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## Abstract

Rainer Pauliks

### An Inquiry into the Homosexuality Debate regarding the Place of Christian Scripture and a Christian Sex-Ethics

This dissertation inquires into some major excerpts of the contemporary discourse on Homosexuality in the Church with a special interest for its implications regarding an ethics of sex that can be or ought to be maintained by Christian ecclesiastical communities today. The predominate aim is to evaluate the place of Christian Scripture in the scholarly discussion particularly in view of some recent proposed approaches that challenge the traditional use of it for questions on human sexuality. The question whether the Bible's vision of sexuality is still of relevance and acceptable for today or whether it is necessary to depart from it due to the demands of the contemporary situation plays a major role in this work.

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

AN INQUIRY INTO THE HOMOSEXUALITY DEBATE  
REGARDING THE PLACE OF CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE  
AND A CHRISTIAN SEX-ETHICS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF ARTS  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF THEOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY

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BY  
RAINER PAULIKS

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## **Abstract**

**Rainer Pauliks**

### **An Inquiry into the Homosexuality Debate regarding the Place of Christian Scripture and a Christian Sex-Ethics**

This dissertation inquires into some major excerpts of the contemporary discourse on Homosexuality in the Church with a special interest for its implications regarding an ethics of sex that can be or ought to be maintained by Christian ecclesiastical communities today. The predominate aim is to evaluate the place of Christian Scripture in the scholarly discussion particularly in view of some recent proposed approaches that challenge the traditional use of it for questions on human sexuality. The question whether the Bible's vision of sexuality is still of relevance and acceptable for today or whether it is necessary to depart from it due to the demands of the contemporary situation plays a major role in this work.

## **Introduction**

This study deals with the issue of homosexuality in the Church and concentrates principally on the evaluation of the place of Christian Scripture in the scholarly discussion. The topic of homosexuality that has come to dominate ethical discourse among theologians and ethicists in the last two decades. Much has been written about it, though it still is a topic that is not often discussed among church members. This at least is true of my own ecclesiastical background in Germany. Nevertheless, in recent times it springs up more frequently, often because of new public Church-statements that show that a departure from the traditional teaching of the Church about this issue is taking place that again reveals opposing views about the issue among people inside and outside the Church.

I have tried to approach this issue with a respectful attitude towards all the different views and convictions that have been proposed by various authors. The end-product of my research is a theoretical one, written at the desk, without a very personal or practical aspect to it. Being aware of the problematic of such a somehow isolated position, I think it is nevertheless possible to evaluate the issue without being too much influenced by presuppositions. This work is certainly an insufficient contribution from the counsellor's perspective. However, it has been my aim to consider the scholarly side to the issue, which requires thorough investigation and open-minded consideration of arguments, in order to work at a kind of foundation on which the respective person, like a pastor, can make ethical decisions while using the Christian Scripture correctly.

We will open this discussion with a look at the main passage in Romans 1 which is the most important biblical statement concerning homosexuality, as the contemporary debate has shown. This will be a good introduction into the whole problematic of the exegetical task. Going on from there, we will focus on the authors reasons for taking their stance in the debate and evaluate them. The following part deals with questions of Scriptural authority and the use of the Bible in the debate, and will see why this area plays an important part in the process of making an ethical decision. Towards the end there will be a discussion about a possible connection between the homosexual debate and the "postmodern" worldview that might have a decisive role regarding the whole issue and the hermeneutical task that springs from it.

## **Romans 1:26-27: The Main Passage**

There are several passages in the Bible that deal with homosexuality, though it is disputed how many.<sup>1</sup> The most important passage in the discussion about homosexuality is Rom. 1:26-27.<sup>2</sup> It is the only passage in the Bible that mentions male and female homosexuality, and is part of an important theological argument, as it was throughout Church-history. Still today it is considered as the most obvious example of the Bible's condemnation of homosexual practice. Consequently most of the scholarly discussion about homosexuality has centred on the following verses:

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way also the men abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion (Rom. 1:26-27).

Out of the scholarly work that dealt with the exegesis of this text in the last half of the century,<sup>3</sup> R. Scroggs' thorough work *The New Testament and Homosexuality*<sup>4</sup>, and John Boswell's work *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*<sup>5</sup> were the two most influential in recent times. Before we start looking at the passage quoted above, we take a brief look at the former's main argument.

### **The Relevance of the Passage**

In his book Scroggs is describing the practices of and attitudes towards homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world to prove that pederasty was the only sexual "model" for homosexual behaviour in Paul's time and known "primarily in its more sordid and dehumanising dimensions"<sup>6</sup>. Therefore Paul was familiar with only this particular image of homosexuality and consequently he opposed only this form in Rom. 1:26-27. In other words, Paul was not addressing the present day situation. Scroggs thinks that if he had known "caring adult homosexual relationships and if he had had respected and talented homosexual friends within the Church and its leadership, what would he have said? I do not know and I do not think that anyone can presume to know."<sup>7</sup> That eventually leads him to the conclusion that: "Biblical judgements against homosexuality are not relevant for today's debate."<sup>8</sup> We need to have a brief

look at the value of that claim before we take a closer look at the passage cited above.

Scroggs' position has been disputed by several scholars.<sup>9</sup> Mark D. Smith, as the latest one of them, addresses three issues that, he argues, have not been dealt with adequately by Scroggs. He criticises firstly his definition of pederasty, secondly his insufficient supply of evidence for non-pederastic homosexual practises in the Greco-Roman world, and thirdly the lack of evidence for and implications of ancient female homosexual activity.<sup>10</sup>

Smith points out that Scrogg's definition of pederasty (*paiderastia*, commonly understood and translated as "love of boys"; *paides* [boys], *erao* [I love]) does not conform to Greek usage, and is also not shared by any other experts on the subject.<sup>11</sup> According to Smith it is far from certain that pederasty was only regarded as a dehumanising, exploitative form of sexual relationship regarding the younger partner. There are several indications that support the assumption that at least some of the young "derived sensual pleasure from the pederastic relationship."<sup>12</sup> If all pederastic relationships were not always exploitative and dehumanising but sometimes pleasurable and satisfying, then Paul would have had no basis to condemn this institution for just that reason.<sup>13</sup> But that exactly is Scroggs' reasoning.<sup>14</sup> It is more likely, Smith goes on, that "Paul was following the lead of his Jewish forebears, condemning homosexual activity, not because of its potential for dehumanising relationships, but because males engaged in sexual activity with other males."<sup>15</sup>

Since Scroggs argued that the only model for homosexual behaviour in the Greco-Roman world was pederasty, Smith offers some evidences of non-pederastic practices of that time. He cites examples from vase-paintings<sup>16</sup>, and Greek<sup>17</sup> as well as Latin<sup>18</sup> literature, which clearly show that there had been homosexual relationships among adults in the Greco-Roman period as well. Even the existence of some forms of homosexual marriages, contracted among high-ranking officials of that time, cannot be denied.<sup>19</sup> Therefore it is difficult to argue that Paul only knew of pederastic behaviour, being a much-travelled man in the Gentile world as he was. Nor should we forget his birthplace in a Greek centre of culture (Acts 21:39), his long residences in that area (Acts 9:30;

Gal. 1:21-24), and his passionate mission to the Gentile world (i.e. Rom. 15:19).<sup>20</sup>

Another area of dispute is the evidence for female homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world. Again Smith refers to literary references and vase paintings and shows that female homosexuality was known in Greco-Roman time though not too common, but it was certainly not known as the female equivalent of pederasty.<sup>21</sup> That implies two important points. Firstly the fact that Paul included female homosexuality in his argument in Rom 1 at all leaves the impression that Paul probably knew much more about the sexual behaviour of the people of his time than Scroggs wants us to believe.<sup>22</sup> And secondly if Paul only intended to condemn the practice of pederasty, then the inclusion of female homosexuality in Rom 1 leaves us wondering why?<sup>23</sup>

Smith's thorough research into the sexual behaviour of the Greco-Roman world reveals to us that not pederasty should be seen as the sexual "model" of their time, if there was such a model at all, but rather, as we describe it today, bisexuality.<sup>24</sup> It appears that all forms of sexual behaviour were practised in that era. For this reason we are obliged to dismiss Scroggs' conclusion that Paul's remarks in Rom. 1 are irrelevant for our discussion. Quite the opposite is true as the following consideration of the passage in Rom. 1 will reveal.

### **Romans 1:26-27 in Context**

As we look at the context of our passage, we need to realise that Paul's statement about homosexual behaviour is part of his theological argument that leads to his doctrine of justification by faith. His intention to write the first three chapters of his letter is neither to give some ethical norms for proper behaviour nor to pronounce a terrible condemnation of especially bad sins. It is rather to open up an argument about God's righteousness now revealed in the Gospel (1:17), by demonstrating that Gentiles and Jews, and really all of humanity, are in an unrighteous position before God, and all are in need of his saving grace (3:9). C.E.B. Cranfield puts it as follows: "The section depicts man as he

appears in the light of the Cross. It is not a description of specially bad man only, but the innermost truth about all of us, as we are in ourselves."<sup>25</sup>

Our passage in particular (1:26-27) is found within Paul's diagnosis of humanity's sinful condition. This condition has its origin in the fundamental human sin, which is the refusal to honour God and give thanks to him (1:21), and consequently resulted in the outpouring of God's wrath on mankind. This wrath is now revealed (1:18) not as God's active dealing with mankind by means of 'thunder and lightning' or other forms of punishments from heaven, but rather as a passive act of God, by leaving mankind to itself. This is God's terrible judgement on humanity, that he "gave them over" to themselves, to do what they like. "There is a moral law in life", in F.F. Bruce's words, "that men are left to the consequences of their own freely chosen course of action, and unless this tendency is reversed by divine grace, their situation will go from bad to worse."<sup>26</sup> Because of that situation mankind end up with distortion in three areas of life, affecting their worship (idolatry, vv.23, 25), their use of their bodies (sexual sins, vv.24, 26-27), and their relationships (social sins, vv.28-31).<sup>27</sup>

If we think now about homosexual behaviour in this context, two points must be highlighted. Firstly, homosexual behaviour is mentioned among other equally condemned human behaviours, which are not provocations of the "wrath of God", but rather consequences of God's decision to "give up" people to their futile thinking and foolish hearts.<sup>28</sup> Homosexual behaviour is viewed by Paul as one symptom of humanity's distorted relationship with its Creator. It is no worse than envy, murder, strife or alike, behaviours that are mentioned in the catalogue of vice in 1:29-31 and which are other expressions of the same sinful condition of humanity. Secondly, nevertheless, homosexual behaviour has a special place in Paul's argument. It is singled out by him for special attention, "because he regards it as a particularly graphic image of the way in which human fallenness distorts God's created order", as R. Hays explains to us.<sup>29</sup> To prove such a statement we need to have a closer look at this expression "created order", mentioned by Hays. Is this expression really the basis for his comments on homosexual behaviour? A look at the Greek-Stoic,

and the Hellenistic-Jewish and the Old Testament background should make it clear.

### ***Physis* ("Nature") in Romans 1**

One indication that Paul was thinking in terms of a distorted "order of creation" regarding homosexuality is given when looked at his use of the phrases "the natural use" (*ten physiken chêsin*) and "contrary to nature" (*para physin*) in 1:26 and v. 27. Before we go into that we need to look at first into three arguments that oppose this statement, but which will provoke us to ask further important questions. These arguments are basically built around the concept of "nature" (*physis*), and how it should be understood in Rom. 1. There has been a lot of scholarly debate about it and J. Boswell's work still needs to be mentioned here.<sup>30</sup> His study had a lot of influence when it was published in 1980, and others have built upon it.<sup>31</sup>

### **"Against" or "beyond" nature?**

Boswell is arguing that Paul's use of the term *para physin* can not be seen as a negative judgement on homosexual behaviour, because it should be translated in neutral terms. "Romans 1 did not condemn homosexual behaviour as 'against nature'... To Paul, the activities in question were beyond nature in the sense of 'extraordinary, peculiar'...".<sup>32</sup> However, though Boswell is rightly pointing out that the word *para* (with the accusative) often has the meaning "more than, in excess of", he does not make anything out of the fact that in a number of cases it also has the meaning of "against" or "contrary to". This finds support from further NT references (see Acts 18:13; Rom. 16:17), from the function of *para* as a prepositional prefix (e.g. *parabasis* ["transgression"], *paranomia* ["lawlessness"], *paratoma* ["false step, sin"]), and from other common Greek usage.<sup>33</sup> As Boswell mentions in a footnote, there are certain stock phrases like *para doxan* for which "contrary to" may be the best rendering of *para*. Now the point is that *para* together with *physin* is precisely such a stock phrase and may most appropriately be translated with the meaning "against" or "contrary to".<sup>34</sup> Therefore Hays concludes that "in Romans 1:26 ... it is precisely the context which insures that sexual acts

"contrary to nature" are given a negative moral evaluation. This argumentative context cannot be explained away by a lexical tour de force.<sup>135</sup>

### ***"Personal nature" or "Universal order"?***

Another point of Boswell's argument is, that Paul cannot have had in mind the notion of "natural law" when he refers to "nature" (1:26-27), because such concept was formed long after Paul's time. "For Paul, "nature" was not a question of universal law or truth but, rather, a matter of the character of some person or group of persons, a character which was largely ethnic and entirely human: Jews are Jews "by nature," just as Gentiles are Gentiles 'by nature,' depending on their own disposition... 'Nature' in Romans 1:26, should be seen as the personal nature of the pagans in question".<sup>36</sup> Again, this point is disputable. Though it is doubtful that Paul had in mind the notion of "natural law" when he refers to "nature" as we will see later, it is still difficult to accept Boswell's conclusion. The whole point of the entire passage (v.18-32) is missed. As we have indicated above, Rom. 1:18-32 is not concerned about the wrong behaviour of individuals. Rather it has in view the sinful state of the whole of humanity that rebelled against God (Gen. 2) and the results of that "Fall".<sup>37</sup> This point is further emphasised in the passage with the threefold use of "exchanged" (*ellaxan*, v.23; *metelaxan*, v.25,26). While verses 23 and 25 talk about how through the "Fall" the truth about God was "exchanged", which resulted in false worship, the verse 26 talks about a specific detail of the same "Fall". That is, the belief in a lie about God resulted in an "exchange" of right to wrong sexual behaviour. As Schmidt puts it, "The point is that same-sex relations are specific falsifications of right behaviour (immorality), made possible by the general falsification of right thinking about God (idolatry)."<sup>38</sup> Therefore it is not some dispositions or "orientations" of persons or communities which are in Paul's mind when he thinks about what is "contrary to nature" in Rom. 1:26-27, but rather he has in mind the complete overturn of the Creator's first intention for sexuality present in the creation (Gen. 1).<sup>39</sup>

### **"Sexual orientation" in Rom. 1?**

Opponents of Boswell's thesis further observe that to introduce the concept of "sexual orientation" into the text (Rom. 1) is a complete anachronism. All scholars are united in affirming that for Paul it would have been totally foreign to make a distinction between constitutionally heterosexual and homosexual people.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, Boswell and others still want to argue that Paul must have thought about homosexual acts, committed by constitutionally heterosexual people, because it says, the people "changed *their* natural relations with unnatural ones" (Rom. 1:26-27).<sup>41</sup> However, if it is true that the concept of "sexual orientation" was most certainly foreign to Paul, it is surely appropriate to join R. Hays in asking: "If Paul did not make such a distinction himself, how can it be maintained that Rom. 1:26-27 strictly observes the distinction?"<sup>42</sup> No, the concept of "sexual orientation" has to be excluded from Rom. 1, because it simply is irrelevant for Paul's understanding of "natural and unnatural relations" in these verses.

### **Conventional Language**

The question why Paul introduced *para physin* into the passage remains. R. Hays writes that Boswell underestimates the importance of the Stoic background of Paul's use of the phrase *para physin*.<sup>43</sup> In Paul's time the phrases *kata physin* and *para physin* were often used for describing natural and unnatural behaviours. Homosexual behaviour was commonly viewed as *para physin*. Greek philosophers like Plato, Dio Chrysostom or Plutarch can be cited for using this term in such a sense.<sup>44</sup> Hellenistic Jewish writers, who "tended to see a correspondence between the philosophical appeal to "nature" and the clear teaching of the Law of Moses", adopted this use of *para physin* and *kata physin* concerning homosexual behaviour frequently. Josephus writes about the union of man and wife as *kata physin* and describes homosexual acts as "monstrous and unnatural (*para physin*) pleasures" (Ap. 2.199; 2.273, 275). The same is true for Philo who used similar language to express his distaste for homosexuality (*ten para physin hedonen*, Spec. Leg. 3.37-42). He writes about the forbidden forms of intercourse that occurred in Sodom, when men mounted males, and "threw off from their necks the law of nature" (*ton tes physeos*

*nomon*, *De. Abr.* 133-41).<sup>45</sup> Hence Paul is here in line with the Hellenistic-Jewish cultural context when he adopts a conventional Greek term (especially Stoic in this case), while rejecting the Greek concept of 'nature' (*physis*).<sup>46</sup> Hays emphasises that point by saying: "The understanding of "nature" in this conventional language does not rest on empirical observations of what actually exists; instead, it appeals to an intuitive conception of what ought to be, of the world as designed by God."<sup>47</sup> *Para physin* was a common phrase with a negative connotation among Jews and Greeks, and if we think about the Gentile addresses of Romans, the use of it makes sense. Paul certainly put his point across. Gentiles as well as Jews surely did not misunderstand Paul on this point.

### **The Old Testament Background of Romans 1**

Recently K. Holter confirmed the assumption that Paul was alluding to the Genesis creation account in our passage. He points out the striking terminological similarities between Rom. 1:23-27 and Gen. 1:26-28 as well as Deut. 4:16-18.<sup>48</sup> In studying the terminologies of these passages, it is difficult to deny that Rom. 1:23-27 is a negative echo of Gen. 1:26-28 (LXX), with Deut. 4 (LXX) as the model. Holter notices three points: Firstly, idolatry in Rom. 1 is described as a reversion of the creation of man. God said: Let us make "man in our image, in our likeness,..." (*anthrôpon kat' eikona hêmeteran kai kath' homoiôsin*, Gen. 1:26), but man exchanged the glory of the immortal God for "images, likenesses made to look like man..." (*homoiômati eikonos phthartiou anthrôpou*; Rom. 1:23). Thus man is worshipping images of himself instead of God, in whose image he is created (cf. Ps. 106:20 [LXX 105:20]). Secondly, the sexual differentiation in Gen. 1:27 ("...male and female he created them." *arsen kai thêlu epoiêsen autous*) which had the purpose to "be fruitful and increase in number" (v.28), is also emphasised in Rom. 1:26-27 *thêleiai* and *arsenes*, plurals of Gen. 1!). However, compared with Gen. 1, it has completely lost its meaning, and is replaced by fruitless sexual relation. And thirdly, the creatures of Gen. 1:26 and 28 (*peteinôn tou ouranou and' erpetôn tôn erpontôn epi tês gês*) are in Rom. 1:23 (*peteión* and *erpetôn*) not any longer subjects for man's dominion but rather patterns for images which man can worship.<sup>49</sup> Holter

concludes that "when St. Paul in his discussion of the godlessness of man in Rom. 1:18-32 juxtaposes idolatry and homosexuality, he thinks in terms of a reversal of the creation of man. This point corresponds with the major argument of the passage, that man is without excuse for his godlessness, since God has been known *apo ktiseôs kosmou*, v. 20."<sup>50</sup> These observations are clear signposts towards the assumption that Paul's remarks concerning idolatry and homosexuality in Rom. 1 should be understood in the light of the creation story.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Uniqueness of Paul's Comments**

It is time to focus on what exactly Paul meant by his comments on same-sex relations in verses 26 and 27. The intertestamental writing "Wisdom of Solomon" (first century B.C.), which is often mentioned in discussions on Romans 1, shows that Paul was at one with some contemporary Jewish teachings on Gentile vices:

"For all people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know the one who exists, nor did they recognise the artisan while paying heed to its works. (13:1)

"... Therefore those who lived unrighteously, in a life of folly, You tormented through their own abominations. (12:23)

"For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them was the corruption of life.... For they... no longer keep their lives or their marriages pure, but they... grieve one another by adultery, and all is a raging riot of blood and murder, theft and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury, confusion over what is good, forgetfulness of favours, defiling of souls, sexual perversion, disorder in marriages, adultery, and debauchery. For the worship of idols not to be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil" (14:12, 23-27).<sup>52</sup>

Although we do not know for sure whether Paul was familiar with this passage<sup>53</sup>, nevertheless it obviously shows that it was common among Jews in Paul's time to see the "corruption of life" in the Gentile world as a consequence of man's rebellion against the Creator.<sup>54</sup> Paul entirely shares this view. But his insights into the causes of such a corruption, especially sexual corruption, seem to go deeper. Some Hellenistic-Jewish authors were predominantly concerned about the preservation of marriage and its procreational aspect when they spoke up against homosexual practices. Especially Philo can be cited here:

"Certainly, had Greeks and barbarians joined together in affecting such unions, city after city would have become a desert, as though depopulated by a pestilential sickness" (*On Abraham* 136).<sup>55</sup>

For Paul, this is not the motivation for mentioning homosexual behaviour. He is not concerned about the surface of the problem, the devastating social consequences of same-sex activity. He is concerned about the root of the problem - what causes people to enter into self-destructive homosexual relations (Rom. 1:27b). By putting his comments about homosexual activity into a passage filled with numerous allusions to the creation story, as we have observed above<sup>56</sup>, it should be clear, that he sees God's first intentions for sexual relations, present in the creation story, in disorder. It is difficult to see what else Paul could have had in mind, when he thought about "natural relations", if not, "relations as intended by God in the first place". A relation designed by God and described in Genesis 2:24: Male and female "becoming one flesh" within a faithful covenantal relationship. D. Wright puts it as follows: "Paul did believe that male and female were created for each with complementary sexualities grounded in the distinctive constitutions of their sexual organs".<sup>57</sup>

Now, because of the departure from this arrangement by rejecting God and his standards, women and men were left to themselves and "inflamed with lust for one another"(v.27). In Paul's view, human sexuality separated from its Creator ends in uncontrolled and perverted lust for one another, where bodies are degraded to being means for sexual satisfaction (v.24). Paul had a high view of the "body" (*soma*). The "body" was due to be given over to God as "a living sacrifice, holy and well pleasing to him" (12:1), and not to immorality, because it is a sin against one's own "body" (1 Cor. 6:18). Paul sees in Rom. 1:24 the body degraded, or more adequately translated, "dishonored" (*atimazesthai*), which hints to the contrast he repeatably makes between *doxa* (glory, honor) and *atimias* (dishonor, cf. 1 Cor. 11:14-5, 15:43; 2 Cor. 6:8). If it is taken that Roman 1:23 is alluding to Psalm 105:20 (LXX) and Jer. 2:11(LXX)<sup>58</sup> where it says "They exchange *their* Glory for an image of a bull" (*doxa*), and "my people have changed *their* Glory for worthless idols", then the contrast between *doxa* and *atimias* in Romans 1 (vv. 23, 24, 26) can not be

ignored. Once man and woman came together in the "glory" of being created in God's image, now, having turned to idols, they come together in "dishonor", as beings with a corrupted image. Hence they are punished in themselves (v.27b). Huggins agrees and writes: "The due reward was the perversion of human identity, with its attendant abuse of the body".<sup>59</sup>

### **Rhetorical Device**

One more point needs to be mentioned before we make a concluding remark. The passage (1:18-32) has an important rhetorical purpose in Paul's argument. Some time ago J. Jeremias pointed out the "preparatory character" of Romans 1:18-32.<sup>60</sup> There is a strong consistency to Paul's argument. Chapter one makes it unmistakably clear that the Gentile world stands under God's judgement because of its rebellion against God in turning towards idols, but Paul's argument does not end here. Paul is joining company with the Jews of his time who condemned the vices of Romans 1 in just the same way as he does here, but then, he suddenly turns around and utters a powerful rebuke towards the people who just shared his strong condemnation:

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgement do the same things. (2:1)

With this rhetorical turn Paul continues his argument and gives a familiar Jewish passage a different emphasis. It is not used for polemical purposes any more, but for making a point in a rather shattering way. The Jews who self-righteously join in condemnation of the Gentiles yet either do the same things or do not do what they should, are not excluded from God's verdict. Neither the idolatrous Gentile nor the self-righteous Jew can escape God's judgement (3:9,23), for both are in desperate need of his mercy (vv. 24-26).<sup>61</sup> Paul is writing as a Hebrew, is building on Jewish condemnations of the Gentile world, but makes this condemnation a universal one, including self-righteous Jews.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, no-one has the right to point the finger at anyone, because everyone has got his sin to deal with (3:19,27). Neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality matters for Paul when it comes to being righteous before God. For "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23).

