender.

A variety of causes for homosexuality have been suggested over the years, ranging from exclusively environmental factors (nurture) to exclusively

biological ones (nature). Several studies have attempted to refute the idea of psychological causation. For example, the Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith study (1981) is often referred to as definitive evidence that the psychoanalytic hypothesis (that homosexuality derives from early childhood experience) is refuted. However, the results of that study may also be questioned because it was based on survey or interview research, which leaves it open to the influence of the phenomenon of adult reinterpretation of the past. As Jones and Yarhouse (1997) indicate, it appears that there is not enough evidence to prove the psychological hypothesis, but there is too much to dismiss it at this time.

Currently, the genetic, brain-structure, and prenatal-hormone causation hypotheses are receiving much interest (see I. Summary of biological research [above]). There is a substantive body of research in favor of those hypotheses, though the research is not conclusive. Similarly, there is a substantial body of literature in favor of hypotheses focusing on psychological and familial factors. The major emphasis in recent research appears to be on biological factors, however, even though the biological theories appear to have “no greater explanatory value” than the psychological theories they seek to displace (Byne and Parsons, 1993).

Jones and Yarhouse (1997) introduce an interesting and relevant discussion about whether the presence of causative influences, either biological or psychosocial, render human choice irrelevant to the development of sexual orientation. They postulate that there are a variety of factors which may provide a “push” in the direction of same-sex preferences for some people, but they also state that there is no evidence that the “push” of these factors renders human choice utterly irrelevant. They agree with Byne and Parsons (1993), who say that human choice can be construed to be one of the factors influencing the development of sexual orientation but that a statement to that effect “is not meant to imply that one consciously decides one’s sexual orientation.” They suggest that sexual orientation is assumed to be shaped and reshaped by a cascade of choices made in a context of changing circumstances in one’s life and by enormous social and cultural pressures and in the context of considerable predispositions toward certain types of preferences. This language seems to suggest that choice may also be influenced by both psychological/ familial factors and biological ones (see also M.S. Van Leeuwen, *Gender and Grace*, Chapters 4 and 5, pp. 80-105).

The possibility that same-sex preferences may be different in etiology and manifestation across persons, and perhaps across genders, has not been lost to this committee. Though there is little current research literature focused on women who become lesbian later in life, some members of the committee could share clinical and pastoral experience suggesting (a) that there may be differences between men and women in etiology and manifestation of same-sex preferences; (b) that for some individuals, their past experiences did make a difference in their preferences; and (c) that in some sense they had made a choice. Jones and Yarhouse state that adult converts to lesbianism may exemplify individuals whose erotic proclivities really are their sexual preference, as Baumrind (1995) and others have argued.

Most experts today believe that the cause(s) of homosexuality have not been definitively established; there is no agreement about its etiology, and much of the data is incomplete. Science has not yet identified what determines

heterosexuality, let alone homosexual orientation. Some experts express the belief that there are various causes of homosexuality, and many are leaning toward a combination of biological and environmental factors in their search for a cause.

Finally, the question of whether homosexual orientation can be changed has received considerable attention. Again, experts differ in their judgment about the possibility of sexual reorientation. It must be remembered in this consideration that many do not view homosexuality as an illness or something requiring change and, furthermore, that many gay and lesbian individuals have no desire to change.

Such professionals as Vanden Aardweg (1985), Nicolosi (1991), and Masters and Johnson (1979) believe that change, though demanding and difficult, is possible and advocate that reparative therapy should be recognized as a viable option for those who are motivated to pursue it. On the other hand, there are those such as Isay (1989) who argue that efforts to change sexual orientation can be harmful, with severe emotional and social consequences. Isay believes that strong consideration must be given to how injurious unsuccessful change may be to a person's self-esteem. Haldeman (1994) has also argued that homosexual orientation is immutable, or unchangeable, and has offered some criticism of claims made by those who advocate that change in sexual orientation is possible.

When statistics are cited which claim successful change, the question "What has changed?" must be asked. Has the person's orientation changed, or just his behavior? Psychologists are far from agreed on the *definition* of successful change. Some are satisfied with celibacy or heterosexual behavior (no change in orientation, change in behavior), whereas others require functioning as a heterosexual person with no homosexual inclinations (change in orientation and behavior). And the definition used has a bearing on the degree of success which can be claimed.

Given some lack of agreement about the definition of successful change, it does appear that there are some conditions which may predispose toward more rather than less success. Most spokespersons for change would agree that change is most likely when motivation is high, when gender-identity issues are not present, when actual homosexual practice has been minimal, and when there is a history of successful heterosexual functioning. These factors are revealed in change statistics cited. Successful treatment is reported for 30 to 50 percent of gay individuals who have had previous positive heterosexual experience (likely bisexual individuals), whereas successful treatment is reported for 0 to 20 percent of gay individuals seeking change who have had exclusively homosexual experiences. Though not all experts agree as to the efficacy of attempts to change sexual orientation, it is evident from the data that sexual orientation is not readily or easily changed.

III. Exegetical issues

Although a reconsideration of the exegetical issues is not part of this committee's mandate, while addressing ministry, the committee has been repeatedly challenged by thoughtful individuals within the Christian community who question the validity of the church's exegesis of those scriptural passages which speak of sexual behavior between members of the same sex.

We note that almost all of the new interpretations brought to the attention of the committee had already been advanced prior to 1970 and were addressed in the 1973 report. Whether they were adequately addressed or whether the church should take a new look at these passages is not for our committee to determine. The church has due processes to ask for reconsideration. We have addressed some issues related to differing judgments in Section III (Justice issues) of this report.

We also note, however, that there is a remarkable unity among Christian churches in rejecting the validity of these new interpretations. These alternative interpretations have been advanced to the ruling bodies of most mainline Christian churches in the United States and Canada, the intent being to seek changes in the moral teachings of these churches. With the exception of the United Church of Christ U.S.A. and the United Church of Canada, every major Christian body has been unconvinced by these new interpretations and has reaffirmed the traditional moral teaching of the church regarding same-sex relationships, as stated in the 1973 report of the Christian Reformed Church.

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