## **Conclusion**

Having examined the evidence, we are able to make the following exegetical remarks. In juxtaposing idolatry (vv. 23, 25) and distorted sexuality (v. 24), further specified as homosexuality (vv. 26-27), Paul was showing that these activities are consequences of God's decision to "give over" a rebellious humanity to do what they like. This decision gradually led man and woman into a total confusion about their identity as created beings as well as sexual beings. For homosexuality is given as the clearest demonstration that the "order of creation" for sexuality (Gen. 2) has been turned up side down. In T. Schmidt's words: "Paul's profound analysis of the human condition in Rom. 1 finds in homosexuality an example of sexual sin that falsifies our identity as sexual beings, just as idolatry falsifies our identity as created beings."<sup>63</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Among them are: Gen. 19:4-11; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deut. 23:17; 1Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2Kings 23:7; Judg. 19:22-30; Rom. 1:26-27; 1Cor. 6:9-10; 1Tim. 1:8-11.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 6:9 has also been important for the discussion of this topic. It centred on disagreements regarding the Greek term *arsenokoitai*. Today it is widely accepted as simply meaning "lying with a male", a literalistic Greek translation of a Hebrew expression, derived directly from Lev. 18:22, 20:13 and used to refer to homosexuality. *cf.* R. Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983): 106-08; D.F. Wright, "Homosexuality or Prostitutes? The Meaning of ARSENOKOITAI (1Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10)", *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 125-153; *ibid.*, "Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible", *Evangelical Quarterly* 61:4 (1989): 291-300.

<sup>3</sup> *Cf.* important scholars and their selected works concerning our discussion in succession: Barth (1951), Bailey (1955), Thielicke (1964), Bostock (1980), Scroggs (1983), Furnish (1985), Wright (1984), Hays (1986). More recent ones: Countryman (1988), Pronk (1993), Schmidt (1995), Brooten (1996).

<sup>4</sup> R. Scroggs, *op.cit.*

<sup>5</sup> J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Scroggs, *op.cit.*, p.126.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.128-9

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.127.

<sup>9</sup> See esp. R.M. Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures* (Washington: Biblical Research Institute, 1988); R.B. Hays, "Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies", in *Homosexuality and the Church*, ed. J.S. Siker (Louisville: Westminster, 1994); M.L. Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster, 1995); T.E. Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in The Homosexual Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1995); M.D. Smith, "Ancient Bisexuality and the Interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXIV/2 (1996): 223-256.

<sup>10</sup> *Cf.*, *op.cit.*, p.227.

<sup>11</sup> *Cf.*, *ibid.*, pp. 128-9; P. Brandt, *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 1932) 435-456; F. Buffiere, *Eros adolescent. La pédérastie dans la Grèce antique* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1980) 9-11; E. Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World* (New Haven: Yale Uni Press, 1992) 136-42; K. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Uni Press, 1989) 15-17, 50-52; H.I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York, Sheed and Ward, 1956) 27.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, *op.cit.*, p.231; *cf.* Dover, p. 204; Aristophanes, "Acharnians" 591f.; "Knights" 963f.; Straton, "Palatine Anthropology" xii. 7; *cf.* Plato, "Symposium" 215a-222b, about Alcibiades's love (as a boy) for Socrates his senior.

<sup>13</sup> *Cf.*, Smith, *op.cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>14</sup> Scroggs, *op.cit.*, p.126.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *op.cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>16</sup> *Cf.* Dover, *op.cit.*, p.133

<sup>17</sup> *Cf.* AS cited by Dover, p. 84; Plato, "Symposium" (c. 411-405; 180c-185c). Smith cites (p.235): Xenophon, "Memorabilia", 2.1.30.; Aristotle, "Politics", 2.96-7 [1247a].

<sup>18</sup> *Cf.* Smith, *op.cit.*, p. 236-7. He cites Seneca, "Epistulae Morales" 47.7; Suetonius, "Galba" 22; Cicero, Philippics 2.18.44-5; Xenophon of Ephesus, Ephesiaca.

<sup>19</sup> *Cf. ibid.*, p.237.

<sup>20</sup> *Cf. Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, ed. G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin, D.G. Reid (Leicester: IVP, 1993): 679-92

<sup>21</sup> *Cf. ibid.*, p. 239-242, who cites 17 literary references to female homosexuality and additional evidence found on pottery not included by Scroggs

<sup>22</sup> *Cf.* Scroggs, *op.cit.* He writes about Paul's simplicity in that matter: "Paul is simply repeating what he must have heard on street corners over and over again", p.128.

<sup>23</sup> With regards to this point P. von der Osten-Sacken writes: "Da weibliche Homosexualität weder im Alten Testament erwähnt wird noch in der Antike nennenswerte Spuren hinterlassen

hat, entfällt hier die Gemeinplatztherorie ebenso wie das päderastische Modell", "Paulinisches Evangelium und Homosexualität", *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 3 (1986): 28-49.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Smith, *op.cit.*, p.243. There are two responses to M. Smith's article. Neither author is convincing in their argument against Smith's proposal, since one of them misses the point in his criticism all together by arguing on an ethical level and not on a historical. The other concentrates too much on one selective source to save a pederastic interpretation of Romans 1. In view of these responses Smith's point still stands. Cf. D.A. Helminiak, „Response: Ethics, Biblical and Denominational: A Response to Mark Smith," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65/4 (1997): 855-859; J.E. Miller, „Response: Pederasty and Romans 1:27: A Response to Mark Smith," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65/4 (1997): 861-866; M.D. Smith, Paul and Ancient Bisexuality: A Rejoinder," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65/4 (1997): 867-870.

<sup>25</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans - A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p.81.

<sup>26</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: Tyndale Press, 1969), p.81.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Smith, *op.cit.*, p.224.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Hays, *op.cit.*, p.8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>30</sup> See for responses on Boswell especially: Scroggs, *op.cit.*; D.F. Wright, "Early Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality", *Studia Patristica* 18, no.2 (1989): 329-34; *ibid.*, "Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible", *Evangelical Quarterly* 61 (1989): 291-300; R. Hays, "A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14/1 (1986): 184-215; Schmidt, *op.cit.*

<sup>31</sup> See esp. L.W. Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), who thoroughly extends Boswell's thesis, though it did not persuaded many, even among revisionists of the traditional interpretation; cf. Schmidt's response to Countryman, *op.cit.*, pp.64-85.

<sup>32</sup> Boswell, *op.cit.*, p.114.

<sup>33</sup> Hays, "A Response," *op.cit.*, p.198.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. J.B. DeYoung, "The Meaning of 'Nature' in Romans 1 and its Implications for Biblical perspectives of Homosexual Behaviour," *JETS* 31 (1988): 429-47.

<sup>35</sup> Hays, "A Response", *op.cit.* Hays further reminds us that the expression "contrary to nature" probably did not carry for Paul and his readers the vehement connotation of "monstrous abomination", which says something about modern society's and the churches' homophobic behaviour. (p.199).

<sup>36</sup> Boswell, *op.cit.*, pp.110-111.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Hays, "Relations", *op.cit.*, pp.190-91, 200; J. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1988): pp.53, 74-75; Scroggs, *op.cit.*, p.110; Springett, *op.cit.*, pp.126-30.

<sup>38</sup> Schmidt, *op.cit.*, p.78..

<sup>39</sup> Cranfield, *op.cit.*, p.35.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. e.g. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Tradition* (New York and London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1955): p.38; Furnish, *op.cit.*, p.66 .

<sup>41</sup> Boswell, *op.cit.*, pp.109-113; J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Kansas City, Kansas: Sheed, Andrews and McNeel, 1976): p.42.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Scroggs, *op.cit.*, who doubts the validity of this distinction or its presence here as well (pp.27-28).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Hays, "A Response," *op.cit.*, 196.

<sup>44</sup> See for example: Plato, *Laws* I.636C; Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse* 7.135, 151-52; Plutarch, *Dialogue on Love* 751C, E..

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Hays, "A Response", *op.cit.*, pp.192-194. Köster reminds us: "Ein technischer stoischer Gebrauch von *para physis* liegt nicht vor, wie Bonhoeffer (149) mit Recht betont" (*op.cit.*, p.267); For more details on this discussion see: Furnish, *op.cit.*, pp.58-67; Scroggs, *op.cit.*, pp.59-60.

<sup>46</sup> H. Köster, "physis", TWNT IX, ed. G. Friedrich (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), refers to the rare use of the word *physis* in the NT that points to the fact that the writers were deliberately choosing not to give any room for "natural theology" in the NT. "Das Fehlen des *physis*-Begriffs

in der Apostelgeschichte, besonders in Kapitel 17, ist immerhin auffallend. Daß der Begriff in Rm 1,18-25 nicht vorkommt, ist kaum ein Zufall." 265(ftn. 202).

<sup>47</sup> Hays, "A Response", *op.cit.*, p.194. It is hard to follow some scholars who try to make of Paul simply someone who adopted thoughts and concepts of his time. Köster agrees while acknowledging that there are a lot of Greek viewpoints reflected in Paul's writings. "Still there is no need to make Paul to be an adoptionist of certain Stoic school-concepts. Bonhoeffer and Pholenz have rightly warned of that as well" ("physis", *op.cit.*, 267). Cf. Hays, "A Response", *op.cit.*, 213.

<sup>48</sup> K. Holter, "A Note on the Old Testament Background of Rom 1,23-27", *Biblische Notizen* 69 (1993): pp.21-23. There have been other scholars pointing into the same direction: cf. J. Jeremias, "Zu Rm 1,22-32", *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 45 (1954): pp.119-121; N. Hyldahl, "A reminiscence of the Old Testament at Romans 1. 23", *New Testament Studies* 2 (1955/56): pp.285-288; J. Jervell, "Imago Dei. Gen. 1,26f im Spätjudentum, in der Gnosis und in den Paulinischen Briefen", *FRLANT* 76 (1960): p.320. Cf. U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (EKK 6/1, Neukirchen - Vluyn, 1978): pp.107-108.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Holter, *op.cit.*, 22-23.

<sup>50</sup> Holter, *op.cit.*, p.23. Holter mentions extrabiblical material which also links idolatry and homosexuality: e.g. *SapSal* 13-15 (i.a. 14,26-27); *TestLev* 17,11; and especially *Test Naph* 3,2-4. See also: J. Jeremias, *op.cit.*, 120. For further research into the relation between Rom. 1 and Gen. 1-2 see: S.H. Dresner, "Homosexuality and the Order of Creation", *Judaism* 40 (1991): pp.309-21; K.W. Huggins, "An Investigation of the Jewish Theology of Sexuality Influencing the References to Homosexuality in Romans 1:18-32," Ph.D. dissertation, *Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*, 1986, pp.200-44

<sup>51</sup> Consequently Rom. 1 is not only a reflex of his encounter with typical features in contemporary pagan culture, as some scholars argued. Cf. e.g. K. Wengst, "Paulus und die Homosexualität. Überlegungen zu Rom 1,26f.", *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 31 (1987): pp.72-81; P. von der Osten Sacken "Paulinisches Evangelium und Homosexualität", *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 3 (1986): pp.28-49; Bailey, *op.cit.*, p.60.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Schmidt, *op.cit.*, pp.80-81; Hays, *op.cit.*, p.194.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932): p. 81; H.L. Newnam, "Influence of the Book of Wisdom on Early Christian Writings", *The Crozer Quarterly* 8 (1931): 361-72.

<sup>54</sup> The explicit closeness of Rom.1 to this document in various passages suggests that Paul became familiar with it at some stage. "It appears that Paul, in Romans 1, is linked both linguistically and thematically to the ideas in Wisdom of Solomon 2:23 und 14:12", Dodd, *Romans*, *op.cit.*, p.203.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Scroggs, *op.cit.*, pp.88-98.

<sup>56</sup> See the paragraph "The OT Background of Romans 1" above.

<sup>57</sup> Wright, "Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible", p.295.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Hyldahl, *op.cit.*; Huggins, *op.cit.*, p.205.

<sup>59</sup> Huggins, *ibid.*, p.218. Again, Paul is here in conformity with his Jewish background. Josephus wrote: "No shame could be worse than the degradation of the body" (*Ant.* 4.206). See also Philo, *Spec.* 1.102.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Jeremias, *op.cit.* (1954), p.121. "1:18-32 hat nur vorbereitenden Charakter.

<sup>61</sup> "Je deutlicher man die Anknüpfung an Gedanken des Spätjudentums in dem ganzen Abschnitt Rm 1:18-32 sieht, desto schärfer tritt der Gegensatz zur Selbstsicherheit des Pharisäismus in Rm 2:1 - 3:20 heraus", *ibid.*, p.121.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Cranfield, *op.cit.*, p.26; Scroggs, *op.cit.*, pp.85-98, 109-110. Huggins makes it even more clear: "With style that rivals the intricacy of Wisdom 14, Paul weaves Old Testament allusions, popular philosophy, word play, idol parody, and grating irony into an indictment that compasses all men" (*op.cit.*, p.222).

<sup>63</sup> Schmidt, *op.cit.*, p.85; cf. Huggins, *op.cit.*, p.207. M.D. Hooker further points out that the climax of Paul's argument is reached in chapter 8, where man finally received back his true identity in Christ. "So in Christ, the tragedy of (Rom.) 1:23 is reversed: men who have sought for glory and incorruption (2:7), qualities which come from God alone (1:23), and which were lost at the Fall, will find them in Christ, as they are changed from the image of the earthly to the image of the heavenly (cf. 1 Cor. 15:49). "Adam in Romans 1", *New Testament Studies* 6 (1959-60): p.306.

## The Church and the Homosexuality Debate

Besides the various arguments about homosexuality in the Church there is one particular problem on which much of the contemporary debate on this topic is centred. As we have seen before the Bible does not give any specific information about how homosexuality is caused, but rather speaks in more general terms about the "why", taking it as an explicit example of man's confusion about his identity that is rooted in alienation from the Creator. Although this understanding helps to classify the phenomenon of homosexuality from a theological point of view, nevertheless, it seems not to take into account the full extent of today's debate, since in modern times we speak about constitutional homosexuals who are "naturally" inclined to same-sex people and therefore can neither be blamed nor condemned for it. It is this fact that dominates the homosexuality debate. Thus it is necessary to make a short comment about 'causal' factors regarding homosexuality.

It is generally accepted today that the genuine homosexual person does not decide to become a homosexual but rather finds out about his or her inclination, mostly in adolescence. Though it is not clear what causes this orientation, it is not adequate to say that homosexuality simply is an inborn or genetic given fact which should be accepted as unchangeable, according to some scholars.<sup>1</sup> The sociologist D.F. Greenberg argues that sexual identity is not totally resistant to social moulding. His research has shown that, where "social definitions of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour are clear and consistent, with positive sanctions for conformity and negative ones for nonconformity, virtually everyone will conform irrespective of genetic inheritance and, to a considerable extent, irrespective of personal psychodynamics".<sup>2</sup>

The theory, however, that homosexuality is simply "learned" or "constructed" is only partially accepted if not completely rejected by other scholars. G. Looser emphasises biological factors and refers to S. Freud, who spoke about a "primitive bisexual disposition" in everyone. Looser recognises both biological inheritance as well as psychologically learned factors and rejects the question that looks for an "either - or" solution. He argues that homosexuality is "ingrained in the whole personality".<sup>3</sup> H.G. Wiedemann is very suspicious about an over-emphasis on psychological factors. For him homosexuality is

not learned but is rather a natural development of one part of our "wholesome and multiform sexuality".<sup>4</sup> He thinks that "Verführung im Sinne einer Aufzwingung von etwas Wesensfremden gibt es nicht".<sup>5</sup>

However, it is difficult to reject the "seduction" factor totally. Bell-Weinberg's research data have shown that many homosexual people (one third among men) reveal "strong heterosexual elements" and even more women live a "partial heterosexual lifestyle". On top of that many homosexual men and women had been married at least once, sometimes with children.<sup>6</sup> Therefore it is possible to limit the "seduction" factor, Ringeling concludes, otherwise one will end up in contradictions. The word "influencing" ("Prägung") is more accurate here.<sup>7</sup> Most scholars, therefore, agree that the "learning" factor cannot completely be excluded.<sup>8</sup>

Hence, Ringeling concludes that "eine bloß biologische These kann nicht genügen; eine bloß psychogene Theorie auch nicht; es herrscht große Übereinstimmung hinsichtlich einer konstitutionell vererbter Grundlage für homosexuelles Verhalten, aber noch nicht völlige Klarheit über dessen Beschaffenheit". This causes him to argue that the most appropriate way to describe the situation is to speak about a "multifactoral causation of homosexuality", which is a somewhat imprecise explanation but well reflects the present scientific and psychological state of knowledge well.<sup>9</sup> There are multiple factors that might help to form a homosexual identity such as biological, cultural, environmental or volitional. What seems clear is that there is no reason to speak of a single cause or a set of causes that reoccur in a rigid order.<sup>10</sup> Every homosexual person has his or her individual story and it is obviously difficult to find an all-embracing explanation, but fact is that there are adult people with a homosexual disposition deeply ingrained in their personality. These people did not "change" from heterosexuality to homosexuality or simply decide to become a homosexual or even a bisexual orientated person. Rather, they find themselves to be in that way.

Therefore, since on the one hand there are people with such a disposition and since on the other hand the Bible condemns homosexuality we face an ethical impasse. How to combine the traditional teaching of Paul and the Bible on homosexuality with modern knowledge about the problem? Is it justifiable to

expect a homosexual inclined person to accept this teaching as normative? And, is it right to say that homosexual activity is wrong since this form of sexual expression is a "natural" expression for the homosexual person? Not surprisingly a lot of homosexual Christians today argue, 'since God made me that way, my inclination is good and there is no reason that sexual expression should be denied to me?'<sup>11</sup> Hence an ethical decision is needed.

### **The State of the Debate**

So far this study has constituted the following assumptions: a. Paul's comments clearly condemn homosexual behaviour. b. Rom. 1 is still relevant for the modern discussion because the cultural gap between Paul's time and today regarding the issue is not as wide as often assumed by modern authors.<sup>12</sup> c. Every endeavour to change or to mould the Scriptural contribution to make it a positive or neutral one has been proven to be impossible in the long run. These statements have caused different scholarly responses, and of course they are not universally accepted without qualifications. We still have to consider some of these qualifications. However, realising the logical consequences of these statements, the debate has moved on to the point of asking in what way Paul's comments on sexuality are normative for today and whether they are acceptable and right? Hence M.D. Smith asks the following inescapable questions:

It is necessary to ask one of the most controversial ecclesiastical questions of the last century: once carefully interpreted, was Paul correct, on an ethical level? Does Paul's perspective represent the word of God to churches? What is meant by such [Rom. 1] a statement? Or is Paul's understanding of right and wrong behaviour (once carefully interpreted and applied) merely one among many voices seeking the word of God throughout the ages? Or is he simply out of date or homophobic or blinded by patriarchal assumptions? What is the meaning of Paul's authority for churches today?<sup>13</sup>

There are some very radical viewpoints, proposed by different churches and gay-organisations, which stand in strong opposition to each other. These views cause the debate to become heated up, because they are frequently argued in a mood of intense emotion. G.D. Comstock, for instance, strongly opposes the Bible's contribution to the issue. He leaves no doubt about the

irrelevance of Paul's remarks for today and even sees a danger in upholding them as correct. He writes:

Not to recognise, critique, and condemn Paul's equation of godlessness with homosexuality is dangerous... Passages [like Rom.1] will be brought up and used against us again and again until Christians demand their removal from the biblical canon or, at the very least, formally discredit their authority to prescribe behaviour".<sup>14</sup>

In his recent book *Freedom, Glorious Freedom* J.J. McNeill affirms this attitude and writes:

"...if it is true that Paul... is unequivocally condemning homosexuality, then we must conclude that Paul is wrong in this judgement, just as we admit today that he was wrong in his acceptance of slavery. The time has come for the Christian community to move beyond Paul's understanding of homosexuality".<sup>15</sup>

However, these authors often appear to be biased in their acceptance of scholarly and scientific data that gives reason to be suspicious about their conclusions. Boswell's and Scroggs' arguments for example are quickly accepted as coherent without much recognition of opposing views by other scholars.<sup>16</sup>

Such argument of course stirs up strong opposition by theologians and churches who have a high view of Scripture and its authority. Many Christians and churches have real difficulties in coming to terms with statements of Christian gay and lesbian groups who openly confess their sexual orientation and demand full acceptance and inclusion into the Christian community.<sup>17</sup> Some strong words are found in response to authors like Comstock or McNeill and their arguments, who so obviously dismiss the Bible's contribution regarding homosexuality. The editor of the German journal *Diakrisis* finds the following words to describe the situation:

"Alle die mit Ernst Christen sein wollen sind heute gefordert die geistlichen Situationen in der evangelischen Kirche wirklichkeitgerecht zu deuten. Die Gefahr, daß die Sünde namenlos wird, vor allem im Blick auf die Homosexualität..., wird täglich ernster".<sup>18</sup>

This kind of argument in the Church is very much imbued by anxious feelings about saving biblical morals and standards. Homosexuality is one of the sins that most preoccupies people, and that must be addressed with firmness and

certainly condemned. Sometimes this conviction is put forward in a very harsh way by some churches.<sup>19</sup>

Leaving these viewpoints aside, we will concentrate on three approaches which scholars have taken towards Paul's comments. Paul's comments might be called the "traditional teaching" of the Church as well<sup>20</sup>: I. Some reject such teaching as being not normative anymore; II. Some speak about a necessary correction or extension of the "creation-order" for human sexuality; III. Others fully accept it and understand it as God's unchangeable Word due to be obeyed.

### **I. The Rejection of Paul's View**

Several scholars today who recognise that Paul clearly condemns homosexual behaviour, still reject his comments completely because they understand his condemnation as not normative for the present time. The common ground from which these scholars argue is the assumption that the Bible's and Paul's remarks are outmoded, too far removed from our present day situation. Hence notions like "order of creation" or "biblical norm for sexual behaviour" are misleading concepts and ought to be avoided, because of the great historical gap that lays between the Bible and our present time and culture.<sup>21</sup> One representative theologian of this reduction approach is Prof. W. Stegemann:

"What I am aiming at is the realisation, that we are constantly called, personally and within the Church... as a whole, to judge, whether it is possible for us to take certain ethical relevant statements of Scripture literally for our time today. In other words: the one who views the homosexual practice as an unnatural and ungodly activity but at the same time ignores the historical context of Paul's remarks, can not, with regards to the question of keeping the Apostolic-decree, the ideals of chastity, the head-covering of woman in worship etc., do any limitations either".<sup>22</sup>

For Prof. Stegemann is clear that Paul was scientifically uninformed compared to modern knowledge and obviously influenced by an outmoded concept of gender-roles of his time and his Jewish background. For him the questions dominants "welches Ideal von Gesellschaft bzw. was ich als natürlich heute vertreten will". On this account he chooses to understand homosexuality

as another variant of sexuality and "liberates himself" from an antique mentality that took it for granted that males rule over women.<sup>23</sup>

This view is further laid out by other authors who equally evaluate Paul's remarks as predominately influenced by his eagerness to reaffirm the patriarchal gender differentiation of his time.<sup>24</sup> M. Foucault for example claims that Paul forbids homosexual practice because it weakens and effeminates the male and allows the female to take a forbidden active role in sexual intercourse.<sup>25</sup> B.J. Brooten argues this point in all thoroughness in her latest book *Love between Women*.<sup>26</sup> She understands "gender ambiguity" as the best framework for understanding Paul's "natural relations" in Romans 1.<sup>27</sup> "Paul, like Philo and many other Greek-speaking Diaspora Jews," Brooten suggests, "considered male-male intercourse a transgression of social roles, which he would understand as dictated by nature. The passive male has allowed himself to play the part of a woman, while the active male has thought his partner effeminate and participated in his becoming effeminate".<sup>28</sup> In adopting the contemporary gender hierarchies of other writings and authors, and by accepting the "Roman-period opposition to sexual love between women" which "grew out of the view of woman as inferior, unfit to rule, passive, and weak", "Paul's condemnation of female homoeroticism has helped to maintain this view".<sup>29</sup> This eventually leads her to the conclusion:

"I have argued that Paul's condemnation of homoeroticism, particularly female homoeroticism, reflects and helps to maintain a gender asymmetry based on female subordination. I hope that churches today, being apprised of the history that I have presented, will no longer teach Rom 1:26f as authoritative."<sup>30</sup>

Hence Stegemann, Foucault and Brooten agree in their conclusion: Although Paul's remarks on homosexuality have undoubtedly negative connotations, in that they clearly condemn homosexual practices, they are antiquated and classified as irrelevant for today. Paul is depicted as conforming to cultural and social norms that confirm a gender hierarchy. Since this is oppressive for women it cannot be accepted anymore.<sup>31</sup> We need to adjust such ethics to our present situation just as we have done in respect of Pauline views on hair-style and head-covering, women's-ministry, slavery, and

certain purity regulations. The following questions arise regarding the argument above.

***Was Paul predominately concerned about a gender hierarchy in Romans 1, sharing it with his contemporaries and culture?***

The answer must be that there are some difficulties with such an assumption when Paul's view on sexual differentiation is investigated more closely. This argument reads a lot into the passage and places concepts in Paul's mind that are difficult to bring in harmony with the rest of his ethical reasoning. Brooten assumes that Paul adopts the view of his Roman-period authors (e.g., Seneca the Elder, Martial, Soranos, Lucian<sup>32</sup>) and emphasises that Paul's phraseology in Rom. 1:18-32 closely corresponds to that of his contemporaries, particularly the condemnation of homosexuality as *para physin* ("contrary to nature"). From this she concludes that for him nature entailed a gender hierarchy.<sup>33</sup> She further defines this view by pointing out that Paul is in agreement with the Hellenistic Jewish writer Josephus who similarly thinks that the union between husband and wife is the only "natural" (*kata physin*) union, and that "intercourse with males" is *para physin* (*Against Apion* 2.199). Hence, Paul must have agreed with Josephus' other convictions as well, namely his view that the woman is "inferior in every respect to the man" and that women are to be subordinate to their husbands (*Against Apion* 2.201). In addition to that, descriptions of man as the head of the woman (1 Cor. 11:3) and the use of the term *hypandros* ("under a man") for a married women (Rom. 7:2) "demonstrate Paul's acceptance of certain fundamental assumptions of his highly gendered culture".<sup>34</sup>

However, this argument is presuming too much. The value of Brooten's investigations is that she rightly points out and denounces the common attitude towards women in Paul's time, for that was an undeniable fact of that culture. Although the Hellenistic period brought about a certain new level of emancipation concerning familiar and social recognition and religious or cultic emancipation, as W. Schrage mentions, nevertheless, a definite negative attitude towards women remained dominant.<sup>35</sup> According to Seneca, "the man

is born to rule while the woman is born to obey" (*De Const. Sap.* 1:1). For him the woman is even morally inferior to man and in general an inferior being (14:1). Together the inferiority of women was a commonly accepted reality.<sup>36</sup> However, when it comes to Paul's attitude, Brooten assumes too much. To claim that Paul agrees on the whole with his contemporaries' concept of a gender hierarchy is not necessarily the case.

Paul significantly disagrees with those thinkers' views on sexuality. This can be observed, for instance, by looking at the differences between his view of sexual intercourse and those of Hellenistic Jewish writers. Both Josephus and Philo, for instance, see the purpose of sexual intercourse as only for procreation and the "begetting of children" (*cf. Against Apion* 2.199; *On Abraham* 133-41). Yet Paul clearly takes a different stance here. He clearly recognises intercourse as a way of satisfying sexual needs (1 Cor. 7:2-5, 9, 36),<sup>37</sup> the sexual needs of not only the man but of the woman as well! Procreation is not the only point of intercourse in his view. This reveals two important points. Firstly, Paul thinks for himself and does not simply accept certain assumptions of other people, but departs from them if need be, and establishes principles that are clearly not in conformity with some of his Jewish and non-Jewish Hellenistic contemporaries.<sup>38</sup> And secondly, he also goes "against the trend" when he recognises that both woman and man have equal rights and duties when it comes to sexual intimacy (1 Cor. 7:3-5). Complementarity and mutual consent are dominant themes in his exhortations for the marital life, and, at least in this respect, nothing can be found here that shows partiality or favouritism for the man. Paul's recognition of women in other areas of life and ministry further shows a different attitude towards women compared with his contemporaries. In his writings we find some remarkable words that come close to a declaration of the equality of man and woman (Gal. 3:28), he calls women his "fellow-worker" and "contenders" (Rom. 16:3; Phil. 4:3), and even knows of women in apostolic ministry (Rom. 16:7) and allows them to exercise their prophetic gift in worship (1 Cor. 11:5).<sup>39</sup> These are some undeniable signs that call for caution in not depicting Paul as simply conforming to the gendered culture of his time.<sup>40</sup>

***What about other passages in Paul's writings that more obviously seem to indicate that he understands the woman as being inferior to man as his culture would lead us to expect?***

First it must be recognised that an obvious tension between some of Paul's rather unconventional, "new ground breaking" comments and some more culture conforming comments concerning sexual differentiation is undeniable. On the one hand it is not acceptable to evaluate Paul's attitude to women as completely negative, as we have seen above, but especially because of his statement in Gal. 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>41</sup> On the other hand there are passages that seem to contradict his own conviction and which cause him to appear as affirming older lines of thought ("...but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man", 1 Cor. 11:7b-9; cf. 1 Cor. 11:3-10, 14:33b-35).<sup>42</sup>

However, within a Corinthian context it is reasonable to argue that Paul finds himself under pressure to uphold his own theological conviction to the effect that there is no sexual hierarchy before God and yet at the same time to guard against an excessive call to freedom for the sexes in the church that caused sociological problems. H. Thieliicke is helpful here, because he recognises a direction in Paul's argumentation regarding the equality of man and woman that is important to see.<sup>43</sup> Paul differentiates between theological statements of truth - the equality of the sexes, and ecclesiastical and sociological applicability - the wise handling of the new Christian freedom in the right spirit.<sup>44</sup>

Paul's remarks in 1 Cor. 11:3-10, which obviously affirm contemporary social roles for the sexes, is balanced with the emphatic statement of 1 Cor. 11:11 ("In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman"). This verse is obviously intended to keep the reader from erroneously assuming that a lower rank of women in society consequently implies different value before God. But this has no theological basis at all. However, he is faced with a Corinthian "parole for freedom" for the sexes, that most probably originated from his own theological statement (Gal. 3:28), yet is

taken to extremes, and, as E. Käsemann describes it, suffers "am Grundgebreechen enthusiastischer Frömmigkeit".<sup>45</sup>

Therefore Paul is forced into a tenacious conflict with his conviction that he pronounced to the Galatians (*comp.* 11:8-9 and 11:11) when he reaffirms the social norms and role descriptions of his culture for the sake of Christian unity and appropriate conduct in community. H. Thielicke, in explaining this Pauline polemic, compares it with an instance from Luther's life. Luther once withstood some farmers in revolt who were demanding their social deliverance in the name of the Gospel's solidarity between lord and servant. This he thought was to misuse the freedom of the liberating message of the Gospel.<sup>46</sup> Thielicke further summarises these observations on Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians with the following words:

"Paulus [urteilt] hier im soziologischen Sinne konservativ, im theologischen dagegen revolutionär, so gewiß die Gleichbegnadung vor Gott dem zeitgeschichtlichen Hintergrunde widersprach. Die Doppel-Intention, die er hier verfolgt, enthält gleichermaßen eine Spitze gegen die schwärmerische, eschatologische Nivellierung der Geschlechter wie auch gegen ihre jüdisch-orthodoxe Differenzierung. Nur in dieser *Intention* und nicht in der *Argumentation* liegt der kerygmatische Gehalt der Perikope".<sup>47</sup>

Although Paul's argumentation appears to be not totally convincing in this Corinthian passage (1 Cor. 11:3-16), it is nevertheless clear that he is not simply conforming to social structures and roles without confronting them and leaving room for disagreement about these matters (cf. vv.13-16). He continues to have in sight the theological truth of the overcoming of sexual hierarchies in Christ. This is where L.S. Cahill discovers a "note of realised eschatology" in Paul's reasoning, meaning that his proclamation in Galatians is a "recognition of the present reality of the kingdom, even though the social institutions and structures in and through which it is embodied are provisional".<sup>48</sup> Simply speaking, Paul sows the seed of the emancipation of the sexes, yet inhibits those who are too quick to reap something that is not ripe yet.

This important point shows where Brooten is mistaken in her comments about the relationship between Gal. 3:28 and Rom. 1:26f. Brooten thinks that Paul intends to abolish every sexual differentiation according to Gal. 3, yet eventually is inconsistent in its realisation. She assumes that "maleness and

femaleness are of no significance for Paul in Gal. 3:28" but "they are of ultimate significance in Rom. 1:26f."<sup>49</sup> However her argument only reveals that she has a different view of sexual differentiation than Paul and for that reason misinterprets the Galatians passage. For her the term 'sexual differentiation' has only negative connotations, while this cannot be said about Paul's view. Thieliicke rightly pointed out above that annulment of the sexual differentiation was never Paul's intention in Gal. 3:28. He rather intended to clarify that there are no *class* distinctions before God or "in the Lord" ("..., for you are all one in Christ", 3:28b). Sexual differentiation remains of significance for Paul though it is important to understand that Paul does not understand sexual differentiation as identical with all gender boundaries. Paul stands for a positive view of gender differentiation as explicitly revealed in the beginning, at the creation.

But the question remains for some scholars whether this really is Paul's perspective in Roman 1? One could still argue since Paul "does not challenge the historical existence of the institutionalised divisions that are transcended in Christ" regarding women, to use Cahill's words, he could proceed similarly regarding homosexuality in Romans 1:26f.<sup>50</sup> This is why it is important to have another look at the question whether Paul really bases his argument on "creational" ("natural"?) differentiation of the sexes that are not transcended in Christ.

### ***What is the content and the significance of Paul's concept of nature in Romans 1?***

In our earlier discussion on the "main passage" Rom.1 we have already argued for the following points that we need to recall here. Firstly it is important to see the reference to homosexuality in the context of Paul's preceding argument, which helps us to give proper weight to themes like "morality" or "nature" regarding this passage. Secondly, it is important to notice that Paul is not interested in offering an explicit reflection on the concept of "nature" in Rom. 1:26-27, because apparently he is not making an original contribution to theological thought regarding homosexuality but speaks out of a Hellenistic Jewish context where such behaviour is classified as being an abomination. "Nature" is a rather marginal theme here and *para physis* conventional

language.<sup>51</sup> Thirdly, the concept of "natural law/theology" is at least not found in the passage where Paul speaks about knowing God from "what has been made" (Rom. 1:18-25), which is underlined by the fact that the term *physis* is completely missing here, as H. Köster rightly points out.<sup>52</sup> And lastly, this last point and the numerous allusions to the Genesis accounts in the passage<sup>53</sup> indicate that for Paul the "Creator and his creation" is central in this part of his argument, and not merely "empirical observation of what actually exists".<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the description of same-sex relations as "contrary to nature" (*para physin*, 1:26-27) is very Stoic in character. Paul's evaluation of homosexual behaviour appears to be attached to a Stoic understanding of "natural order".<sup>55</sup> So how do we have to understand Paul's view on "nature" here?

To claim that Paul has adopted certain Greek philosophical concepts because of his introduction of *para physin* into his argument goes too far.<sup>56</sup> For instance, Brooten claims that Paul "greatly adapted the natural law theory of the philosophers".<sup>57</sup> This statement, however, is too one-sided. It overlooks the closeness of Paul's opinions to those of other Hellenistic Jews. This can for example be observed by looking at the close relationship of *physis* and *nomos* ("law") in Paul's reasoning (see esp. Rom. 2:14f.). He relates these concepts together similarly to his Hellenistic Jewish contemporaries. R.B. Hays further explains why this is important regarding Rom. 1:

Hellenistic Jewish thinkers tended to adopt and "circumcise" the philosophical category of "nature" by identifying it with the Law and with God's creative intention. It is precisely this Hellenistic Jewish milieu from which the thought-patterns of Rom. 1:18-32 emerge; thus it would be arbitrary and unjustified to interpret the phrase *para physin* in Rom 1:26 without reference to its typical Stoic connotations, as filtered through the medium of Jewish monotheism.<sup>58</sup>

Here we find the link between Paul's understanding of "natural relations" and "God's creative intention". This is the key for understanding his negative evaluation of homosexuality in Romans 1. Paul agrees with his Hellenistic Jewish contemporaries, identifying God's creative intentions with the philosophical category of nature. "Those who indulge in sexual practice *para physin* are defying the Creator and demonstrating their alienation from him", Hays explains.<sup>59</sup> It is this strong contrast between the original (or "natural")

purpose of sexuality and the corrupted original, explicitly seen in homosexuality, that alone fits into the main thrust of Paul's argument in Rom. 1. Not the saving of sexual roles based on cultural norms, but the demonstration of sexual confusion based on the departure from creational norms is Paul's motivation for including the topic of "unnatural" same-sex relations into the passage.

Rather surprisingly the Dutch theologian P. Pronk argues completely in the opposite direction and disagrees with Hays on this point. He thinks that Paul does not "equate creation (= normative creation order) and nature", and therefore, "the word "unnatural" cannot without qualification be taken as referring to Genesis 1".<sup>59</sup> Pronk is basing his claim on the assumption that the context of vv. 26-27 evidently shows that this is not likely. He prefers to understand Paul as viewing "homosexual behaviour as a typical sign, a classic example, of paganism for which he did not have to present any special arguments".<sup>60</sup> However, this argument fails to have any textual and theological basis. Instead it must be objected firstly, that, in fact it is evident from the context that Paul does think of a normative order of creation, and secondly, Paul is not addressing the problem of "unbelief" but of "immorality" that is present in the world as a result of the alienation from the Creator.

Another scholar who needs to be mentioned in this context is V.P. Furnish. He completely refuses to acknowledge any allusion to a "creation theology", as he calls it, regarding Romans 1. Beside the already discussed objections he adds the claim that there is no evidence whatsoever in any of Paul's other references to what is "natural" or "unnatural", that would show traces of such a "creation theology". He thinks 1 Cor. 11:2-16, as the most significant reference, supports this view.<sup>61</sup> But Furnish's argument is rather puzzling here. He is claiming that there is nothing in this Corinthian passage that points to an understanding of nature according to creation, because Paul is only appealing to "social convention" (vv. 13-15). Yet immediately Furnish refutes this claim in the footnote when he writes:

To be sure, in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 there are allusions to the creation accounts - specifically, to Gen. 1:27a; 2:18; 2:22-23. But Paul has not based his argument here on God's creation of two sexes (heterosexuality). The terms for "male" and "female" do not occur in the passage

(he uses them only in Rom. 1:26-27 and Gal. 3:28), nor is there any allusion to God's creation of such.<sup>63</sup>

One wonders whether Furnish is really certain about the logic of his reasoning? It seems clear by viewing the evidence that Paul does think of "creation theology" when it come to sexual differentiation and how it ought to be understood.

And yet another scholar who disagrees with Hays' conclusion is L.W. Countryman. He admits that Paul apparently "alludes in a variety of ways to Genesis 1", yet he still objects that Paul "never explicitly" alludes "to the creation of male and female or to the institution of marriage".<sup>64</sup> However, by putting the topic of abusive sexuality (cf. Rom. 1:24) and homosexuality into the context of Genesis 1, Paul and his readers certainly recalled the creation of the sexes and its original intention of the Creator. Such "creation theology" remains to be the most reasonable explanation, especially when admitted that allusions to the Genesis accounts in Rom. 1 are found in a "variety of ways".

Countryman's main argument in his book *Dirt, Greed, and Sex* is another attempt to diminish the authority of Paul's comments in Romans 1 for today. He is arguing that Paul chooses to mention homosexuality in Rom. 1 because it is the "prime illustration of Gentile uncleanness", but that he does not understand it as sinful.<sup>65</sup> Paul, it is claimed, maintained a consistent distinction between impurity and sin, and since homosexuality is not related to sin but to purity we are free to dismiss his condemnation of same-sex behaviour. The conclusion of Countryman's argument is that we cannot make the purity or property systems of antiquity the basis of today's sexual ethic.<sup>66</sup> However, this proposal has some serious flaws. We will only look at Countryman's interpretation of the word desire or lust (v.24, *epithymia*; v.26, *pathos*; v.27, *orexis*).

Countryman maintains that Paul's use of these terms in Rom. 1 should not be interpreted negatively but as at least "neutral". He bases this claim on a single reference to 1 Thessalonians 2:17, where it says that "Paul "desires" to visit the addressees. But is this a reasonable claim? Looking at the evidence, "desire" is clearly linked to sin in Paul's mind. T.E Schmidt explains on this, that among the seventeen instances where Paul uses these terms, he uses

fifteen of them in a moral context.<sup>67</sup> In Romans alone we find four instances that make Countryman's assumption very doubtful:

"Do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies so that you obey its evil desires [*epithymia*]" (6:12).

"...I would not have known what sin was... I would not have known what coveting [*epithymia*] really was... But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire [*epithymia*]" (7:7-8).

"...Do not think about how to gratify the desires [*epithymia*] of the flesh" (13:14).

On top of that Philo informs us in what manner the word for "desire" was used in Paul's time. Philo refers to the people of Sodom regarding same-sex activity as "mastered by *epithymia*" (*De Abrahamo* 135), and in another place he refers to it again and mentions their "unnatural and unholy *epithymia*" (*De Fuga et Inventione* 144).<sup>68</sup> It is simply untenable to argue that Paul does not associate desire with sin, since almost all the instances he uses this word affirm the opposite. This interpretation is applicable to Rom. 1 as well where Paul uses the word "desire" or "passion" with a negative connotation.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, for this reason alone, Countryman's argument easily falls apart.<sup>70</sup>

To sum up the discussion above, the following points can be made. With regard to femaleness and maleness Paul is on the one hand constantly looking back to the creation, where he finds the Creator's first intentions for the inter-relationship of the sexes, and on the other hand looking forward towards an eschatological hope, when though sin corrupted creation, including its hierarchical differentiation ("Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you", Gen. 3:16b), corruption will finally and completely be overcome. Meanwhile this eschatological hope finds itself partially realised, yet in an increasing measure, in the kingdom of God and the Church.

Regarding homosexual behaviour an important line of distinction needs to be drawn. Very often the topic of same-sex relations and matters of hairstyle or veiling is put on an equal footing, as done by Brooten.<sup>71</sup> But it is essential to distinguish these two spheres, just as Paul does. Whilst it is true that Paul accepts certain cultural structures and norms in certain circumstances, yet it is not true to say that he is occupied with the same sociological norms in Romans

1:26-27. In this case he is referring to norms constituted in the beginning, at the creation of the world (1:20,25). Consequently such fundamental norms for human existence are of greater significance than sociological norms for right dressing or clothing. Homosexual behaviour, therefore, explicitly infringes creational norms and not only sociological norms in Paul's understanding.

## II. The Correction of the Norm

Some theologians hold that the Bible has an important place in ethical decision-making and that it operates as a teacher in the discussion instead of a mere participant with equal or no vote at all. And further, they hold that the Bible advocates a created order for sexuality that is reaffirmed by the New Testament writers. Hence the theological basis for human sexuality starts with the Genesis accounts and is given to mankind for orientation and illumination as well as authoritative guidance. On this view homosexuality is located in the context of sin.

### Homosexuality and Sin

H. Thielicke's statement about homosexuality in his book *Sex - Ethik der Geschlechtlichkeit* is still a widely accepted foundational opinion among theologians who evaluate the biblical view about homosexual phenomena.<sup>72</sup> For him clearly homosexuality must be understood as a "disorder of creation" ("Schöpfungsstörung"), an "abnormal structure of personality" ("abnormer Persönlichkeitsstruktur") that has to be put on a level with sickness, suffering, and pain. It is one of the consequences of the "fall" that caused the original "good" state of the world ("Ur-Status") to become distorted.<sup>73</sup> Consequently there is no reason to defame the constitutional homosexual person morally or theologically, since we are all under the judgement of God and all share his verdict. At the same time we all share in the eschatological promise of the restoration of the world's "Ur-Status", of which Jesus' miracles were the realisation and the anticipation.<sup>74</sup> These theological observations cause H. Thielicke to write:

Die Homosexualität kann nicht einfach der normalen Schöpfungsordnung der Geschlechter gleichgestellt werden, sondern sie ist deren habituelle oder aktuelle

Entstellung (Depravierung). Demzufolge ist der Homosexuelle aufgefordert, seinen Status nicht *a priori* zu bejahen oder gar zu idealisieren... - genausowenig, wie eine andere krankhafte Störung *a priori* bejaht werden kann, sondern zunächst Objekt angemessener Befragung, das heißt in ihrer Fragwürdigkeit anerkannt werden will.<sup>75</sup>

Thus Thielicke defines homosexuality as an abnormal facet of sexuality incompatible with the creational norm. U. Eibach agrees with these observations and additionally introduces the notion "Konkupiszenz" into the discussion, which Augustine and Luther use to describe the tension between the two co-existing realities of sin.<sup>76</sup> On one hand every human being is under the power of sin, a power that enslaves and captivates everyone. Therefore sin is no moral category in itself that presupposes an act of the will, but rather seems to be a fate of which no-one is able to escape. Yet on the other hand, this sinful fate is always confirmed by wilful acts, which are done by people despite the fact of knowing better. Hence "Konkupiszenz" stands for the following dilemma: Despite the superior force that causes man to do what he does not want do, still at the heart of it all, the free will of man remains and so does his responsibility for each sinful deed.<sup>77</sup>

Concerning Paul's reference to homosexuality in Romans 1, Eibach goes on to argue, this understanding of sin shows firstly, that homosexuality is not simply a freely chosen way of life that one might simply choose to leave behind. Hence Paul argues in Rom. 1:26 that homosexuality is a symptom of the "Ur-Sünde", which means that the sinner is somehow captive to her or his sin. And, secondly, it also shows that homosexuality is an "afflicted fate" that is, however, not according to the Creator's intention and so can not be classified as another variant of sexuality.<sup>78</sup> According to such a viewpoint homosexual behaviour or a homosexual partnership is classified as not according to creational order.<sup>79</sup>

From here U. Eibach goes on to explain that we need to distinguish between the homosexual *person* and homosexual *behaviour* ("Verhalten") here. He emphasises that the Bible does not condemn a homosexual person but the behaviour of that person. On this account the dignity and value of such a person, which is rooted in God's forgiving love and acceptance and not in her or his moral behaviour, remains untouched.<sup>80</sup> But nevertheless the deed has to be distinguished from the person and clearly be condemned, because it opposes the norm for sexuality, which clearly is heterosexuality, and is not

made morally neutral within a homosexual partnership.<sup>81</sup> Hence, "eine Bejahung der Person schließt nicht notwendig eine Bejahung ihrer gesamten Lebensführung ein".<sup>82</sup>

This opinion has been refuted by other scholars. Basically two objections have been raised. Firstly, the distinction between the person and the deed is evaluated as being discriminatory regarding the homosexual person. Secondly, it is questioned whether the reference to the creation accounts as reliable sources for an all-embracing view on sex is appropriate. And thirdly, it is claimed that we need to understand sexuality as a part of the wholesome identity of a person.

R. Stuhlmann thinks that such a distinction between the person and the deed is out of place though might be applicable in prisons with reference to murderers.<sup>83</sup> Stuhlmann accepts the theological principle that distinguishes between the "sinner" and the "sin" ("Ohne Zweifel einwichtiger theologischer Grundsatz"<sup>84</sup>), which is introduced by Eibach here, nevertheless he rejects it when it comes to homosexuality. He bases his decision on the assumption that the biblical passages that condemn same-sex behaviour demand a "differentiating" interpretation and understanding that eventually directs him to conclude that the Bible does not call every form of homosexual behaviour sinful.

However, this view we discussed before, in the context of Scroggs' argument. We concluded from it that it is at least doubtful that Paul only thought of a particular form of homosexual behaviour but that it is more likely to assume that he was very much informed about the sexual behaviour of his time. Thus his comment in Rom. 1 would appear to be very inconsiderate when it is argued that he intended to condemn only a specific form of homosexual behaviour. The new idea that Stuhlmann introduces here is that the creational teaching on sex could be applicable to same-sex love as well, meaning the passages in Genesis do not clearly say that heterosexuality is the norm and the only appropriate form of sexuality. According to such an understanding, homosexuality becomes another variant of sexuality and of course must be evaluated differently. Thus, Stuhlmann argues that we are not expected to accept a "murderer" into the Christian community but simply a particular human

person or, using his comparison, an "African". With other words, the homosexual person is only different but not sinful.<sup>85</sup> Along this line H. Kreß underlines this thought and writes:

Die Achtung vor der ganzheitlichen individuellen Identität, von der die Sexualität nicht abgespalten werden darf, droht unterlaufen zu werden, wenn von Seiten Evangelischher Ethik (U. Eibach) in Vorschlag gebracht wird, im Blick auf den homosexuellen Menschen zwischen der 'Person' einerseits und dem moralisch zu kritisierenden sexuellen Verhalten als 'Werk' zu unterscheiden. Dieser Vorschlag könnte verhängnisvolle Schuldzuweisungen an homosexuelle Menschen erneut Vorschub leisten.<sup>86</sup>

From this Kreß clearly understands constitutional homosexuality as an essential part of a "wholesome individual identity", and it is the homosexual's identity that demands protection.

However, there are difficulties with these authors' perspectives. Granted, when it is right to assume that the biblical accounts allow a variety of sexual behaviours and expressions other than heterosexual activity, then these authors arguments deserve full consideration. This claim, however, demands a closer look at the passages in question, particularly the Genesis accounts, which will be done later. Nevertheless, one point can be made initially regarding those authors' understandings of "disposition". When from the outset the distinction between person and deed is excluded, because of the homosexual's "unchangeable" disposition (since the disposition determines the rightness of the action), then other sexual expressions like bisexuality, transsexualism, and even perverse forms of sexuality have to be judged according to the same principle. They can equally be constitutional and unchangeable. In other words reference to a disposition alone does not settle the argument. The same principle applies of course for the heterosexual person who, for example, commits adultery. To disapprove the activity here would not be equal to disdain for the person.

R.B. Hays agrees with this explanation and insists on the distinction between the descriptive findings of empirical studies and the value judgements that are often attached to them. These value judgements "sometimes rather abruptly derive an 'ought' from an 'is'."<sup>87</sup> But for Paul this way of reasoning is not totally acceptable. Hays thinks that it is important to remember that Paul thought of sin as a power that holds humanity in bondage. Thus, the whole

issue of homosexuality is viewed in a different light by Paul. Hays further explains that:

Paul's condemnation of homosexual activity does not rest upon an assumption that it is freely chosen; indeed, it is precisely characteristic of Paul to regard "sin" as a condition of human existence, a condition that robs us of free volition and drives us to disobedient actions which, though involuntary, are nonetheless culpable (see especially Rom 7:13-25). That is what it means to live "in the flesh" in a fallen creation. The gulf is wide between Paul's viewpoint and the modern habit of assigning culpability only for actions assumed to be under free control of the agent.<sup>88</sup>

Along those lines U. Eibach has some difficulties with overemphasis on sexuality as the essential part of one's identity. He argues for a balanced understanding on this:

Auch wenn die Sexualität ein wesentliches Moment des Menschseins und vor allem des menschlichen Verhaltens ausmacht, ist der Mensch selbst hinsichtlich seines Verhaltens nicht nur und nicht in erster Linie durch seine Sexualität definiert.<sup>89</sup>

For Eibach is clear that the behaviour of a person does not determine that person's value. The importance of the sexual orientation of a person has to be evaluated correctly when it comes to terms like "individual identity".

However, since homosexuality is defined by Thielicke and Eibach as a "Grenzfall" ("marginal case"), meaning the homosexual person is, in a way, "thrown upon" this situation<sup>90</sup>, it is reasonable to ask whether this "case" should be recognised accordingly? It is here where opinions divide, different ethical-decisions are made, and a distinction between the "correcting" (II.) and the "accepting" (III.) attitude can be discerned. We will have a closer look at the former argument.

### **The "Marginal Case" ("Grenzfall")**

The former attitude again is based on H. Thielicke's considerations, who writes that we need to accept the homosexual disposition just as we have to accept an incurable illness. That means that the constitutional homosexual has to learn to live with his or her unchangeable fate, not least because medical treatments and psychological therapies for "curing" a homosexual inclination have not been helpful, according to experience. In H. Thielicke's opinion homosexuality is a disposition that according to the majority of the people in

question is non-reversible. Thus Thieliicke speaks about a "Korrektur der Ordnung", meaning the created order is deformed due to its corruption through sin, a fact that we have to accept as unchangeable.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, the argument goes, it is necessary to find a place for the homosexual person where an optimal chance for sexual self-realization is granted, for its negation cannot be expected of anyone. Celibacy can not be demanded here, Thieliicke argues, because it is a special calling according to Paul and anyway one's choice.<sup>92</sup> Hence for the person who is not able to live an ascetic or celibate life the possibility of forming an ethically responsible constructed same-sex partnership should be allowed for. The homosexual is asked whether he is willing "die mann-männliche Verbundenheit *ethisch verbindlich* zu gestalten".<sup>93</sup>

This line of thought developed some time ago and is differently described today. Reference is made to the "Liebesgebot" ("command of love") that is already found in the Old Testament and which has an increasingly important place in the New Testament.<sup>94</sup> By this it is meant that since the Bible only condemns *homosexual practice*, especially in its promiscuous form, and does not say anything about the modern form of an ethically responsible homosexual partnership. Therefore the "Liebesgebot" constitutes a possible ethical foundation for such a partnership.<sup>95</sup> Different churches have accepted this criterion in their reports on this issue.<sup>96</sup> The Methodist Church's Division of Social Responsibility for instance argued that homosexual activities are "not intrinsically wrong". This means, regarding a homosexual relationship, that:

The quality of any homosexual relationship is... to be assessed by the same basic criteria that have been applied to heterosexual relationships. For homosexual man and woman, permanent relationships characterised by love can be an appropriate and Christian way of expressing their sexuality.<sup>97</sup>

And the official German Protestant Church recently argued similarly in one of its reports:

Da das Liebesgebot ausnahmslos und umfassend gilt, kann auch homosexuelles Zusammenleben nicht von seiner Geltung ausgenommen werden. Das heißt aber: Der im Liebesgebot ausgesprochene Wille Gottes gilt (auch) für die Gestaltung homosexuellen Zusammenlebens.<sup>98</sup>

The obvious tension between the biblical condemnation of homosexual practice and this proposal is neither denied nor ignored by these authors but is accepted by them as inevitable and must be, as well as can be, endured.<sup>99</sup>

### III. The Reaffirmation of the Norm

This solution has not been accepted by scholars on another wing of the debate. John Stott has some difficulties in accepting the reference to the "Liebesgebot" as a sufficient justification of homosexual partnerships.<sup>100</sup> Love, he argues, cannot be the only absolute in moral decisions. We can not assume that beside the "love-command" all moral law has been abolished, and every deed that is compatible with it is *ipso facto* good. He thinks that "love needs law to guide it" and refers to Jesus and the apostles who by emphasising the "love-command" did not discard all other commandments. Instead Jesus said: "If you love me you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15), and Paul wrote "Love is the fulfilling (not the abrogating) of the law" (Rom 13:8-10).<sup>101</sup> Hence, the love-quality of homosexual relationships (and Stott does not deny that they can be loving) is not sufficient to justify them. He adds:

Instead, I have to add that they are incompatible with true love because they are incompatible with God's law. Love is concerned for the highest welfare of the beloved. And our highest human welfare is found in obedience to God's law and purpose, not in revolt against them.<sup>102</sup>

According to such an understanding homosexual relationships are not at all acceptable for Stott, due to his high view of Scripture and the acceptance of an explicit universal moral law drawn from the Bible. Stott claims that faith is believing God's Word, and consequently faith accepts God's standards.<sup>103</sup>

One more scholar who comes from the same angle is R.B. Hays. According to his view of the issue, homosexual partnerships should not be accepted as "the lesser evil" and be classified as equal to a heterosexual marriage. Instead they should be avoided, because nothing can make homosexual practice "right". Homosexual acts are viewed as being morally wrong according to the Bible and in particular with regard to Paul's remarks in 1 Cor. 6:9-10, who treated them as equivalent to idolatry, adultery, theft, greediness, or drunkenness. Therefore, since homosexual behaviour is sinful in itself,

because it violates God's ethical norm, it cannot be accepted in whatever context. R.B. Hays argues that "it is no more appropriate for homosexual Christians to persist in a homosexual lifestyle than it would be for heterosexual Christians to maintain a lifestyle of fornication or adultery".<sup>104</sup> Thus the only choice for homosexual Christians "unless they are able to change their orientation and enter a heterosexual marriage relationship" is to seek to live "lives of disciplined sexual abstinence".<sup>105</sup>

Therefore the scholars on this wing of the debate presume that homosexual behaviour violates an universal order or norm for sexuality drawn from the creation accounts. We need to examine whether this is justifiable and if the creation accounts are as clear about sexual behaviour as assumed by these authors.

### **Summary**

We have said that the existence of constitutional homosexuals who find the homosexual orientation deeply ingrained in their personality constitutes an ethical problem. The question arises whether it is possible to hold on to the biblical norm for sexuality, which excludes homosexual behaviour. The different responses to this problem have three main directions. The first direction is towards a rejection of the norm, based on the assumption that the Bible is outmoded, uninformed, and biased on this matter and therefore not to be taken as normative. The Bible is used selectively and downgraded in its credibility on sexual matters. The second response is characterised firstly through its general acceptance of the Bible's contribution and authority on sexual matters. But it describes the biblical norm as being incomplete and in need of correction, and proposes to create a space for the unchangeable homosexual person within that norm. The framework of such a marginal-space is the ethically responsible homosexual partnership, which again finds its ethical justification in the "Liebesgebot". The third response distinguishes itself from the second in such a way as to view the norm as unchangeable and allowing no exceptions to the norm. Firmness on this matter is allayed by scholars' optimistic conviction that either alteration of the homosexual orientation or a life of sexual abstinence is possible.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. Müller, *Homosexualität - eine Herausforderung für Theologen und Seelsorger* (Mainz, 1986): 19ff; G.J.M. van den Aardweg, *Das Drama des gewöhnlichen Homosexuellen* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1992); M. Ruse, *Homosexuality. A Philosophical Inquiry* (New York, 1988); A. Bell, M. Weinberg, S. Hammersmith, *op.cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988): p.487.

<sup>3</sup> *Homosexualität - menschlich-christlich-moralisch, op.cit.*, pp.83-84.

<sup>4</sup> *Homosexuelle Liebe, op.cit.*, p.40.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.33, 39

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Bell-Weinberg, *op.cit.*, pp.70, 185f., 191

<sup>7</sup> Cf. H. Ringeling, "Ansatz", *op.cit.*, p.27.; *comp.* Wiedemann, *op.cit.*, 36.f.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p.25; I.Eibl-Eibesfeld, *Die Biologie des Menschlichen Verhaltens. Grundriß der Humanethologie* (München und Zürich, 1984): pp.325-29.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. H. Ringeling, "Ansatz", *op.cit.*, p. 29; T.E. Schmidt, *op.cit.*, pp.150-53.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. L.S. Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): pp.97-102.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. e.g. N. Pittenger, *Time for Consent* (London: SCM, 1976): pp.7, 73.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. M.D. Smith, "Ancient Bisexuality": "It is no longer possible, as has too often been the practice, to hold up copies of Boswell's or Scroggs books as if they have put the question to rest", *op.cit.*, p.250. Later we need to come back to those arguments that emphasize the cultural and sociological distance to the biblical texts.

<sup>13</sup> "Ancient Bisexuality", *op.cit.*, p.250

<sup>14</sup> *Gay Theology without Apology* (Cleveland: Pilgram Press, 1993): p. 43; Cf. R. Williams, *Just As I Am: A Practical Guide to Being Out, Proud, and Christian* (New York: Crown, 1992): He calls Rom. 1 a "text of terror", p.53.

<sup>15</sup> *Freedom, Glorious Freedom* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995): p.130.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p.130.

<sup>17</sup> The LGCM (Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement), Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London E2 6HG, pronounces a "Statement of Conviction" that reveals their stance:

"It is the conviction of the members of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement that human sexuality in all its richness is a gift of God gladly to be accepted, enjoyed, and honoured, as a way of both expressing and growing in love, in accordance with the life and teaching of Jesus Christ; therefore it is their conviction that it is entirely compatible with the Christian faith not only to love another person of the same sex, but also to express that love fully in personal, sexual relationship."

<sup>18</sup> *Diakrisis*, 1992, p.72.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the lesbian and gay evangelicals newsletter *Integrity* (London, Vol.3, Nov. 1996): Beside some remarks on public British denunciations of homosexuals, the author also quotes from the Internet web page of a Baptist Church in the USA, where he found exceedingly abusive sentiments against homosexual people.

<sup>20</sup> Despite Boswell's argument who apparently claims that the Early Church did not condemn homosexuality, as usually assumed by the contemporary Church. For a response to this claim Cf. D.F. Wright, "Early Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality", *Studia Patristica* 18, no. 2 (1989): pp.329-34.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. on this the explanations of D. Lange, *Ethik in evangelischer Perspektive* (Göttingen, 1992): pp.56f, 455f., and M. Honecker, *Grundriß der Sozialethik* (Berlin/New York, 1995): pp.198f. These authors are particularly interested in reducing references to an "order from creation" in contemporary debates on sexual and social matters. That is because the acceptance of such a concept implies that a radical changing process of history, that effects all aspects of the culture, is ignored or underestimated. This argument leads to the question whether it is helpful to refer to the Bible on ethical matters at all. This is a question to which we have to come back later, because it seems, historical speaking, that Paul with his reference and acceptance of such an order, is precisely doing that which these authors criticise regarding the modern discussion

<sup>22</sup> "Keine ewige Wahrheit", in: *Was auf dem Spiel steht*, eds. B. Kittelberger, W. Schürger, W. Heilig-Achneck (München: Claudius, 1993): p.282

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.283; cf. pp.280-285

<sup>24</sup> Cf. K. Hoeisel, "Homosexualität", *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* XVI (Stuttgart, 1992): pp.318, 345-50; P. Brown, *Die Keuschheit der Engel* (München: Hanser, 1984): pp.34f.

<sup>25</sup> M. Foucault, *Sexualität und Wahrheit* I, II, III (Frankfurt/Main, 1977/86/89): vol. 2, pp.281, 276-7. We will later have to refer to some of Foucault's influential views in another part of this study; cf. B.J. Brooten, "Die Weibliche Homoerotik bei Paulus", in: *Hättest du gedacht das wir so viele sind? Lesbische Frauen in der Kirche*, eds. M. Barz, H. Leistner, U. Wild (Stuttgart, 1987): pp. 115f.; *ibid.*, "Patristic Interpretation of Romans 1:26", *Studia Patristica* 18/1: pp. 287-291.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Love Between Women* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1996)

<sup>27</sup> Brooten quotes the following scholars who, as she thinks, implicitly or explicitly recognised this as well (*ibid.*, p.252): R.B. Hays, "Response", *op.cit.*, p.191: "rebellion... made palpable in the flouting of sexual distinctions that are fundamental to God's creative design"; S.J. Ridderbos, "Bibel und Homosexualität", in *Der Homosexuelle Nächste: Ein Symposium*, with contribution by Hermanus Bianchi et.al. (Hamburg: Furche, 1963): pp.60-62: "the issue is the boundaries between the sexes"; G.L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978): pp.55-57: "God ordained a specific distinction between male and female". However, as we will see later, Brooten's concept of sexual differentiation has a clearly negative connotation while the authors above argue from a more positive angle, which raises the question whether they ought to be classified as agreeing with her argument.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.256

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.301; cf. pp.275, 280, 299.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.302; cf. K.E. Corley and K.J. Torjesen, "Sexuality, Hierarchy, and Evangelicalism", *TSF Bulletin* 10 (1987) no. 4, pp.23-27. Their argument is similar to Brooten's.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.280-83; cf. H.G. Wiedemann: "Es ist also festzustellen, daß die antike Sozial- und Moralvorstellungen nicht Inhalt christlicher Verkündigung sein können. Darüber haben wir mit anderen und besserem Wissen heute auch anders zu urteilen", *Homosexuelle Liebe*, *op.cit.*, p.88; D.A. Helminiak, *What the Bible really says about Homosexuality* (San Francisco: Alamo Square Press, 1994): pp.72-3; K. Wengst, *op.cit.*, pp.79-80 (fn. 4); V.P. Fumish, *The Bible and Homosexuality*, *op.cit.*, pp.24f.; E. Kähler, "Exegese zweier neutestamentlichen Stellen", in: *Probleme der Homophilie in medizinischer, theologischer und juristischer Sicht*, ed. Th. Bovet (Tübingen, 1965): "Wir wissen heute mehr und differenzierter als Paulus", p.31; B. Brooten, "Paul and the Law: How complete was the Departure?", *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Supp. 1: pp. 71-89.

<sup>32</sup> For these authors "natural intercourse" meant penetrating of a subordinate person by a dominant one, and who frequently described sexual relations between women as "unnatural" because the women attempts to take a dominant, penetrating role, instead of the passive, subordinate role accorded to her by nature; cf. Brooten, *Love Between Women*, *op.cit.*, pp.241, 248-50.

<sup>33</sup> Brooten does remind us of the controversial origins of the concept of nature in Greek thought, which makes it difficult to speak of an uniform concept of nature among Roman-period authors, *ibid.*, p.280-1; cf. G.E.R. Lloyd, *Methods and Problems in Greek Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); pp.431f.

<sup>34</sup> Brooten, *ibid.*, p.266; comp. W. Schrage, *Ethik*, *op.cit.*, pp.97f., 229-33.

<sup>35</sup> W. Schrage, *Ethik*, *op.cit.*, pp.229-30; cf. J. Leipoldt, *Die Frau in der antiken Welt und im Urchristentum* (Berlin: Evang. Verl.-Anstalt, 1955): pp.10f.; W. Schottroff, "Frauen in der Nachfolge Jesu in ntl. Zeit", in: *Tradition der Befreiung*, ed. W. Schottroff a.o. (München: Kaiser, 1980): pp.91f.; W. Schrage, W. Gerstenberger, *Frau und Mann* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln, Mainz: Kohlhammer, 1980).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Schrage, *Ethik*, *op.cit.*, p.230.

<sup>37</sup> K. Wengst emphasises this point, "Paulus und die Homosexualität", *op.cit.*, p.76; cf. D.S. Bailey who also recognises that the lack of population growth is never an argument against homosexuality in the Bible, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, *op.cit.*, p.58.

<sup>38</sup> Brooten has shown that many inhabitants of the Roman world viewed asymmetrical sexual relations as the norm, *ibid.*, p.250; cf. pp.29-141.

<sup>39</sup> Comp. W. Schrage, *Ethik*, *op.cit.*, pp. 230-233.

<sup>40</sup> Along those lines, Brooten criticises R.B. Hays' argumentation. She thinks he distorts the picture for the modern reader, because, by "atomistically citing several ancient authors who

describe male-male relations as being unnatural" (*para physin*), and by showing that Paul is in agreement with their description, Hays fails to mention how concepts of female inferiority shaped these authors' understandings of natural relations. Again, Brooten presupposes that Paul uncritically accepts these concepts of female inferiority which Hays does not. By citing those ancient authors Hays only intended to demonstrate that the categorisation of homosexual behaviour as *para physin* was a commonplace feature of polemical attacks against such behaviour. From here it is a long way to go to assume that Paul, because of his introduction of *para physin* into the passage necessarily agrees on the whole with those ancient authors' views of gender hierarchy, as the observations above have shown. There was no need for Hays to consider this in the main thrust of his argument; cf. Brooten, *Love Between Women*, *op.cit.*, p.245; cf. R.B. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response To John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1", *op.cit.*

<sup>41</sup> K. Stendahl describes Gal. 3:28 as "breakthrough" for the early church, *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress-Facet, 1966).

<sup>42</sup> G. Dautzenberg referring to 1 Cor. 11:2f. observes a "Spannung zwischen patriarchalischen Ordnungsdenken und theologisch begründeter Gleichrangigkeit der Geschlechter", "Zur Stellung der Frau in den paulischen Gemeinden", in: *Die Frau im Urchristentum*, QD 95 (1983): p. 209.

<sup>43</sup> *Sex - Ethik der Geschlechtlichkeit*, *op.cit.*, pp.7-8.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. W. Schrage, *1 Korinther*, VII/2, *op.cit.*, pp.525-33.

<sup>45</sup> *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen II* (Göttingen, 1964): p.218. He further explains this "Gebrechen": "Sie (die enthusiastische Frömmigkeit) faßt nur die Freiheit vom lästigen Zwang ins Auge. Dem Apostel geht es dagegen wie stets um die Freiheit, die sich zum Dienen gerufen weiß, und sie eben sieht er bedroht, wo Enthusiasmus am Bestehen der Ordnung rüttelt um im Namen des Geistes sein vermeintliches Recht proklamiert"; *comp.* W. Schrage, *Ethik*, *op.cit.*, p.232.

<sup>46</sup> *Sex*, *op.cit.*, p.8.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Between the Sexes - Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985): p.66.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Brooten, *Love*, *op.cit.*, p.252.

<sup>50</sup> Cahill, *Between*, *op.cit.*, p.66.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.191

<sup>52</sup> TWNT, "physis", *op.cit.*, p.265

<sup>53</sup> Cf. the paragraph on "the Old Testament background of Romans 1".

<sup>54</sup> Hays uses this expression ("Response", *op.cit.*, p.194) as well as P. Pronk (*Against Nature?*, *op.cit.*, p.277), yet the latter author claims that the expression actually describes Paul's viewpoint accurately.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Köster, *op.cit.*, p.267; Hays points out Rom. 1:28 and its apparently Stoic technical terminology: *ta me katekonta*, (RSV: "improper conduct"), *op.cit.*, p.196

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Köster, *op.cit.*, p.267.

<sup>57</sup> Brooten, *Love*, *op.cit.*, p.270; cf. pp.267-71.

<sup>58</sup> Hays, "Response", *op.cit.*, p.196.; cf. Josephus, who associated the Law of Moses with the philosophical appeal to "nature": "The Law recognises no sexual connections except for the natural (*kata physin*) union of man and wife... (Ap. 2.199).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.194

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Against Nature?*, *op.cit.*, p.277-78.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p.277.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. "The Bible and Homosexuality" in: *Homosexuality in the Church*, *op.cit.*, pp.29-30.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.34-35, fn.17.

<sup>64</sup> *Dirt, Greed, and Sex*, *op.cit.*, pp.114-15.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.121.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp.109-23, 237-67.

<sup>67</sup> T.E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?*, *op.cit.*, p.71.

<sup>68</sup> Countryman objects that we can not refer to Philo, since Paul does not fully adopt the purity ethic of the Hellenistic Jews, *op.cit.*, pp.97-104, 119 fn.31. But this is difficult to maintain, because Philo describes homosexual behaviour almost entirely in the same way as Paul does, and even employs *epithymia* in the same context. Very clear signs that show that Paul at least partially adopted the Hellenistic Jewish ethical code. Brooten rightly points out

that Paul and Philo differ on two distinctive points: "(1) Paul does not follow all of the Pentateuchal laws and nowhere mentions menstruation as an issue for the Pauline communities; and (2) Paul expresses virtually no interest in procreation and was himself unmarried (1 Cor. 9:5)", *Love, op.cit.*, pp.247-48; cf. Schmidt, *op.cit.*, p.72.

<sup>69</sup> Other ancient sources, most likely known to Paul, equally used "desire" with an negative connotation: Wisdom of Salomon (14:2; 15:5) and Sirach (18:30; 23:6); cf. Brooten's remarks on this word, *Love, op.cit.*, pp.254-56

<sup>70</sup> See Schmidt for a detailed response to Countryman's argument, particularly on Romans 1, *op.cit.*, pp.64-85; cf. Brooten's evaluation of his argument: *Love, op.cit.*, 235, fn.57.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Brooten *op.cit.*, pp.252, 265; Stegemann, *op.cit.*, see quotation above.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Thielicke, *op.cit.*, pp.282-304; many German theologians in particular argue along those lines, cf. H. Ringeling, "Ansatz", *op.cit.*, pp.6-14, 21, 33.

<sup>73</sup> H. Thielicke, *op.cit.*, p.295.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp.295-6.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.296.

<sup>76</sup> "Homosexualität und Kirche", *op.cit.*, pp.103-4.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. U. Eibach, *Seelische Krankheit und christlicher Glaube* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1992): pp.120f.; J.P. Sampley, *Walking between the Times. Paul's Moral Reasoning* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991). Referring to Rom. 1:19-28 he writes: "Paul does not write much of sins. Rather, he thinks of sin as if it were a power stalking about looking for a beachhead (cf. Rom. 7:8,11) from which to launch a campaign to take control over someone's life", p.13.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. U. Eibach, "Homosexualität", *op.cit.*, p.104.

<sup>79</sup> This is the opinion of many ethics-scholars today. cf. Ringeling, "Ansatz", *op.cit.*, pp.88f.; T. Rendtorff, "Homosexualität" in: *Handbuch der christlichen Ethik* (Gütersloh, 2. ed., 1993): pp. 177f., esp. 183; M. Honecker, *Kirche und Homosexualität, ein theologischer Beitrag im Auftrag des Männerwerks der Ev. Kirche im Rheinland* (Düsseldorf, 1994): p.8; S. Grenz, "Sexual Ethics", *op.cit.*, pp.203-9; R.B. Hays, "Awaiting", *op.cit.*, p.10; W. Schrage, *1 Korinther VII/1*, *op.cit.*, p.436; D.F. Wright, "Homosexuality", in: *Dict.o.P.a.h.L.*, *op.cit.*, p.414.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. "Homosexualität und Kirche", *op.cit.*, p.109; W. Pannenberg, "Kann die Liebe Sünde sein?", *idea Spektrum* 48 (1993): p.13f.. He equally points out that "die Unterscheidung zwischen Norm und dem davon abweichenden Verhalten" cannot be given up with regard to homosexuality".

<sup>81</sup> Cf. U. Eibach, *ibid.*, p.109-10.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* p.110. U. Eibach, while objecting the equation of a homosexual partnership with marriage, is still leaving it somehow open whether a homosexual, faithful, lifelong, responsible, and caring relationship is acceptable or not. He thinks that such a relationship is to be assessed differently from a theological point of view, than a promiscuous relationship. By taking such an undecided position, on one hand accepting the biblical norm as absolute and condemning homosexual behaviour as contrary to this norm, yet on the other hand avoiding the final consequence of his argumentation, he stands as representative for many German theologians and Churches whose argumentation lacks consistency; cf. p.110-11.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. "Homosexualität in der Kirche", *Deutsches Pfarrblatt* (1994/12, pp.578-581): p.578; and "Wider die Arroganz der Ehepaare", *EvKo* (1993); pp.433f.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. "Homosexualität", *op.cit.*, p.578.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*; J.S. Siker argues similarly in his concluding article "Homosexual Christians, the Bible, and Gentile Conclusion: Confessions of a Repenting Heterosexual" in his book *Homosexuality in the Church - Both Sides of the Debate* (*op.cit.*, pp.178-191). He compares the acceptance and inclusion of homosexual persons into the Church with alcoholism and the Gentile inclusion into the early Church of the Apostles. Siker also excludes the Bible's contribution from the discussion and doubts the assumption that the creation stories are explicitly saying that heterosexuality is the only appropriate form of sexuality (p.184).

<sup>86</sup> "Würde bewahren", *EvKo* (1994): p.91; cf. J.J. McNeill who argues that "Every human being has the right to sexual love and intimacy", "Homosexuality: Challenging the Church to Grow", *Christian Century* 104/8 (March 11, 1987): p.243.

<sup>87</sup> R.B. Hays, "Response", *op.cit.*, pp.208-209.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.209.

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<sup>89</sup> "Homosexualität und Kirche", *op.cit.*, p.109; *cf.* J. Stott, "Homosexual Partnerships?", *op.cit.*, p.355-56; *comp.* on this view: R. Stuhlmann, "Wider der Arroganz der Ehepaare", *EvKo* (1993): pp.433f.; H. Kreß, "Würde bewahren", *op.cit.*, pp.91f.

<sup>90</sup> *Cf.* H. Thielicke, *op.cit.*, p.297.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.296-7; *cf.* H. Ringeling, "Ansatz", *op.cit.*, p.33.

<sup>92</sup> *Cf.* H. Thielicke, p.298.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.297.

<sup>94</sup> *Cf.* Lev. 19:18; Mk. 12:28-34; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14.

<sup>95</sup> *Cf.* N. Pittenger, *Time for Consent*, who lists six characteristics of such an ethics: commitment, mutuality in giving and receiving, tenderness, faithfulness, hopefulness, and desire for union, *op.cit.*, pp.31-33.

<sup>96</sup> *Cf.* H. Engel, "Kirchliche Stellungnahmen von 1968 bis 1992", in: *Was auf dem Spiel steht*, *op.cit.*, pp.84-128.

<sup>97</sup> *A Christian Understanding of Human Sexuality* (1979), chapter 9.

<sup>98</sup> *Mit Spannungen leben. Eine Orientierungshilfe des Rates der EKD zum Thema "Homosexualität und Kirche"*, EKD Texte 57, ed. Kirchenamt der Ev. Kirche in Deutschland (Hannover, 1996): p.21.

<sup>99</sup> *Cf. ibid.*, pp.21-22.

<sup>100</sup> *Cf.* "Homosexual Partnerships?", *op.cit.*, p.349-51.

<sup>101</sup> *Cf. ibid.*, p.350.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p.350-51.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.355.

<sup>104</sup> "Awaiting", *op.cit.*, p.14.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

## An Universal Norm?

The discussion above, concerning one wing of the debate, has shown that another wing maintains that a biblical norm for sexuality can be drawn from the creation accounts. These Genesis passages (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18-24) are taken as explicitly and fully revealing God's intentions for sexuality. It is argued that they affirm certain fundamental truths about sexuality such as the complementarity of the sexes and the goodness of sex as well as marriage.<sup>1</sup> For this reason sexual expression in marriage is *exclusively* "right" or "good" and there are no exemptions to the rule, including homosexuality. The question is whether it is appropriate to read all this into or out of the Genesis passages.

### The Creation Accounts in the Discussion

V.P. Furnish doubts that such an interpretation of the passages in question is justifiable. He thinks that this "reads far more into the text as it actually says, or even presupposes". He further explains: "Although the creation accounts presume and explain heterosexual behaviour, they do not command it. They are not about God's will for individual members of the species but only about what is typical of the species as a whole".<sup>2</sup>

Furnish heavily depends on the article of Phyllis A. Bird, who is very much interested in investigating of what the given text originally meant to its author.<sup>3</sup> Bird criticises that often the text is misused by theologians who uncritically impose concerns, questions, or assumption upon the text that are foreign to it. Too often, she claims, "approval of the theological construction is taken as validation of the exegesis."<sup>4</sup> This is especially vivid, Bird claims, in Karl Barth's interpretation of the *imago dei*. Although Barth attempted to use the text as his primary source, nevertheless he failed to discern the text's anthropology and theology. She further explains:

(thus Barth) has advanced only a novel and arresting variation of the classical Trinitarian interpretation, an interpretation characterised by the distinctly modern concept of an "I-Thou" relationship, which is foreign to the ancient writer's thought and intention at all three points of its application (God in the relationship within the Godhead, humanity in the relationship between the sexes, and God and humanity in relationship to each other).<sup>5</sup>

Thus Bird sees the need to distinguish between the historical and the constructive tasks of interpreters to relate them properly.

Without doubt historical-critical evaluation of the Genesis accounts need to be taken seriously. It is widely accepted among scholars today that Genesis 1 and 2 are two distinct accounts. The former account is known as the Priestly (P) creation narrative while the second is called Yahwist (Y) account.<sup>6</sup> For Bird the dominant theme of the Priestly (P) creation narrative is dependency on God and the preservation of the order of God. With regard to human sexual differentiation procreation is the central concern. The fruitfulness of humanity is emphasised ("Be fruitful and multiply", Gen. 1:28), just as it is with regard, for example, to the vegetation that bears seed. Thus the theme of sexual complementarity does not expand upon that of the image of God, since God transcends sexuality, but "it represents the sustainability of nature, not that of position and dominion within the created order".<sup>7</sup>

According to Bird the Priestly author did not see a contradiction in Gen. 1:27 when he construes no special correspondence between the sexes and the nature of God.<sup>8</sup> This is because the Priestly author's view was that men have a special role in procreation and public life, which is supported by the male genealogies of the Priestly author's accounts elsewhere (e.g. Gen. 5, 12).<sup>9</sup> Thus Bird affirms the centrality of procreation concerning sexual differentiations yet denies any correspondence of this differentiation to the nature or image of God; basically because that would not be compatible with the Priestly author's patriarchal worldview.

This view is partially affirmed by L.S. Cahill. She agrees with Bird's exegesis that shows that sexual differentiation and co-operation in Gen. 1:27-28 are linked to procreation. The obvious implications of these verses are that maleness and femaleness are destined as response to the Lord's command to be fruitful. On this account she further explains:

Contrary to modern liberalism, the Priestly author places the man-woman relation in the context of the welfare of the creation, rather than of interpersonal communion. Even their sexual coming together is in fulfillment of their responsibility to propagate the inclusive community of their species, and so to support the maintenance of the created orders. Male and female relations, it can be said, find definition and meaning in the "common good".<sup>10</sup>

Cahill, however, is suspicious about Bird's way of analyzing the text, when it comes to normative interpretation, in view of certain expectancies of ethicists. She asks whether every ethicist possesses "the tools that would enable original investigation of what a given text meant to its author(s) or editor(s)."<sup>11</sup> The task of an ethicist is more complex, since often they must decide "by which criteria one exegetical account of the original meaning is to be preferred over another".<sup>12</sup> Obviously ethicists are interested in finding out what the text actually meant to the author(s) and their audience, but equally they need to define what the text means for today's audience.

S. Schneider elaborates on this and warns against exclusive focus on the "literal sense" of the text.<sup>13</sup> While this method "enjoys relative hegemony in academic circles" these days, it is not very helpful when it comes to finding a model for the normative function of the material and its application. She suggests that the meaning of the text has to be seen not just in the context of its original audience but its subsequent audiences as well. The meaning is no longer limited to the former understanding but the modern interpreter enters into a dialogue with it due a common religious tradition, even though the questions and concerns of the ancient author may not be identical to those brought to the text today. Hence, Schneider suggests a closer attachment to the text itself and thinks that the contemporary interpreter must be "controlled by the text" or be "faithful to the text".<sup>14</sup> Thinking of medieval interpreters, she makes the point that we are in an advanced state of biblical interpretation today due to new exegetical insights and possibilities, though this does not simplify hermeneutics. She writes:

While we need to reappropriate their (medieval interpreters) sense of the nature of the biblical text as many-levelled religious literature and their concern for the truth claims of the inspired text we must also continue to wrestle with the tension they did not experience between what the text meant and what the text means. An exclusively historical critical approach that is one-sidedly concerned with the former is sterile. But an exclusive and uncritical concern with the latter will result in fundamentalism or uninformed pietism. The task of our own time is to appreciate and exploit the creative possibilities of the tension between what the text meant and what the text means.<sup>15</sup>

Concerning the creation accounts Phyllis Trible's contribution is another example of interpretation that is close to and controlled by the text. In her book *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* she uses the tools of rhetorical analysis and

so focuses on the present shape and internal coherence of a text, and in a way lifts the text out of its historical life situation.<sup>16</sup> Rhetorical criticism is her main tool for the interpretation of the text, and so she writes: "Infolgedessen betrachte ich den Text als eine literarische Schöpfung mit einer komplizierten Struktur von Wörtern und Motiven. Eine richtige Analyse der Form führt zu einer richtigen Artikulation der Bedeutung".<sup>17</sup> With this hermeneutical tool Tribble examines Gen. 1:27 and argues that the chiasmus and parallel structures within the verse reveal a correspondence between "image of God" and "male and female". From this she concludes that humankind is two sexually different creatures who are equal in likeness to God, power over the earth, and authority regarding one another.<sup>18</sup>

Another uncommon interpretation is given by Tribble when she translates *'ādām* (adam) as "earth creature" because of the similarity between the Hebrew word for "man" (*'ādām*) and "the earth" (*h'êres*). Thus she argues that God at first created an undifferentiated and not androgynous being, and later differentiates it by a subsequent act into male and female. Consequently man did not exist before woman, but they both were created simultaneously. This further implies that humanity and sexuality were created in succession to one another.<sup>19</sup>

Although Tribble's skilful literary critical approach has the advantage of being close to the original text as well as being attractive in view of normative interpretation, nevertheless, some scholars doubt whether it helps to gain a reliable understanding about what the original author truly intended to convey, and whether this is an appropriate way of interpreting Scripture. Her interpretation of the text, for instance her conclusion about the equality of the sexes, is generally shared by contemporary Christian ethical viewpoints and by the ongoing community of the church, but the avenues towards this interpretation, it is argued, are rather far removed from the original. It is criticised that Tribble, while not treating the text as a purely historical source, focuses on the literary value of the text alone, which does not do justice to the fact that the text is part of Christian Scripture with a particular meaning and "message" for the people of the past as well as the present.<sup>20</sup>

L. Cahill points out that, though Tribble does not claim that her conclusions on male and female and the image of God would be shared by the Priestly writers

(indeed Tribe shows no interest in such a question) it is more likely that this is not so. "The structure of the writer's poetry, from which the conclusions of the literary critic are drawn, emerges from fundamental, if inchoate, insights of the Priestly author's community into the nature of humanity and its standing before God".<sup>21</sup> Thus a text must not be dislodged from its original setting and used as a "piece of literature" that loses out on credibility for normative interpretation and is simply used contrary to the author's intention. The "Sitz im Leben" of a text remains to be of vital importance for hermeneutics. Cahill writes that the "'meaning for us' has an indispensable chain of connection to 'meaning for them'."<sup>22</sup> Similarly, A.C. Thiselton writes in his criticism of Tribe that "language is not a container that has a separable identity from its context."<sup>23</sup>

However, while acknowledging these objections towards Tribe's analysis, this cannot fully annul the worth of her endeavour. We need to ask to what extent had the insights of the Priestly author's community a bearing on the text? Is it right to assume that the text represents the priestly author's insights into "the nature of humanity and its standing before God" alone, so that all other interpretation of the text that is beyond the horizon of its author and his understanding of the relationship between the sexes is excluded? Tribe's implied indication that the text includes certain concepts and ideas that were foreign to the Priestly author or at least were not fully perceived by him must not be underestimated. The Christian claim that Scripture incorporates certain revelatory aspects is otherwise diminished.

It is right to emphasise that a biblical text and its language must not be separated from its original context and its historical setting because then Scripture would be taken out of time and place and the idea that it is a written account of God's revelation in history transmitted by means of human authorship would be overlooked. Moreover important implications could be missed out with regard to proper exegesis. All Scripture is bound to its historical setting and human authorship. Yet still, to emphasise the human authorship of Scripture alone would not take into account the claim that there remains to be a revelatory aspect to Christian Scripture. If it is assumed that this poetry in Genesis *only* portrays the (limited) insights of an ancient Jewish community, then of course it will be difficult to find any meaning of the text other than how it was perceived and transmitted to us by the ancient authors. In that

case the most thorough investigation into the historical background of the relevant text would grant the most adequate exegesis. But if it is assumed that the writer's poetry includes the reality of revelation that has to be perceived properly and the possibility of limited comprehension in view of Jewish authorship then there is room for an extended (Christian) meaning of the text.

Samual Terrien seems to have found a way of interpreting the Genesis accounts that appreciates both the historical-critical and literary-critical approach, in his book *Till the Heart Sings*.<sup>24</sup> He recognises the historical situation of the accounts<sup>25</sup> and at the same time takes a close look at the literary form of the text. We will have a look at his exegesis of the word "helper", found in Gen. 2:18, that describes the woman's function that is attached to her in her correspondence to man.

Traditionally, S. Terrien points out, this word has been interpreted as meaning retainer, employee, domestic help, a mother's or a teacher's helper. But these translations do not express what the word actually means. According to Terrien, the verb 'ázâr, from which the noun 'ézêr derives, means "to succor" (at the existential level of being), "to save from extremity," "to deliver from death." Outside of this passage, the word 'ézêr applies only to God himself. He is the giver of succor, "the helper of Israel in time of distress" (cf. Deut. 33:7; Pss. 33:20; 115:9). Hence the word in Gen. 2:18 obviously depicts the woman not as "being a subordinated or menial servant, women is the saviour of man." The Hebrew word translated as "alone" in the same verse shows why this saving connotation of the "helper" is necessary. The human being ('ádâm) is depicted as being existentially lonely because no other companion is found. A partner is missing who will fulfil this existential need. "The Hebraic mentality", Terrien explains, considered aloneness as the negation of authentic living". Therefore "human beings live only insofar as they are related within their environment to partners with whom they share mutuality and complementariness. Animals do not fulfil the requirement of true partnership."<sup>26</sup> In this context the woman is created for completion and fulfilment of true partnership.

Such interpretation seems to be using the tools of historical- and literary-criticism correctly. Again, if Bird's analysis is correct, however, than it has to be objected that Terrien's conclusion is too sympathetic towards women, because

a concept that supports the equality of sexes would have been strange for the Priestly writer. It seems obvious that the stories are written from a man's point of view, as some scholars emphasise.<sup>27</sup> But again, does that imply that there cannot possibly be any hint in the story that would point to an equality of the sexes? The Genesis accounts were composed and perceived by the Priestly authors in the context of a patriarchal society, but that does not mean that the text incorporates no concept of equality or complementarity of the sexes. The patriarchal viewpoints of the Hebrew Scriptures' authors need not be understood as the decisive aspect for its interpretation. It seems advisable not to do precisely that what Cahill mentions by way of introduction, namely to avoid "excessive dependence on a particular view or consensus".<sup>28</sup>

Such an excessive tendency can be discerned in D.N. Fewell's and D.M. Gunn's book *Gender, Power, & Promise*.<sup>29</sup> The authors approach the Genesis accounts from a feminist perspective that has a rather extreme bearing on their interpretation of the text. Their description of the story includes such intimations such as the woman's grasp for the fruit is a positive striving for sustenance, beauty, and wisdom. Or God's response to the disobedient act of eating from the forbidden tree was really motivated by anxious feelings because he was jealous of his power. The authors claim that God drove the couple out of the garden because he felt threatened by their newly gained knowledge of good and evil and their new position equal with him. "The issue on this reading, then, would be God's need to guard jealously his privileged position, to dominate (or transcend, if you will)."<sup>30</sup>

On the whole the authors describe God as a being who is not sure about his own identity, which is implied, according to Fewell and Gunn, in the narrator's grammatical confusion of the plural name (*'Elohim*) and a singular verb (*cf.* Gen. 1:26-29). Such an "identity slippage" emerges again in connection with the differentiated human.<sup>31</sup> In line with such reasoning the authors deny that aspects of mutuality and complementarity may be found in the passage relevant to relationships between the sexes, but instead argue that the creation story is really just the beginning of an oppressive history of gender differentiation which continued throughout the area of the patriarchs and which is still present in contemporary experiences of women and children.

However, such an interpretation of the Genesis accounts is very speculative and reads the text from a viewpoint that is somewhat problematic in view of its original intent and meaning. It reveals an extremely suspicious and negative attitude towards Scripture that is indicated in the fact that every positive aspect of the story is excluded in the first place. Neither the provisional and sustaining aspects of the man's ruling and subduing of the world (1:26-28), nor Adam's rejoicing over the woman who was brought to him by God (2:21-23), nor the curse of the serpent and the subsequent promise to crush its head (3:14-15), just to mention some of them, are seriously considered by the authors. The whole story is read from a strong feminist viewpoint that projects a modern concept into this ancient Jewish writing that violates the text and its meaning.<sup>32</sup>

For Cahill it is less problematic that aspects of the accounts simply represent the patriarchy of the tenth-century Israel, because she allows the text to stand "to be modified in a subsequent hermeneutics of appropriation, using sources beyond Scripture".<sup>33</sup> In other words, for her the text on its own may not provide sufficient material for a normative interpretation which will be helpful for the ethicist, but non-biblical or extrabiblical criteria (biblical communities, tradition, philosophical or "normative" accounts, and factual or "descriptive" accounts of the human) are additional tools also necessary for such a task.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the text itself, in favour of Terrien's interpretation, shows clear signs of not being excessively patriarchal.

Several points can be highlighted from the exegesis of the text.<sup>35</sup> Firstly, the word "helper" connotes that the woman is more than a domestic servant or sexual mate for the man, as we have seen above. The word points towards the complementary and fulfilling value that the woman has for the man, who is actually "helpless" without her. Secondly, because the sequence of creation after the *'ādām* has progressed from lower to higher, from the garden to the animal to the woman. In other words the woman is the final type of human being, so it is possible to argue for a certain superiority of this being. Thirdly, a "historical remarkable stipulation", as Cahill calls it, is made in Gen. 2:24 where the man is expected to "leave" or to "abandon" (*yasazâb*) *comp.* Ps. 22:1; Mk. 15:34) his social relations by "cleaving" to his woman (*comp.* Deut. 10:20; 1 Kings 11:2; Josh. 23:8) and so to show that his first loyalty is to her. And this although the woman was assimilated by the man's family in Israelite society.

Another important observation, fourthly, can be made by looking at Gen. 2:23, where Adam calls the female being *'issâ* ("woman"). This is a word that incorporates the Hebrew word for husband (*'iysh*), that derives from the idea of marching ahead, and so combines it with the different image of delicacy and elegance that is associated with this word for wife (*'éshet*). Terrien comments on this point:

By producing the assonance *ish-issah*, the storyteller may well have intended to show at the same time both the differentiation of functions and the oneness of man-and-woman, husband-and-wife, in a new community of exchange, in a reciprocity of needs, in a mutuality of responsible concerns. The antique narrative thus points to ideal monogamy. And this is exactly what Jesus saw here (Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:8).<sup>36</sup>

And finally, it can be claimed that the hierarchy of the sexes is described as a consequence and perpetuation of sin. Only after the Fall the relation between the sexes is found as being affected for the worse in all aspects of life, socially and personally. The "desire" of the wife for her husband and his "ruling over" her, Adam's naming of the woman as "Eve" that indicates a reduction of her status to that of the animals (*comp.* Gen. 2 and 3:20), and the transmutation of the creational partnership into disorder and suffering. These are all results of alienation from the Creator. Cahill rightly points out that "the Lord's discourse describes an effect of sin on the created order rather than describing that order's intrinsic design".<sup>37</sup>

We can notice a number of points thus far. (i) The accounts will never be freed from certain patriarchal undertones. (ii) The text on its own will not necessarily be such an indisputable guidance for normative ethics as some want it to be. (iii) Themes like mutual love-relationship, marriage, or monogamy are implicitly rather than explicitly described. However, it is still justifiable to argue that normative Christian understanding about human sexual relations and about the above mentioned themes may still be drawn from these accounts in question. This is so because the text itself is not opposed to such an understanding and because additional traditional, empirical, and scientific criteria are necessarily included with interpretation of the biblical criteria to prevent a sterile reading of the text. As we have seen, a sterile reading of the Genesis accounts may cause the interpreter to argue those accounts are *excessively* patriarchal, which they are not. And, coming back to Furnish's

interpretation and application of the creation accounts, it is here where he argues inadequately.

### **The Normative Use of the Creation Accounts**

A number of scholars emphasise the centrality of marriage in Scripture. According to the New Testament, they claim, marriage is an institution that originated in God's Creation and thus is fundamentally constituted by the Creator for companionship, procreation and as the proper place for sexual fulfilment.<sup>38</sup> H. Ringeling sees the Church advocating the "Höchstgestaltung der Ehe" with its implicit obligations and commitment as well as its significance for the family, for "diese Kulturordnung nach den Maßstäben der Schöpfung, d.h. als nach dem Willen Gottes zu gestaltender Naturordnung und hinsichtlich ihrer Eignung für die gegenseitige Anerkennung von Frauen und Männer gut begründet ist".<sup>39</sup>

Terrien, on the contrary, supposes that we should not conclude from reading the creation accounts that "the biblical dynamics of manhood and womanhood impose heterosexual marriage as the only form of human fulfilment". Claus Westermann agrees in a similar way in his commentary on Genesis.<sup>40</sup> While affirming the foundational teaching of the Genesis passages that the human being is destined for communion, for "Gemeinschaft", and that the gender differentiation of man and woman is the "predeterminational order from creation" for all such communion, he does however, reject the assumption that the institution of marriage is implied in Gen. 2:24. This verse is rather concerned about the "urgewaltiger Drang der Geschlechter zueinander". Westermann further explains:

Die beiden Verben 'er verläßt' und 'er hängt an' dürfen keinesfalls als Beschreibungen von Institutionen verstanden werden. Die Vermutung, hier klinge eine Erinnerung an das Matriarchat nach, verkennt die Absicht dieses Verses. Es ist vielmehr hervorzuheben, daß in der Institution der Ehe (ob nun Ein- oder Mehrehe), wie sie uns im AT begegnet, dieser Drang der Geschlechter zueinander gerade nicht das einzige, meist nicht einmal das ausschlaggebende Element ist;... Dieser Vers hat seine Bedeutung gerade darin, daß er im Unterschied zu den bestehenden Institutionen und z.T. sogar im Gegensatz zu ihnen auf die elementare Kraft der Liebe von Mann und Frau weist.<sup>41</sup>

Hence, there are good reasons not to read an institutional aspect into the creation accounts, because to read such an aspect into the passage,

particularly considering the Old Testament patriarchal understanding of marriage, would misconstrue the writer's intention and diminish the significance of these verses.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, this verse does not describe the Old Testament reality of the marital institution, where a primary emphasis on the institution was evaluated as necessary, for the preservation of the "seed of Abraham" (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 24:7), and where it was a disgrace and reproach for a woman not to be married (e.g. Is. 4:1); not to mention the common practice of polygamy.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, while it is important to recognise the difference between the Old Testament *reality* of marriage and the creational *ideal*, the love-relationship between two companions as indicated by the passage, it will be difficult to exclude the concept of marriage from these verses completely. The word 'issâ ("wife", LXX : *gunaika*) in verse 24 indicates that something more than sexual distinction is in mind. P.K. Jewett suggests that the structure of the text reflects a distinction between the creation of the woman in verse 23 and the institution of marriage in verse 24.<sup>44</sup> Jewett further emphasises that this distinction, which has become so important for the Christian view of life, was probably not of great significance for the Old Testament writers, because in their thought male and female complementarity simply merged with the marriage relationship.<sup>45</sup> Thus for the people in ancient Israel and in later Judaism this Genesis passage has always been the primary text that instituted marriage.<sup>46</sup>

What seems certain, however, is that the creation accounts do not provide permissions or prohibitions concerning sexuality. There are other passages in the Hebrew canon that provided the Jewish community with definite rules for sexual relations and marriage (e.g. Lev. 18; Deut. 22:13f.). In the Genesis accounts however, we rather find descriptions instead of commands. This explains why theologians frequently use terms like "implication", "indication" or "points towards" for a normative interpretation of the text. What the interpretation of Gen. 1 and 2 does yield, is, that the writer of the Genesis stories describes the "Drang der Geschlechter zueinander", and that the complementarity of male and female is grounded in the will of God as well as designed by him. The climax of this description is clearly the bringing together of the two sexes in what is called "to become one flesh".<sup>47</sup> L. Cahill summarises the implications of Gen. 1-3 well:

These Genesis chapters reveal and affirm the communal significance of sexual differentiation, complementarity, and partnership. Sexuality is portrayed there as the precondition of humanity's support of the order of creation through the procreation of the species, and also as the *sine qua non* of the partnership of man and woman in fulfilling the Lord God's command.<sup>48</sup>

Thus neither monogamy nor polygamy, neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality is commanded nor prohibited in these accounts. These topics are simply *not* the main concern of the creation accounts, but nevertheless, the creation accounts do contribute something to the discussion of these topics, simply because sexuality *is* a major theme of the accounts. For this reason theologians and ethicists take the accounts as a *basis for biblical commands and for subsequent reflection* to construct a sexual ethics for new and changing situations. Thus the creation accounts are important when homosexuality is discussed because they are at least related to the topic and the ethicist cannot ignore them but needs to reflect on them. According to the discussion above, where we pointed out that a sterile reading of the text ought to be avoided, it is necessary for the ethicist to find out, first of all, how the accounts are used elsewhere in Scripture and whether her or his reflection on the accounts is consistent with broader biblical teaching concerning sexuality.

### **Creation Theology in the Gospels and Paul's Epistles**

It has been pointed out that Jesus and Paul also refer to the creation accounts for constituting ethical norms for sexuality (Mk 10:1-12; Matt. 5:32; 19:1-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:10-11). Jesus' demand of the indissolubility of marriage in Mark 10 and Matthew 19 is placed into the context of the creation (Gen. 1 and 2). Thus the creational and now institutionalised partnership of man and woman is affirmed as being normative for the temporal community. P. Farla argues in this context that in combining Gen. 1:27 with 2:24 (Mark 10:6-8) the former passage becomes "immediately and explicitly involved in marriage... The sexual differences of man and woman form the mainspring and foundation for their unity in marriage".<sup>49</sup>

Furnish, on the contrary, denies this claim. He thinks that this Jesus tradition is not about "heterosexuality" but about divorce and that "divorce is in every case a perversion of the created order and thus always contrary to God's will".<sup>50</sup> However, Furnish persists on his excessively technical reading of the

Genesis accounts and fails to see that this is not Jesus' perspective in the Gospels. For Jesus it is not the institutional or reproductional side of marriage that is perverted through divorce alone. Rather, he emphasises the complementarity of male and female within a covenant of fidelity according to Gen. 1 and 2. He even puts the "one flesh" union in the context of direct divine intervention ("what God has joined together...", Matt. 19:6) and so revalues marriage significantly.<sup>51</sup>

Thus Jesus opposes the widely "hard-hearted" and patriarchal practice of marriage (Matt. 19:8) which was oppressive for the women and revealed a misconception about the Creator's original intention. Marriage is affirmed as a lifelong partnership between man and woman intended by the Creator from "the beginning" (Matt. 19:8) and as an institution that may display the already present kingdom of God. This aspect is implied, as L. Cahill points out, in Matthew 5:27-32, where Jesus puts marriage in the realm of the "kingdom present". With other words Jesus is setting up an ideal of marriage, drawn from the beginning, that is attainable for the "kingdom people". Obviously the eschatological aspect of the gospel plays a significant part regarding marriage in the New Testament.

Paul agrees with this indissolubility demand of the Lord as well as the one exception to the norm, which is *porneia*, only found in Matthew 19.<sup>52</sup> Addressing the problem of divorce in the Corinthian community, he carefully clarifies the saying of Jesus (1 Cor. 7:10) and then adds his own comment about exceptional cases (v.12). Concerning *porneia*, Paul also cites the Genesis accounts to contrast the Creator's ideal of the "one-flesh" union with the perversion of that union, which is union with a prostitute (1 Cor. 6:16). Thus Paul's connecting of marriage with the "one flesh" union of Gen. 2:24 shows that creation-theology is part of Paul's moral reasoning.<sup>53</sup>

The implication of this is that Paul understands marriage as the exclusive place and the safest place for sexual activity. In Paul's eyes all extra marital sexual activity damages the *soma* ("body").<sup>54</sup> The *soma* as a physical and spiritual "medium of personal communication" is of such a high value that the person who engages in *porneia* is dishonouring and degrading the *soma* in a particularly shameful and damaging way (1 Cor. 6:15b; cf. Rom. 1:24).<sup>55</sup> The positive side of Paul's argument is the possibility of using the body as an

instrument for the glorification of God in marriage (1 Cor. 6:20b; 1 Cor. 7). W. Schrage thus writes about this protective aspect of marriage in Paul's mind:

Ehe gilt ihm (Paul) als eine schöpfungsmäßige Ordnung und als wirksamer Wall und Damm gegen die dämonische Macht der Unzucht und den Einbruch des Bösen (cf. 1 Cor. 7:5).<sup>58</sup>

Some theologians, however, do not accept such a positive Pauline attitude towards marriage. It is claimed that 1 Corinthian 7 evidently shows that Paul has an all together low view of marriage. These scholars suggest that Paul's evaluation of marriage is supposed to be predominately negative and reserved. It is only a "necessary evil, a means for the satisfaction of "non-Christian desire", a "safety-valve" for evil transgressions, or simply given for the avoidance of immorality (comp. 1 Cor. 7:1-7). M. Honecker claims "bei Paulus wird die Ehe einseitig negativ zum Zweck der Vermeidung der Unzucht her gesehen".<sup>57</sup>

But this is a selective view of the matter. Similarly to the objection concerning Paul's view on women, discussed above, it has to be taken into account that Paul writes to the Corinthian church, and in particular to some of its members who had an excessive zeal for asceticism (cf. 1 Cor. 7:1).<sup>58</sup> This implies that Paul is not giving an all-embracing teaching on marriage but is rather responding to a special situation. He is reminding the mentioned church members that an antagonistic attitude towards the body and sex leads even more into immorality, and for that reason marriage is the more clear-headed and less illusory option that avoids this danger.<sup>59</sup> This of course does not fully explain Paul's undoubtedly reserved attitude towards marriage. This reservation however, is in accordance with the Gospels, where the provisional character of marriage is explicit (Mark 12:25, the resurrected "will neither marry nor are given in marriage"). It is true to say that marriage in Paul's eyes, particularly in view of his *parousia* expectancy, is secondary to the preparation for this eschatological hope (1 Cor. 7). Similarly Schrage explains:

Entscheidend für die paulinische Empfehlung der Ehelosigkeit ist also die eschatologisch-christologische Motivation, nicht eine spätantike Ehemüdigkeit oder gar asketisch-dualistische Ehefeindschaft.<sup>60</sup>

Thus Paul is not discriminating against sexuality in any way but rather opposes every form of uncontrolled and passionate lust, that causes people to misuse their bodies for selfish and self-destructive purposes (Rom. 1:24; 1 Cor. 6:18; 1 Thess. 4:3-4). Paul appears to be "defending a positive appraisal of marriage and sexuality".<sup>61</sup>

### ***Is monogamy required?***

Concerning the question whether Jesus and Paul took it for granted that marriage has to be a monogamous relationship, it has to be said that there is not much in the Bible that would affirm that, but much which indicates it. The Bible on the whole neither prohibits polygamy nor clearly enjoins monogamy. Passages in the New testament like 1 Cor. 7:2 (".. each man should have his own wife") and 1 Tim. 3:2, 12; Tim. 1:6 (spiritual leaders are required to be husbands of one wife) point into such a direction. Even more important might be that the relational purpose of marriage, and the realisation of an "one flesh" union clearly requires a monogamous situation.

The Old Testament's ideal, despite the patriarchs' polygamous marriages, appears to be monogamy, which is indicated in several passages that portray the relation of Yahweh and Israel (Hos. 1f.; Mall. 2:10f.; Prov. 2:17). Apparently this (theological?) ideal was not fully acknowledged and realised in the Jewish society. The question why the Jewish polygamous society did not perceive (like Jesus) that the creation accounts pointed towards the monogamous ideal might be mentioned in this context. Obviously the sociological norm in the Jewish community of the Old Testament period was that polygamy is accepted yet not practised by everyone. This sociological norm stood in opposition to the theological norm that is revealed in the creation accounts. If the observations above are correct, then Jewish society not only failed to perceive the ideal of monogamy, but also the "historical remarkable stipulation" (due to its abnormality from a sociological point of view) that the man was expected to abandon his social relations in order to "cleave" to the woman. The other implications in the Genesis accounts (woman as helper for the "helpless" man; woman as the "crown" of creation; the rule of the man over the woman a consequence of the Fall) further point to the assumption that the Jewish society did not live up to the standard that God constituted at creation. By looking at

the texts of the New Testament this standard seems to have been affirmed by the apostolic teaching.

The Christian community pictures the bond between Christ and the church in terms of marital imagery (e.g. Eph. 5),<sup>62</sup> another indication that Christian tradition universally assumed that monogamous marriage is the biblical norm, though Scriptural testimony is not totally clear about it. That raises the question how to evaluate and classify creational descriptions or norms for sexuality? Before we turn to that, a short summary.

## **Conclusion**

All this shows so far, that the New Testament writers evaluate the creation accounts as normative for their sexual ethics. And they understand (monogamous) marriage as ordained by God from creation. The text in Gen. 2:24 "they shall be two in one flesh" was the foundation of the early Christian ethics of marriage. There clearly is an emphasis on the social aspect of marriage, particularly in the teaching of Jesus in the Synoptics, for the protection of wives who were too easily rejected and dismissed by their husbands. However, the deeper meaning of the 'one-flesh-union' is further emphasised by Paul, which indicates that it is more than a mere social institution. Sexual union between a man and a woman is described here as something that involves the whole human being, not just the physical body, and must not be devalued through any form of promiscuous behaviour. Consequently the New Testament makes it explicitly clear that the only right place for sexual intercourse is marriage and sexual activity outside the marriage bond is classified as immoral (*cf.* 1 Cor. 7:2; 1 Tess. 4:3). Sexual sin in the New Testament is always a violation of marriage. On this account it seems appropriate to speak about the centrality of marriage, or marriage as the norm, regarding sexuality in the Bible.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. T.E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?*, *op.cit.*, pp.39-45; J. Stott, "Homosexual Relationships", *op.cit.*, pp.344-347; R.B. Hays, "Awaiting", *op.cit.*, p.10; S. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics*, *op.cit.*, pp. 18-39; R.M. Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures*, *op.cit.*, pp.124-130.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "The Bible and Homosexuality", *op.cit.*, pp.22, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. P.A. Bird, "'Male and Female He Created Them': Gen. 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," *Harvard Theological Review* 74/2 (1981): pp.129-59.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.132.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*; K. Barth makes some foundational statements about the relations between the sexes and, for instance, claims that "the 'I' is created for the correspondence with the 'you', and apart from each other there is no such thing as humanity", cf. K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, III/2, p.344; very distinctive is Barth's dogmatic reasoning concerning "Mann und Frau" ("man and woman") that is grounded in the "Schöpfungsgebot" ("creation-order") from which all theological ethics derives. Thus he writes in view of Gen. 2:18-25: "Sollte es aber ein Wissen um Mann und Frau geben, das wir bei der Frage nach Gottes Gebot als ein Vorgegebenes behandeln dürften, dann müsste es doch wohl ein sicheres und nicht ein unsicheres Wissen sein. Daß Mann und Frau - in der durch die diese unumkehrbare Folge geordneten Beziehung zueinander - das menschliche Geschöpf Gottes und als solche Gottes Ebenbild, das Gleichnis des Gnadenbundes sind, das ist das sichere Theologische Wissen, mit dem wir hier arbeiten, an dem wir uns aber hier auch genügen lassen", *KD* III/4, p.168; cf. pp.142f.

<sup>6</sup> The Priestly account dates from the sixth century BC, around the time of the fall of the nation and exile, and the Yahwist account earlier, dating from the time of the monarchy in the tenth century BC

<sup>7</sup> Bird, "Male and Female", *op.cit.*, p.156.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p.156.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Cahill, *Between the Sexes*, *op.cit.*, p.53; cf. J. Jennies who confirms that procreation is the central theme in Gen.1, while Gen. 2 contributes the theme of companionship, making the texts complementary, "Human Sexuality in the Scripture," in: *Human Sexuality and Personhood* (St. Louis: Pope John Center, 1981): 15-16.

<sup>11</sup> *Between the Sexes*, *op.cit.*, p.47.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> S.M. Schneiders, "From Exegesis to Hermeneutics: The Problem of the Contemporary Meaning of Scripture," *Horizons* 8/1 (1981): p.30.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.34, 36.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37. We will come back to her "hermeneutical model" of interpretation when we discuss the question how to interpret Scripture for ethical concerns.

<sup>16</sup> P. Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, *Overtures to Biblical Theology* 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978): pp.15-21.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from the German translation "Gott und Sexualität im Alten Testament", transl. by M. Reppekus (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verl. Gerd Mohn, 1993): p.26.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 93-128; comp. Cahill, *Between*, *op.cit.*, pp.49-50.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Tribble, *op.cit.*, pp.98-101. Cahill's objection concerning this interpretation is twofold. This interpretation seems to suggest that humanity is not intrinsically sexual, a view that is at odds with the anthropologies both of the biblical author and the Christian tradition. Secondly, against Tribble's thesis stands the fact that, though there is a Hebrew word that can only be used for a single male (*'s*), and a word for a single female (*'issâ*), the word *'adâm* continues to be used (along with *'s*) about the male after the creation of the woman; cf. *Between*, *op.cit.*, pp.54, 57 (fn. 11).

<sup>20</sup> comp. *ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>21</sup> Cahill, *Between*, *op.cit.*, p.50.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.51.

<sup>23</sup> A.C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1992): p. 454; cf. pp. 452-562.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. S. Terrin, *Till the Heart Sings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985): pp.10-11.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp.7-9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.9-10.

<sup>27</sup> Cahill, *Between*, *op.cit.*, p.54; P.K. Jewett writes: "Although women shared in the covenant relationship, the social and religious institutions of Israelite society were undeniably patriarchal"; *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975): pp.86-94.

<sup>28</sup> Cahill, *ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>29</sup> *Gender, Power, and Promise* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993): pp.22-38.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 28.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. M. Bal, "Sexuality, Sin, and Sorrow; The Emergence of the Female Character," in: *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987): pp.104-32; D. Jobling, "Myth and its Limits in Genesis 2.4b-3.24," in: *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible, II*. JSOTS 39 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986): pp.17-43.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp.48,52.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. regarding the following observations: Terrien, *op.cit.*, pp.10-17; Cahill, *Between*, *op.cit.*, pp.54-56; Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, *op.cit.*, pp.120-28; Tribbe, *Gott und Sexualität*, *op.cit.*, pp.89-101, 116-129.

<sup>36</sup> *op.cit.*, p.13.

<sup>37</sup> Cahill, *Between*, *op.cit.*, p.55.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. H. Balz, "Biblische Aussagen zur Homosexualität", *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 31, 1987: p.67; J. Becker, "Zum Problem der Homosexualität in der Bibel", *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 31 (1987): p.56: "Das neutestamentliche Eheverständnis folgt einer rigorosen jüdischen Linie... Nur die strenge Einehe ist Norm"; U. Eibach, "Homosexualität und Kirche", *op.cit.*, p.105.

<sup>39</sup> Ringeling, "Zur Ethischen Urteilsfindung", *op.cit.*, p.100.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1974): pp.220-21.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.317-18; comp. J. Stott, "Homosexual Partnerships", *op.cit.*, pp.345-46.

<sup>42</sup> C. Westermann points out that marriage in Old Testament times was predominately recognised as "Vermehrungsordnung" ("reproduction-order"), and the blessing of God for the marriage was especially vivid in its fruitfulness, meaning the children as the explicit sign of a blessed marital life, cf. C. Westermann, *Der Segen in der Bibel und im Handeln der Kirche* (Stuttgart, 1981).

<sup>43</sup> The Hebrew Scriptures permit divorce and concubinage, but nevertheless, they hold marital faithfulness to be ideal (Mal. 2:14-16). The New Testament on the contrary interprets the "one flesh" unity of Genesis 2:24 in monogamous terms; cf. L. Cahill, *Sex, gender, and Christian Ethics*, *op.cit.*, p.90f.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, *op.cit.*, p.120.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.121.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. J. P. Sampley, *'And The Two Shall Become One Flesh'* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971). Sampley cites an Jewish commentator: "There is no reason to question the assertion that 'Marriage is ordained in Gen. 1,22 and 2,24' (cf. BT Mo'ed Katan, *The Talmud* [Soncino Press], p.39, n.1)": p.57; cf. G.F. Moore, *Judaism in the first Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958): II, p.119.

<sup>47</sup> F. Delitzsch highlights that term "one-flesh" implies more than a reference to procreation or sexual intercourse, it is "als geistliche Einheit, die allumfassendste persönliche Gemeinschaft" *per se*; cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, *op.cit.*, p.318; "das hebräische wort *basr* meint das Menschsein als ganzes unter dem Aspekt der Körperlichkeit", *op.cit.*, p.318.

<sup>48</sup> Cahill, *Between*, *op.cit.*, p.56.

<sup>49</sup> "The two shall become one flesh" - Gen. 1:27 and 2:24 in the New Testament Marriage Texts", in: *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings* [Kampen: Uitgeversmaatscappij J.H. Kok, 1989]: p.69

<sup>50</sup> Cf. "The Bible and Homosexuality", *op.cit.*, p.23.

<sup>51</sup> Furnish, however, is right in pointing out that one should avoid drawing conclusions about homosexuality from this tradition too easily, and further, it is true to say that Jesus had nothing distinctive to say about homosexuality and that this topic was not a matter of special concern within the church that preserved and applied Jesus' sayings, cf. *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Cf. E. Hirsute, "Randglossen zu 1 Kor. 7", *Zeitschrift für Studien in Theologie* 3, (1926): 50-62.

<sup>53</sup> W. Schrage qualifies Paul's use of creation theology: "Zwar ist die Schöpfungstheologie nicht der Gesamthorizont paulinischer Theologie,... aber doch eine kritische Mitte zwischen der

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Verweltlichung und der Entweltlichung des christlichen Lebens" (*Ethik des Neuen Testaments*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982): p.194; K.W. Huggins argues that Gen. 2:24, as the background for Paul's sexual ethics, is consistent with (a) first-century Judaism (cf. *Tob.* 6:17, 8:6; *Sir.* 25:24; 36:24; *Jub.* 3:4-6; *Macc.* 18:7; *Apoc. Mos.* 25:4; 42:1; *m. Yambam* 6:60), (b) Jesus' teaching (see above), and (c) the Church's teachings (Eph. 5:31), ("An Investigation", *op.cit.*, p.177-78).

<sup>54</sup> For a deeper discussion on Paul's high view of the *soma* see: W. Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther VII/2*, EKK (Zürich, Braunschweig, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger and Neukirchener Verlag, 1991): p.22f.; E. Käsemann, "Leib und Leib Christi. Eine Untersuchung zur paulinischen Begrifflichkeit", *BHTh* 9 (1933): p.119f.; *ibid.*, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen* (Göttingen, 1970): "Soma ist jenes Stück Welt das wir selber sind und für das wir Verantwortung tragen... Leib ist der Mensch in seiner Weltlichkeit, also Kommunikationsfähigkeit", p.129f.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. B. Byrne, "Sinning against One's own Body: Paul's understanding of the sexual relationship in 1 Cor. 6:18", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983): pp.608-16; D.R. Carlidge, "1 Corinthians 7 as a Foundation for a Christian Sex Ethics", *Journal of Religion* 55 (1975): pp.220-234; He writes: "Sexual sin becomes a unique sin in Paul's ethics", p.227.

<sup>56</sup> Schrage, *Ethik*, *op.cit.*, p.210.

<sup>57</sup> *Grundriss der Socioethik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1995): p.158; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975): p.116f.; *comp.* W. Schrage, "Zur Frontstellung der paulinischen Ehebewertung in 1 Kor. 7,1-7", in: G. Dautzenberg, *Die Frau im Urchristentum* (Freiburg, 1983): pp.225-53.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. P. Farla, *op.cit.*, p.75; H. Merklin, "Es ist gut für den Menschen, eine Frau nicht anzufassen'. Paulus und die Sexualität nach 1 Kor. 7", in: G Dautzenberg, *Die Frau im Urchristentum* (Freiburg, 1983): pp.225-53; B. Brooten takes 1 Cor. 7:1 ("It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman") as being Paul's view, *Love between Women*, *op.cit.*, p.263. This opinion, however, is not shared by the most commentators today, but it is assumed that Paul quotes a Corinthian saying, Cf. W. Schrage, *1 Kor. II/2*, EKK, *op.cit.*, pp.52f.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. W. Schrage, *Ethik*, *op.cit.*, pp.234f.

<sup>60</sup> Schrage, *Ethik*, *op.cit.*, p.234-36; *comp.* G. Friedrich, *Sexualität und Ehe* (Stuttgart, 1977): pp.62f; D.R. Carlidge, *op.cit.*, pp.227f.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. P. Farla, *op.cit.*, p.82.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. fn. 71 above.

## Ethical decisions and Scripture

As the discussion has shown so far, the Biblical canon upholds marriage as a creational institution whose intrinsic purpose is to be "fruitful" according to the order of creation and its procreational and propagational aspects. And further, this institution provides the platform for a complementary partnership between a man and a woman of which the "one flesh" union signifies its sexual component as well as its most intimate communication of two persons of the opposite sex. Thus the Bible may be taken to be the foundation for such a statement as: marriage is the norm for the relation between the sexes and there is no other place for sexual activity outside of marriage. So what is the significance of this for the homosexuality debate?

Coming back to the religious problem described above, it is doubtful, these days, whether this foundational statement can be maintained in its absolute sense regarding the existence of a constitutional homosexuality. The Pauline description of the situation (Rom. 1:26-27), which implies the view that sexual union between a man and a woman is the only "normal" relation, is not as accepted today as it probably was in Paul's time among the Jews and Christians. Paul could have expected to find his readers to agree with him on this matter, which is indicated in his use of contemporary language and his basic agreement with the viewpoint of contemporary Hellenistic-Jewish writers (though with a slightly different yet significant emphasis on "passionate lust").

Today, however, Paul's view is questioned. Supported by empirical and scientific studies (as well as by a post-modern way of thinking about ethical norms?) scholarly and public opinion tends to think that homosexuality is a constitutional reality, or at least not normal, yet not *morally* wrong. Hence, the absolute regulation of the Bible that sexual activity is only allowed in marriage is diminished. And further, the normative and authoritative place of Paul's description is at stake here. In other words, as Mark D. Smith has remarked, the authority of "Scripture" in its understanding is clearly at issue. Since Paul builds his view on the Hebrew condemnation of homosexuality, as argued above, the significance of this authority-question is expanded to questions about canonical authority and the place of Scripture in ethics in general.

## Defining the Problem

W. Stegemann, who questioned the relevance of Paul's comments on homosexuality, mentioned above, has also pointed out that the evaluation whether Paul's comments are accepted or not depends on one's evaluation of the biblical accounts. He thus argues from a certain standpoint by making what he calls a "principle decision" ("Grundsatzentscheidung"). This entails that all interpretations of Paul's remarks for normative ethics are grounded in the principle whether one has a "fundamental" or "historical-critical" approach to his sayings.<sup>2</sup> The fundamental approach is, in Stegemann's view, to be understood as taking Scripture at face-value, word for word applicable for today, while ignoring or down-playing historical analysis. The historical-critical approach takes into account the reasons why Paul says what he says by looking at the characteristics of his society and its mentality, focusing on "what really happens" and the "facts" behind the text, in order to qualify certain passages and to find out what influenced Paul's thinking. On this account Stegemann claims that every historical-critical approach to the problem of homosexuality in the Bible must end up with the conclusion that the Bible's standards and norms for sexuality are outmoded and irrelevant.<sup>3</sup>

By making this two-sided distinction between the "fundamentalists" and the "historians" Stegemann, however, draws a too simplistic picture of the problem. About this "Grundsatzentscheidung" it is notable that not all scholars who, along with Stegemann, use a historical-critical approach to the text for evaluating the acceptability of Paul's remarks regarding homosexuality end up with the same conclusion.<sup>4</sup> Not only "fundamentalists" maintain that biblical ethics can be applied to modern situations, and that Paul's ethical reasoning has a thorough theological foundation.<sup>5</sup> However, Stegemann certainly moves in the right direction for identifying the root of the problem concerning the diversity of opinions and convictions about ethical questions in contemporary debates. This diversity is especially vivid in the homosexual debate, but it cannot be restricted to this case. Thus scholarly discussion about the use of Scripture in ethics must be placed in a wider context.

## **The Interpretation of Scripture and the Canon**

W.C. Spohn found out, in a survey of arguments about the place of Scripture in Christian ethics, that contemporary Christian ethics does not use the Bible in such a way, as a "source-book of moral norms".<sup>6</sup>

Most of the authors we investigated propose an illuminative rather than a prescriptive use of Scripture. Decisions should be made in light of the central concerns and commitments of the canonical text, but decisions are not directly derived from biblical prescriptions.<sup>7</sup>

According to this study, much contemporary ethical decision-making focuses on the illuminative character of Scripture, upholding the importance of its canonical construction. However, though it is true to say that for many scholars the canon embodies an authoritative standard for the church<sup>8</sup>, on the whole it is explicit that there still exists much diversity among scholars about the question of what this actually means. Basically, the arguments move into two directions. Some scholars insist that there is a certain biblical integrity in reinterpreted form and others doubt the exclusive authority of the canon and additionally rely on external criteria.<sup>9</sup>

B. Childs, for instance, refers to the "full range" of biblical witnesses when approaching a particular issue, assuming that the canon enables the interpreter to engage in "a dialectical process of interpretation" of the biblical texts and books in the light of one another.<sup>10</sup> He explains that the canon provides "a context, different from both Testaments, in which the Christian church continues to wrestle in every new age with the living God".<sup>11</sup> Later he writes about the "final" (i.e., canonical) form of a text that is important for and alone can "exercise an authority on the community of faith".<sup>12</sup> B. Birch and L. Rasmussen affirm such a view and argue for a "canonical framework of control". Other scholars uphold the notion of canonical integrity, yet with restrictions.<sup>13</sup> D.H. Kelsey, for example, argues for the incorporation of other sources that correspond with canonical authority, as there exists the common life of the church as well as the theologian's "biblical construes" of how God is present in the community. However, Kelsey still insists that the centrality of Scripture for theology and community is provided by the canon.<sup>14</sup>

By way of contrast, some critics charge this group of scholars of attempting to unify a great diversity implicit in the Bible for the sake of retaining canonical

authority. Thus J. Barr argues against Childs that such "canonical criticism" is a desire for "hermeneutical certainty" within definite boundaries, but that to assert such certainty than be provided by the canon does not ensure it.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Barr maintains that to gain meaningful theological interpretation of the canon requires a choice of priorities within it.<sup>16</sup> This, he claims, is an acceptable hermeneutical principle, because we must read the individual books of the canon in the context of their particular historical situation *and* considering the persons who wrote them. Simply to assume a 'canon within the canon' would not do justice to their original meaning and intention.

Therefore, we need to see that the authority of the Bible not only means the authority of the books as such but also the authority of the people, the time, the life of the Bible. Barr goes on to say:

It no longer makes sense to speak of the authority of the Bible as if it meant the authority of the written documents, quite apart from the persons and lives that lie behind them. Authority must belong to both: certainly to the books, but not only to the books... Christianity as a faith is not directed in the first place towards a book, but towards the persons within and behind that book and the life of the ancient community which was their context in which they made themselves known. Critical biblical study, in making known something more of that life and those persons, is thus - at the very least - contributing directly towards the understanding of the basis of authority that underlies the church.<sup>17</sup>

Barr emphasises here the importance of the historical situation and the "facts" behind the text, in order to constitute a meaningful interpretation which is not based on an abstract "theological" harmonisation of diversities but on "truthful" historical research into the "extrinsic realities to which the text refers."<sup>18</sup>

This concept of interpretation is at bottom affirmed and applied in the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who approaches the question of canonical authority from a particular feminist perspective.<sup>19</sup> Very distinctive for her is the proposal that scholars and theologians need to replace a widely accepted "hermeneutics of consent" with a "hermeneutics of suspicion".<sup>20</sup> This suspicion is grounded in the assumption that the biblical authors' horizon of meaning was a patriarchal one, which should exclude the possibility of fusing the contemporary horizon of meaning with theirs.

Fiorenza contends, firstly, that it is of primary importance to define the historical reality behind the Bible to gain a viewpoint that is freed from the denigratory image of the subordination of woman. Thus, only the "revelatory canon" is authoritative for her. In particular, Fiorenza refers to the

egalitarianism of Jesus' ministry, which she understands as normative in the canon for us. In Jesus' ministry, as displayed in the gospel, the "discipleship of equals" was truly realised, while those passages in the New Testament, that display a hierarchical view of women basically show that a departure from this ideal had taken place in the early church. Apparently the struggle over leadership of women in the church (cf. e.g. Gal. 3:28 versus 1 Cor. 14:34-36) has left some traces in the writings of those first communities.<sup>21</sup>

According to such a reading of Scripture, a right ethical decision in sexual matters can only be done when biblical texts are read with a suspicious attitude, if their writers were heavily influenced by a patriarchal viewpoint. Krister Stendahl does not write from a feminist perspective yet affirms Fiorenza's principle in his contribution to this discussion. For him it is clear that Scripture includes views and themes that have to be rejected because they are incorrect and in themselves opposing true Christian teaching. The discrepancy in the biblical vision on sexuality is a case in point for Stendahl. He claims that women's subordination is "part of the biblical tradition in its main thrust", which shows that parts of Scripture belong to human "fallenness". On this account we should not be afraid to "close a lot of issues".<sup>22</sup> There are deep and illuminating insights in Scripture, Stendahl maintains, like Paul's announcement of the equality of sexes (Gal. 3:28), but even Paul occasionally fails to live up to his own principles.<sup>23</sup>

However, it is difficult to see how Stendahl's view here is compatible with his preceding remarks where he insists that there is something like a "gradation" within the canon. He disagrees with a concept about Scripture that implies a gradation of authority in terms of "Jesus knows best, Paul knows well, and the secondary rendition is not really of truly revelatory quality."<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, he is willing to discriminate between certain passages and concepts of the canon and classifies them as non-normative because they reflect traces of human fallenness in Scripture (e.g. 1 Tim. 2:9-15).

With regard to the proposals of Fiorenza and Stendahl Lisa Cahill points out that neither of them "defines precisely the criteria of discrimination between redemptive and sinful, normative and non-normative, canonical elements," but they both simply refer them to the ongoing communal experience.<sup>25</sup> By referring to the ongoing communal experience, these authors question

canonical integrity, but do not show how to discriminate which are inauthentic or corrupted texts of Scripture. What is clear is that Fiorenza discovers a contrast between liberation and oppression in the canon itself, while Stendahl argues that "a broadening of what is theologically 'authoritative' is required to include what is novel in Christian experience."

Cahill also refers to Robin Scrogg's discussion of homosexuality in the New Testament.<sup>26</sup> She argues that Robin Scroggs affirms the viewpoint of Fiorenza and Stendahl in his study. He also allows contemporary experience to modify the authority of Scripture, at least in part. His conclusion about the matter, which claims that Paul's remarks are "irrelevant for today's debate" because he only condemns a specific form of homosexual behaviour (pederasty), are built upon the following hermeneutical principles proposed by him: The interpreter needs to (1) define the meaning of the biblical statements in their historical and literary context accurately, (2) compare the specific meaning of the texts with the major theological and ethical themes of the Bible, (3) and find out whether the cultural context of the text bears reasonable similarity to the modern context in which it is to be applied. On this basis he dismisses Paul's condemnation of homosexuality.<sup>27</sup> Hence, the implication of Scrogg's proposal is equal to Fiorenza's and Stendahl's proposals. The canon as a whole is not authoritative but only in part. Historical criticism reveals the "facts" behind the biblical descriptions and allows us, indeed, demand of us to qualify the authoritative position of certain bits of Scripture. There is no such thing as complete to self-contained canonical integrity.

Cahill criticises Scroggs for being ambiguous in his hermeneutical criteria. Though she acknowledges that Scroggs criteria are "helpful in relating specific moral statements to the larger spheres of experience and tradition," she nevertheless sees herself compelled to ask "how precisely is it to be determined what is the heart of the biblical and ethical traditions of Christianity, and what specific moral judgements are or are not enduring expressions of it?" In answering this question Cahill refers to other scholars who dispute that there is any single substantive theme that lies at the core of the biblical traditions. Moreover she asks "what aspects of the referent of a moral judgement is its 'context' and how is the 'reasonableness' of similarity between two contexts to be ascertained?" As Cahill says:

While the specific contexts of biblical and modern discussion of homosexuality are different, in that they have in view different sorts of homosexual relationships, their broader contexts may have points in common. An example is the Judeo-Christian commitment to heterosexual monogamy as the proper sphere of sexual activity.<sup>28</sup>

From this it becomes clear that, though Fiorenza, Stendahl, and Scroggs are not unambiguous about their reason for discrimination between certain biblical passages, they nevertheless fail to define the precise criteria for discrimination. To bridge this imprecision other theologians continue attempt to reconstruct the historical background of the canonical texts. The following question results from this strategy.

***What is the significance of the historical background for hermeneutics?***

The proposals of the scholars mentioned above imply the conviction that the historical critical approach is *the* essential tool for good interpretation. Driven by such a conviction, much effort has been invested by several scholars in the last two or three decades who have tried to reconstruct the historical setting of the New Testament, especially regarding Jesus' ministry. It is argued that the *historical events* behind the canonical texts are the key for proper hermeneutics. That is because Scripture is constituted by the first Christian communities' interpretation of the historical events, so that all we really have is a "second hand" facet of historical material handed down to us by the early ecclesiastical traditions. Therefore we need historical criticism that enables the contemporary interpreter to reconstruct the historical background and helps to evaluate the authenticity of the different texts and sayings of the canon accurately.<sup>29</sup>

Norman Perrin and Reginald Fuller, for example, are interested in the "authentic Jesus".<sup>30</sup> In their view it is possible to discover which sayings and claims of Jesus are "authentic" among the "competing kerygmata" in the gospels, by evaluating the historical knowledge of Jesus, yielded by the New Testament and confirmed by historical and non-Christian sources. Thus, only the authentic and historical Christ is relevant and significant for ethical evaluation.<sup>31</sup>

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza affirms a comparable endeavour. Though not interested in a "quest for the historical Jesus," she is eager to find out about the "historical basis of her faith" that is represented in the original ministry of Christ by means of historical criticism. Apparently, only the ministry of Christ reveals the true vision of the equality of sexes accurately. She argues that "the locus of revelation is not the androcentric text but the life and ministry of Jesus and the movement of women and men called forth by him."<sup>32</sup> Thus, the goal of this hermeneutical method is to redefine an authentic, or truly Christian interpretation of the early church's "interpretation" by reinterpreting the historical events transmitted to us through the Bible.

However, other scholars doubt that it is very possible to reconstruct a full historical picture by simply looking at the biblical texts that would allow one to discriminate certain passages in such way. Leander E. Keck objects that the criteria that isolate the distinctive teaching of Jesus are unsatisfactory because they neglect the full picture of what is characteristic of Jesus.<sup>33</sup> Equally suspicious of the claim that historical events are the interpretative key and that those historical events in the New Testament are reliably described and sufficient sources for a proper reconstruction of history is Lisa Cahill. She objects that "it would be a mistake to see those events as genuinely "external", both because they are accessible primarily through the canon and because the canon includes them as an integral part of its own meaning."<sup>34</sup>

Thus, to take the historical events that gave rise to the canon as the primary criteria for proper hermeneutics is not sufficient either, because it appears to be too problematic to suppose that a full historical picture can be distinguished in the New Testament texts. To identify the "authentic" Christian sayings of the canon on such ground is a dubious endeavour. Nevertheless, the thought that ethical norms developed in the early church must not be dismissed too easily. It has been argued that the canon itself includes changes in ethical norms that were accomplished and tolerated by the early Christian communities due to their communal needs and experiences. This, it is claimed, can be acknowledged without accepting the same level of discrimination about texts to be found in the canon such as those proposed by the theologians discussed above.

## **The Hermeneutical Task - A Developmental Process?**

Much has been written on the question whether the Bible includes moral rules that are timeless and universal and whether they can be imposed on us as well. In this respect, J.M. Gustafson has earned much credibility for his contributions on this matter. Gustafson argues that it is important to distinguish between an understanding of the Bible as "revealed morality" and "revealed reality" when it comes to canonical authority.<sup>35</sup> He explains that the primary purpose of Scripture is not to provide moral laws, precepts and commands, but to provide theological principles that can be used for interpreting what "God is doing" and further to provide the theological context that illumines the contemporary issue in question. Thus Scripture provides the "basic orientation towards particular judgements" and "deeply informs these judgements... but it does not by itself determine what they ought to be. *That determination is done by persons and communities as finite moral agents responsible to God.*"<sup>36</sup> Later Gustafson argued that any prescriptive sexual ethics must attend to three "fundamental bases". These are human nature, both biological and "personal"; the reality of moral and religious evil or sin; and "the social character of human experience".<sup>37</sup> These bases can be established with biblical accounts that are one sort of material, but these accounts need to be complemented by philosophical, traditional, and empirical sources.

On these accounts scholars and ethicists have rejected accounts that primarily describe the Bible as prescribing moral laws, principles or commands. Some even dismiss the notion of "moral-rule" altogether. For example Allen Verhey argues that it is not adequate to inquire of Scripture at the "moral-rule" level.<sup>38</sup> Scripture, he claims, is not a timeless moral code, as if the New Testament texts "dropped from heaven", or a source from which we may derive an "autonomous, impartial, and universal ethic" that is "based on reason and impartial to the commitments and loyalties of the moral agent."<sup>39</sup> Verhey attempts to find a way for using Scripture correctly in ethical discourse within the boundary of the Chalcedonian consensus. Apparently, the Chalcedonian consensus laid down the principle that the Bible is the "Word of God" *and* the "words of men". Thus, the author moves between these two descriptions of Scripture and offers a "modest proposal" that, as he thinks, recognises these two descriptive aspects of Scripture yet avoids becoming entangled with any of

those extreme views of fundamentalism and liberalism.<sup>40</sup> However, it appears that Verhey tends to emphasise the human "word of men" side of Scripture more than the authoritative "Word of God" side of it.

According to Verhey's understanding, the early Christian communities did not think of Scripture as "law" anymore, in the sense of an imposed moral code, but they continued in a developing process of ethical changes, which already began in Jesus' announcement of the kingdom of God. By announcing this kingdom, Jesus brought a shift of emphasis from *Halakah* to *Haggadah*, which means that a mere legal observance of laws is not sufficient anymore but that the coming kingdom demands a response of the whole person.<sup>41</sup> Thus, here, at the "beginning" of the Christian moral tradition, a clear shift from the code with its external commandments to the "issues of identity, perspective, disposition, and intentions" is accomplished by Christ. Such a development, Verhey goes on to explain, continued in the early church that interpreted the Jesus traditions in a "creative and faithful" way. Its members

... shaped and modified the words of Jesus and the catechetical tradition freely and faithfully, bringing them to bear on questions of conduct without allowing them to petrify into a timeless code that would need only to be subsequently applied.<sup>42</sup>

Verhey further refers to the Gospel writers Mark, Matthew, and Luke, as well as to Paul, who all had their individual method in applying and changing moral rules to make them fit to particular communal situations and needs. It is clear, the author claims, that "there was no attempt to impose one timeless and universal or biblical set of rules. Rather, their one fundamental loyalty, the perspective and values they shared in Christian integrity, was the basis of mutual exhortation and discernment."<sup>43</sup> There is much wisdom in Verhey's proposal, for it clarifies how the New Testament concept and meaning of morality differs from the Old Testament and what significance (or insignificance) moral rules and principles received considering the dawning and present kingdom of God. However, one is left with the question whether Verhey is right to eliminate every notion of "moral law" from the New Testament.

Gustafson's proposal is not quite as absolute regarding this question. He affirms in his writings that the mode of "moral laws and precepts" is included in

Scripture, and refers to passages that can be used as "corroborating evidence (but not proof texts) for the judgements made in the light of the more general theological and ethical principles that are used." On those lines he further explains:

Certain moral laws or precepts given in both Testaments can be used as concise specifications of the more general intent derived from Scripture and can be brought to bear upon the judgements of particular events. One would not judge ... (a particular event<sup>44</sup>) to be morally wrong simply because it violates the love commandment; the love commandment is a specification of a moral precept consistent with the biblical understanding of God's will for men, and thus it has a theological backing which is also biblically based.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, Gustafson insists on the importance of placing moral laws and precepts into the context of what "God is doing" in particular situations, and so retains a rather suspicious attitude towards the use of Scripture as revealed moral law.

Writing about the Christian evaluation of sex, L. Cahill maintains that it is difficult to argue "on a solid biblical basis that the key to the Christian evaluation of sex is categorisation of behaviours." She thinks that the condemnation of types of sexual conduct is clearly not a major moral concern of the New Testament. Economic and class behaviour are more important here. But she adds to this, that such an interpretation does not "permit any quick move to liberty-oriented renditions of a biblical ethic of sex." For her the main thrust of biblical morality is found in the condemnation of the deed that causes harm to the neighbour; and this basic evil must be avoided. Lisa Cahill emphasises this point as follows:

Key to biblical morality in all spheres of life is a strong social sense, a sense of unity in Christ with demanding ramifications for the moral life. It focuses on the ability of each disciple to recognise the need of those whom society has deemed unworthy or even "nonpersons," and to meet that need as though the other were oneself. In the sexual realm, particular care is required to insure that sexual liberty is not a screen for - and even a modern-day institutionalisation of - manipulative and ultimately oppressive sex which demeans women; fosters the destruction, neglect, or domination of children; and permits a market-place mentality of free entrepreneurship, risk-benefit analysis, and survival of the clever and well positioned, to undermine this crucial realm of human interdependence.<sup>46</sup>

According to such a view, the New Testament constitutes a morality that can be understood in general terms like love and service, directed towards the needy neighbour. Yet it would be also hard to argue that the early Christian

communities understood morality *only* in such general terms, without any more specific and detailed examples of what is right and wrong.

There might be the danger of becoming entangled in excessive generalisation, as if normative rules and precepts cannot at all be discerned in Scripture. Verhey and Gustafson argue in general terms which is of course appropriate in a discussion about the use of Scripture for *general* ethics. However, in a discussion about a *sexual* ethics, it must be pointed out, that in this case the Bible exemplifies a consistent attitude. There are definite moral laws and precepts that lay claim to absolute authority. For example, such rules like "Do not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:17; Luke 12:15; Rom. 13:9) or "Do not covet" (Ex. 20:14; Mt. 5:27; Rom. 13:9) have the status of a law or precept in both Testaments. They are never questioned or diminished in any of the New Testament writings. Though Paul summed up these rules into the one rule called "love your neighbour as yourself" (Rom. 13:9), nevertheless, love does not annul them retrospectively. Therefore, it is better to understand the early Christian community as a body of believers who shaped and redefined certain Old Testament laws and precepts, but still clung to a limited set of rules as well.

These observations have shown so far that the existence of a certain level of responsible decision-making regarding the hermeneutical task cannot be denied. The Bible should not primarily be understood in terms of static moral rules and precepts, but even more so in terms of illuminating and basic orientation towards particular judgements, though some moral rules (e.g. adultery, prostitution) cannot lose their absolute normative force because they violate foundational orders for the inter-relation of human beings (e.g. 1 Cor. 6:16). Nonetheless, such definite rules are not explicitly given for all spheres of human sexuality, so that the ethicist is often obliged to use Scripture for ethical decisions in a more "theological" sense.

About the issue of homosexuality, for example, R.B. Hays decides to understand Rom. 1 as a source for "understanding of the world and humankind." This, he claims, is the mode in which Romans 1 speaks. Hays uses Gustafson's proposed categories as a basis for his decision, and suggests that there are at least five modes in which a particular text may function as an authority for ethical discourse. These are: (1) moral law; (2) principles or ideals; (3) analogies to contemporary experience; (4)

understanding of the world and humankind; (5) understanding of God. It may well be accepted that Romans 1 is properly representative of the fourth mode so that in view of ethical reflections about homosexuality, Hays writes, "we should not try to wring laws or principles or analogies out of it".<sup>47</sup>

But does that mean that Paul's remarks on homosexuality exclude a condemnatory attitude on his side towards homosexual behaviour? This is difficult to maintain, if it is accepted that his sexual ethics, present in Romans and his other writings, exclude every form of extra-marital sexual behaviour, a point that has been discussed above. According to this view, Paul as well as the other New Testament writers maintain that sexual activity is exclusively designed for marriage, and thus, this norm is to be attached to the first mode or at least to the second mode of Gustafson's and Hays' categories.

Thus, while Romans 1 cannot be taken as a condemnation of homosexual behaviour as such, nevertheless, counterpoised with the "moral law" or "moral ideal" of marriage, homosexuality falls out of the scope of the New Testament normative description for sexual behaviour. But of course, it is doubted whether this "biblical" statement, "sex exclusively in marriage", must be understood in such a "legalistic" way. It might well be asked whether it is possible to digress from this biblical sexual norm? And if so, on what authority? Picking up the thought mentioned above, scholars like Verhey and Cahill argue that a reconstruction of biblical sexual ethics is possible due to the developmental character of ethical norms already explicit in the canon.

### ***Does the pilgrim community hold the authoritative position to reconstruct a biblical sex ethics?***

It is clear for Lisa Cahill that the Bible grounds a positive view of heterosexuality as normative for sexual love. The "Jesus sayings" on divorce establish marriage as the ideal and the norm for the sexual love between the sexes.<sup>48</sup> However, the canonical texts constitute for Cahill a model for a developmental interpretation of ethical norms in the ongoing Christian community. This claim she corroborates with reference to Mark's, Matthew's, Luke's, and Paul's use of the divorce sayings of Jesus.<sup>49</sup> Apparently, Matthew and Paul are also part of the ongoing debate within Judaism about divorce to which, as we know, Jesus contributed (*cf.* Matt. 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:11). In

agreement with other scholars, Cahill assumes that the Matthew passage "represents some kind of exception of an absolute prohibition of divorce."<sup>50</sup> This allowance for such an exceptional case ("except for *porneia*") is usually explained with the suggestion that Matthew's community (and Paul's) had a problem with "mixed marriages" between Christian converts and those who did not want to become Christian.<sup>51</sup> With Paul, it is claimed, it is similar. He explicitly distinguishes between the saying of "the Lord" (v.10) and his own (v.12; compare 1 Thess. 5:21-23), when writing about divorce to the Corinthian church.<sup>52</sup> To the Lord's command (v.10 and 11b) he adds his own comment: That, if a woman separates from her husband she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to him (v.11a).

From this Cahill derives two basic guidelines for the hermeneutical task. Firstly, there are "authoritative moral norms which ought to be based on the essential insights and concrete injunctions of the Bible" (e.g., Genesis, Mark, and Luke) and should be taken seriously. And, secondly, the biblical teaching on divorce shows that there is room for exceptions. Cahill calls it a "developmental 'handing on' (*paradosis* = *traditio*) and modification of specific moral norms" (e.g., Matthew and Paul), which is constituted by the "authoritative and canonical collection" itself.<sup>53</sup> In other words, clear ethical norms of Scripture may become modified and adjusted by the "pilgrim community", because the needs and experiences of this community determines the credibility or applicability of the norm. This constitutes a model of interpretation for the ongoing contemporary Christian community, by taking into account the twofold eschatological reality of God's reign, "as radically instituted and radically incomplete."<sup>54</sup>

This proposal is obviously a seriously thought through and honest appeal not to use Scripture in a "legalistic" way but to make room for exceptions to absolute norms which seem to be indispensably necessary in the light of changing times and circumstances.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that this reference to the divorce sayings as a model of interpretation does not stand on very secure ground. Without going into an extensive discussion about the large subject of divorce in the New Testament, still doubts can be raised about the assumption that Mark, Matthew, and Paul were adjusting the clear prohibition of Jesus to their ecclesiastical situations. Cahill builds her

view here not on any evidence from the texts that would affirm such a view, but simply on a historical reconstruction of the needs and situations of the Gospel writers' and Paul's communities. But if historical reconstruction serves as warrant for interpretation here, then other explanations for the diversities within the different versions of Jesus' teaching on divorce may well be found.

Firstly, is Mark's inclusion of women divorcing their husbands an anachronistic adaptation of Jesus' teaching? It is fairly plausible to argue that Mark relies on the original utterance of Jesus because Jesus was certainly not unaware of the pagan and Hellenistic practice of women who divorced their husbands. At least the one case of Herodias who abandoned her husband and married Antipas was well known among the Jews of his time.<sup>56</sup> Secondly, is it justifiable that the exception to the norm was made up by Matthew because he thought of it as too hard and necessary to soften it by allowing divorce in the case of marital infidelity? This solution appears to be not very likely, when it is taken into account that the author Matthew formulates Jesus' moral teachings in an exclusively uncompromising way. D. Atkinson insists that "there is no tendency in Matthew... to relax requirements of the law... The argument that the Matthean church, faced with hard cases, here resorted to a casuistry is without parallel elsewhere in the Gospel."<sup>57</sup> And lastly, the assumption that Paul included his own comment in 1 Cor. 7:11a is also not fully tenable. It is a more reasonable to argue that Paul quotes Jesus' saying on divorce in verse 10 ("I give this command [not I, but the Lord]...") and closes it in verse 11b. Only in verse 12 ("To the rest I say this [I, not the Lord]...") he goes on with his suggestion about the matter. Verse 11a is thus, at the most, a paraphrase of Christ's teaching by Paul.<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, it is far from certain that the early church really dealt with Jesus' sayings on divorce in such a manner. This doubt is further supported by the fact that the earliest interpreters of the New Testament, the early church Fathers such as Hermas, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus, or Clement of Alexandria, adopted a very strict view on divorce. The majority of those writers even did not allow remarriage after divorce, assuming that this was Jesus teaching.<sup>59</sup> Instead of diminishing Jesus' prohibition of divorce, they affirmed it. One important point can be drawn from this. The writings of those early interpreters seem to support the view that there was no

freedom to change or adjust ethical norms within the ongoing Christian community, but rather an obedient acceptance of everything that Jesus has said according to the traditions that were handed down to them.<sup>60</sup>

In this context, a scholar who appears to disagree with such a view is David Parker.<sup>61</sup> He points to the fact that there has never been a definite "original" and consequently "authoritative" text that could be discovered by the interpreters on which a position was built. He lists different early manuscripts of the Synoptic Gospels' divorce sayings of Jesus (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mk. 10:11-12; Luke 16:18) and shows that there are, as he thinks, significant variations in emphasis and literal structure. For example, he lists eight versions of Matthew 19:9 that all vary from each other in some detail. The most significant differences can be observed in the following early manuscripts of Matt. 19:9 which Parker lists:

Whoever divorces his wife, except for *porneia*, and marries another commits adultery (The Greek column of Codex Bezae [D]).

Whoever divorces his wife, except for *porneia*, makes her an adulteress; and the person marrying a divorced woman commits adultery (Sixth-century manuscript [N] and pc [*pauci*]).

Whoever divorces his wife, except for *porneia*, and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery (Washington Codex [W] and the Koridethi codex [Q078]).

Whoever divorces his wife, except for *porneia*, and marries another makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery (Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus [C\*]).<sup>62</sup>

From this kind of investigation Parker derives the argument that it is difficult to establish a fixed point in the tradition that has any unique 'authority'. It is virtually impossible to recover a definite 'original' text. While this is a valid point to reconsider when it comes to putting too much weight on textual "proofs" for theological arguments, however, Parker goes too far in his subsequent conclusions.

Parker is certainly right in pointing out that each divorce saying does not exist only in one textual form. But he exaggerates the implication of this observation that we "only have a collection of interpretative rewritings of a tradition."<sup>63</sup> Parker fails to see the other implication of his study that shows that the original norm that Jesus established (no divorce, with the one exception of

*porneia*) did not change in all the manuscripts he lists. All the different texts say nothing new on the subject of divorce, but all remain within the main thrust of the earliest manuscripts and traditions. In other words those three versions of Mark, Matthew, and Luke which are widely accepted among scholars as being the earliest and most authentic ones, and which to be found in contemporary translations of the Bible, are not saying anything other than the later manuscripts of the fourth, or sixth, or some medieval texts. Thus, to say, like Parker, that the early churches "freely" altered the tradition "to make sense of their own difficulties and conflicts," is not fully justifiable with such kind of investigating and reasoning.<sup>64</sup>

Even more so, Parker's conclusion is questionable, when he writes that "the quest for a law in the teaching of Jesus cannot be pursued," because for the early Christian there was no law but only an "idea to be explored" and a "tradition whose meaning had to be kept alive by a reflection and re-interpretation." Such a claim is certainly not true to the actual way those Christian and the subsequent re-writers of the texts understood Jesus' sayings on divorce. Obviously later duplicators of the tradition changed structures of verses or even combined Matthew's version with Mark's or Luke's or the other way round respectively, but they did not simply re-interpret their meaning. Parker is partly wrong in his claim that there is "no single letter of 'Scripture' to absolutize. Instead there will be the invitation to explore and honour the traditions."<sup>65</sup> There remains a significant difference between "Scripture" and "text" here. The early Christian communities did not attach absolute authority to single pieces of literature, but certainly to Jesus and the Apostles and the meaning of what they were believed to have said and written.

Again, it cannot be maintained that the early ecclesiastical communities simply changed the traditions and had no concept of "moral law" to which they felt obliged to submit. It is much more tenable that they had such a concept. Therefore, for the contemporary discussion the question remains what authority ought to be given to the writings of the Synoptics or Paul for today's hermeneutical task. In more specific terms, is Paul's evaluation and view on homosexuality authoritative for us today, or are we allowed to let contemporary empirical observations and scientific research, or community-needs and situations determine our decisions?

## **The Question of Scriptural Authority and other Criteria**

After carefully studying the divorce texts of the New Testament, Joseph Fitzmyer writes the following paragraph:

If Matthew under inspiration could have been moved to add an exception phrase to the saying of Jesus about divorce that he found in an absolute form in either his Marcan source or in 'Q', or if Paul likewise under inspiration could introduce into his writing an exception on his own authority then why cannot the Spirit-guided Institutional Church of a later generation make a similar exception in view of problems confronting Christian married life of its day or so called broken marriages (not really envisaged in the New Testament) as it has done in some situations?<sup>66</sup>

This is a serious question that well expresses the attitude and the way many theologians and ethicists think today. Why should the Church not be authorised to change biblical rules? Clearly, this has been done and will be done, for example, regarding the biblical view of women's ministry, the head-covering in public worship, or the Apostolic decree. However, the question remains whether the church is allowed to change the biblical norm for the inter-relationships between the sexes and in particular regarding homosexuality? This must be a valid question, especially because all of those "changed" rules above can be attached to a category of *social* norms but the biblical rules for sexuality rather to a category of *gender/sex* norms. Again, the Bible comes across rather firmly when it comes to sexual norms, and in the New Testament the coming of the kingdom even aggravates the demand for sexual purity and integrity, and the hardest punishment for sexual sins is exclusion from the kingdom or the church community (e.g., Matt. 5:28f.; 1 Cor. 6:9f.). So the question is who has the final authority in this matter?

R.B. Hays thinks about this that "we have passed into an era in which the urgent question is the relative authority of Scripture and experience."<sup>67</sup> The Reformation fought its hermeneutical battles over the relation of church tradition to Scripture and the Enlightenment wrestles a still continuing battle over the relation of reason to Scripture. But today, neither the rubrics of "tradition" nor "reason" take precedence over the discussion about authority but "experience". The feminist theologian's position illustrates this point and is also representative for other liberationist's views. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's views on this question are exemplary here. As argued above, Fiorenza

suggests that historical criticism has to be the chief means for finding out what happened in the New Testament times and consequently what is "authentic" and authoritative. But due to her specific feminist perspective, she heavily emphasises the "experience of liberation" as the essential hermeneutical principle. So "oppressed women" takes prior place in her considerations about Scriptural authority. Hence, she writes:

I would ... suggest that the revelatory canon for theological evaluation of biblical androcentric traditions and their subsequent interpretations cannot be derived from the Bible itself but can only be formulated in and through women's struggle for liberation from all patriarchal oppression... The personally and politically reflected experience of oppression and liberation must become the criterion of appropriateness for biblical interpretation and evaluation of biblical authority claims.<sup>68</sup>

Thus the extra biblical source of "experience" enables her to subordinate the authority of Scripture in principle "to the authority of critical hermeneutical insight conferred by the experience of the oppressed or of women."<sup>69</sup> The influential feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether expresses the same line of thought when she writes that the character of Scripture has to be understood as "human words about God's word."<sup>70</sup> Human experience is normative when it comes to the authority of Scripture. Scripture, she claims, is merely a reflection of human experience, experiences of people seeking to hear and to enact God's word. "What has been called the objective sources of theology, Scripture and tradition, are themselves codified collective human experience."<sup>71</sup>

Lisa Cahill's response to such kind of arguing is that Scripture supports the sort of theology or religious faith that is "authentic", "liberating", or "healing", in fact Scripture is in its very nature "redemptive". These concepts however do not determine the authority question alone. That is because Scripture is also forming and directing the reader in "a critical process of appropriating and using" it.<sup>72</sup> However, in the end Cahill agrees with Gustafson who concluded that "Scripture alone is never the final court of appeal for Christian ethics."<sup>73</sup> She thinks that the hermeneutical task requires "insights 'extrinsic' in a sense to the canon: the subsequent tradition of the faith community; the actual, describable past and present of the human community and human individuals; and normative reflection on the sort of virtues, lives, and communities that would best fulfil humanity."<sup>74</sup> Thus Scripture is normative only in a nuanced or

modified form.<sup>75</sup> Lisa Cahill reduces the feminist emphasis on "experience", yet places her rubric as authoritative for her reading of Scripture.

And it is here where opinions divide between, for example, Cahill and Hays, theologians who share a generally high view of Scripture, and who both take the considerations of other sources seriously. But Hays insists that "the Bible's perspective is privileged, not ours." He claims that "extra-biblical sources for theological insight" (and in extension "ethical") "stand in a hermeneutical relation to the New Testament; they are not independent counterbalancing sources of authority."<sup>76</sup> Thus, Hays includes other sources for illumination in ethical discourse, but concedes to Scripture a place of precedence.

Consequently, it is reasonable to say: the view one takes on the authority of Scripture depends on the fundamental standpoint of the individual interpreter. Fiorenza supports a hermeneutics of "suspicion". Yet here, the standpoints of Cahill and Hays could be understood and distinguished as grounded in a hermeneutics of "reduction" and a hermeneutics of "submission" respectively. Apparently, such a standpoint determines what view the interpreter takes concerning specific ethical decisions. This is illustrated by the differences between R.B. Hays' and Scroggs' arguments regarding homosexuality. While Hays attaches authority to the whole of Scripture here, R. Scroggs (and V.P. Furnish), on the contrary, tends rather to use the biblical material selectively and does not relate the issue explicitly to the realm of Scriptural authority.<sup>77</sup> Hence, Hays would never make such a claim as that the Pauline judgement on homosexual behaviour in Romans 1 is "not relevant for today's debate", as Scroggs does, because for him Scripture has a place superior to our own views or scientific findings.<sup>78</sup> He thinks "it prudent and necessary to let the univocal testimony of Scripture and the Christian tradition order the life of the church on this painfully controversial matter. We must affirm that the New Testament tells us the truth..."<sup>79</sup>

These considerations indicate that the interpreter needs to come to a point of decision over the matter. This decision might be achieved by answering the following question, as some theologians put it: Should Scripture have authority over the interpreter or does the interpreter have authority over Scripture, using it as one source among others? Considering such a question, it might be argued that it is almost impossible to come to a unified Christian understanding

about normative ethics, particular regarding matters of sexuality, as it appears. This leads to further investigation of contemporary scholarship research into this area. Is there another hermeneutical method that would be able to accomplish such a unity by somehow conceding an authoritative place to Scripture and at the same time recognising contemporary experiences of people and communities?

### **An Insurmountable Problem - New Ways of using Scripture?**

This diversity between authors like Cahill and Hays, or even Thielicke and Barth, which is certainly not enormous yet decisive regarding normative ethics, appears to be an insurmountable problem for other scholars and theologians as recent published writings disclose. This diversity, it is said, will never be resolved and never yield any unified Christian description in ethical matters, particularly regarding the homosexuality debate. For this reason those scholars start to think about new ways and solutions concerning the problem. They build upon and enlarge the importance of "community" regarding the proper interpretation of Scripture.

One who recognises this diversity of scholarly opinion as well, as he reflects on methods in biblical interpretation, is Stephen C. Barton.<sup>80</sup> Similar to Stegemann, mentioned above, Barton discerns two essential differing viewpoints in the discussion which are represented by the conservative fundamentalists on the one side, and the historical critics on the other. As we have argued above that such a description of the situation might be too simplistic, so for Barton there are problematic aspects to it for contemporary discussion of sexual norms derived from the Bible. He argues that these two groups have a defective starting-point when it comes to the question "whether the Bible gives some good guidance and is good news for sexuality". Barton first questioned the practice of using the Bible as a source book into which the interpreter digs or to which he goes back, as is commonly done among fundamentalists as well as historians. By doing so, Barton suggests, both sides are in danger of "trivialising" the text of the Bible, as if it is a "battleground of competing special interest groups". Or they are in danger of reducing the text to a "univocal" meaning, as if the literal meaning of a text or passage can be exactly defined by its interpreter. In the end, Barton predicts, both these

approaches lead to the point where "the Bible can be dispensed with altogether".<sup>81</sup>

The characteristics of the conservative fundamentalist's approach, Barton goes on to explain, are that they usually use the Bible as a kind of collection of "purple passages", which means they are looking for proof texts in Scripture to buttress their existing convictions about a topic in question. Differences between one part of the Bible and another are often simplistically harmonised. The distinctive characteristics of the historians' method of interpretation can be recognised in their tendency to make of the Bible a fractured and fragmented book with isolated or even opposing parts, and as a consequence different accounts or passages of the Bible are played off against each other. On top of that, Barton thinks, in accordance with S. Schneider's objection mentioned above, that whilst historical as well as literary criticism might be successful in establishing what the biblical text actually says, nevertheless this fails to answer the question whether what it says is true and what its true meaning is for today.<sup>82</sup> Thus Barton is suspicious about the starting point of these two opposing methods of biblical interpretation that try to gain Scriptural guidance for the issue of human sexuality by first looking at "what the Bible teaches":<sup>83</sup>

It is as if the answers to this and any other question can be 'read off' the text in a relatively straightforward way, either by 'stretching' history (in the case of the fundamentalists) or by asserting historical distance (in the case of the historical critic), with the matter of application following on subsequently.<sup>84</sup>

Beside the difficulties of these two avenues of interpretation, Barton additionally mentions the problem that often the text becomes "captive to tribal interests of one kind or another, whether conservative fundamentalism, liberal biblical criticism, feminism, gay liberation, or whatever".<sup>85</sup> This is a tendency towards scapegoating in his view. The Bible becomes the scapegoat for the anxieties of feminists and gays, or they become the scapegoat for the loyalists, or the historians, altogether giving up on trusting the writers of the Gospels, become involved into a quest for the historical Jesus, and so on.<sup>86</sup> Hence Barton, though not doubting that the biblical material remains to be of vital importance concerning the pressing questions on human sexuality, nevertheless, does not leave much confidence in currently conventional methods of interpretation.

This suspicious attitude towards conventional methods of interpretation is taken further in one of R. Scroggs' recent articles.<sup>87</sup> Being aware of obvious hermeneutical difficulties, which appears to be even more complex in sexual-ethical questions, Scroggs goes a step further than other scholars and demands the abolition of the Bible's authoritative place within this debate. He wants to use the Bible as a "foundational document" instead of an "authoritative document" in discussions on ethical questions since it does not contain any absolute truth on sexual matters but is, for reasons outlined above, biased in its perspective and anyway interpreted by biblical scholars in accordance with their existing presuppositions. Scroggs discerns a "gradual but constant erosion of the claims for biblical authority" in biblical scholarship and proposes to undertake the "final step" that means to "give up any claim that the Bible is authoritative in guidance for contemporary faith and morals".<sup>88</sup>

According to this approach the Bible it is not only treated selectively but downgraded in its credibility on the whole. The Bible is both "a genuine partner in our search for God's will" and "a friend with whom we can respectfully disagree".<sup>89</sup> Regarding the homosexual issue, this proposal enables Scroggs to accept an "easy" solution. Since the Bible is not clear about it and does not decide the issue, we are advised to give up on hermeneutics concerning this issue and reverend to "issues of psychology and sociology as well as the moral issue of the quality of the relationship".<sup>90</sup> And those issues clearly show that homosexuality is to be accepted as another variant of sexuality and in no way to be condemned.

This of course is a radical proposal, and Prof. Scroggs is aware of it.<sup>91</sup> It ties up with one of M.D. Smith's questions quoted above, whether the concept of "authority of Scripture" means anything to the biblical scholar today. Scroggs, even more than Barton, is very critical of fundamentalist and historical approaches to the Bible, the former for its "legal" understanding of the Bible and the latter for its treatment of the biblical texts as "purely" historical documents without any appeal to a "supernatural" dimension in their formation and content.<sup>92</sup> Scroggs' study has rightly alerted us to some problems concerning the question what "authority of Scripture" can mean for different scholars and communities, particularly in ethical matters.

However, instead of accepting complete defiance of the Bible's ethical contribution, scholars should look for deficiencies in the traditional exegetical and hermeneutical methods and strive for a better way.<sup>93</sup> One may ask why serious biblical scholars like Scroggs are so eager to give up on every notion of "authority of Scripture"? Obviously Paul, in Scroggs' eyes, is "merely one among many voices seeking the word of God throughout the ages", to use M.D. Schmidt's formation.<sup>94</sup> To be sure, the consequences of Scroggs' proposal are obvious. We are left with a book that might be used as a discussion partner within ethical debates, but otherwise it is merely a literary "classic" with a certain theological value. In fact, according to Scroggs' proposal, the Bible has no final authoritative place at all in ethical discourse, but may also be deprived of having an equal voice and finally dismissed.

Scroggs puts much confidence in human ability to make right moral decisions apart from absolute divine orders and norms. He suggests that if Paul were here today

perhaps he would say something like this: Through Christ we learn that God is the gracious God who secures our selfhood without the anxious striving to create it by ourselves. Living out of this gift, we are freed to live a life of caring for others. In this freedom to care, we are exhorted to 'attest what is the will of God' for our time and place.<sup>95</sup>

But one question is pressing, whether Paul thought of God's dealing with humanity in terms of "graciousness" alone, or whether it is more appropriate to ascertain that Paul thought of it in terms of "gracious firmness"?

It is not giving us the full picture if we assume that Paul taught that God secures our selfhood without making the distinction between the "person" and the "deed", as already discussed above. Paul has a very pessimistic attitude towards the "self" of human beings, teaching that it is intrinsically sinful and corrupted (e.g. Rom. 7:18-24; Gal. 5:16-21). It is true to say that Paul teaches that Christians will be able to discern the will of God better than those led by the "flesh" (Gal. 5:24), but he always emphasises in this context the never ending process of transformation and sanctification, with sin constantly "lurking in the crawling space" (Rom. 7:11, 15-17, 12:2a, Gal. 5:25, 2 Cor. 3:18). It is difficult to argue that Paul's attitude towards human selfhood is dominated by the thought that there is nothing wrong with it. Paul expects a struggle with this

corrupted self that needs change. Therefore it is more appropriate to argue that his positive expectation is directed towards the transformed person who has learned to live a life of discipline in control over the body of sin. This person will be able to care for others and to find out the good will of God. These objections should make us suspicious of descriptions of Scripture as a "friendly persuader" or "genuine partner" without its representing any normative ethics or position of authority in the relevant discussions.

Barton's solution to the question of Scriptural authority and sexuality is more moderate compared with Scroggs' proposal. Barton is interested in moving away from biblicism, both of a loyalist and of a critical kind. On that account he emphasises the value of interpretation within the community of the church, where the person who asks is put into the dock for cross-examination and not the Bible.<sup>96</sup> He is not so much looking for new *methods* of interpreting Scripture, but for the new *interpreter* of Scripture. In other words the interpretation of certain passages of Scripture can either be deadly or life-giving in the realm of gender and sexuality, depending on the person who interprets. Simply to quote a biblical saying and prove its authoritative or historical acceptability will not do here.

Hence Barton asks the question whether our judgement in matters of sexuality should be "based on the story of Sodom in Genesis 19, or on the list of sexual prohibitions in 1 Cor 6.9-10, or on the (at first sight irrelevant) parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10?"<sup>97</sup> By referring to the parable of the Good Samaritan, a story which Jesus told to one of the Jewish "experts of the law" (v.25), Barton thus ties up with a central exhortation of Jesus in his teachings. On several occasions Jesus questioned and criticised experts of the law because of their legalism and hard-heartedness and showed them a better way by indicating that legalistic observance of the law is not everything in religion.<sup>98</sup> So, there seems to be more to biblical interpretation than to find answers to the question "what does Scripture teach about this issue?" Barton concludes from this:

Instead of remaining suspended at the theoretical level of either the dogmatic literalist's assertion or positivist historical inquiry, the issue of whether or not the Bible is good news becomes an invitation and summons to show that it can be so by the way we live and the kinds of community we build.<sup>99</sup>

Barton certainly emphasises a point that was important for Jesus and the ongoing community of the church that preserved his teachings. And it needs to be important for contemporary discussion of homosexuality as well. Nevertheless, he also seems to imply in his alternative approach that there was no normative side to Jesus' ethical teaching at all, and he tends to handle Scripture selectively when it comes to judgements in matters of sexuality. According to his approach to biblical interpretation, the church with her "traditions of interpretation, social embodiment and liturgical action" has the mandate to decide and control ethical developments. Much responsibility is given to individual groups and communities who have to interpret and "perform" Scripture.<sup>100</sup> But Barton does not explain how this could be done without a certain level of authoritative and normative ethical guidance from the Bible.

Really, his proposal is not too far away from Scroggs conclusion, where Scripture is more a highly motivating and encouraging (ancient) writing but in the end not decisive regarding ethical decisions. This kind of authority of Scripture comes close to the approach that views the Bible as a religious classic, great or not so great literature, but with no sense of being normative for the Christian life.<sup>101</sup> Without diminishing Barton's important contribution regarding a too biblio-centric approach and a too rigid application of Scriptural norms far removed from practical life, it is questionable whether the "performance" of Scripture will be accomplished without conceding to the Bible a superior place in ethical decision-making.

### **The Interpretative Community**

Barton's considerations about the problem of the right use of Scripture are not unique. Other contemporary scholars too move away from too theoretical understanding of ethics and interpretation of the Bible. For instance in their quest for the right handling of Scripture in ethics S.E. Fowl and L.G. Jones try to refocus the issues in their book *Reading in Communion*.<sup>102</sup> The authors argue that regardless of whether one has an illuminative or prescriptive view of the Bible, it is presumed that isolated, autonomous individuals are the primary focus in the Bible who must make individual decisions regardless of their particular social and historical context. Such a presumption is a mistake, Fowl

and Jones claim, because "Scripture is addressed to specific communities called into being by God and not to individuals".<sup>103</sup> Thus it is insufficient to make moral decisions apart from people's contexts, convictions, and commitments. Instead it should be recognised that the formation of character in and through socially embodied traditions is essential. In other words the central role of communities regarding the forming of character and ethical deliberation must be rediscovered.<sup>104</sup>

The same idea applies, the authors further contend, to the quest for a right method of interpretation.<sup>105</sup> Fowl and Jones point out that any "context-independent method" of interpretation is bound to fail here, because Christian communities are capable of interpreting Scripture accurately due to their already existing intimate relationship to the Bible. The authors in particular point towards the great distance between the "professional" interpreters of the Bible, scholars found in universities and professional societies, and the ecclesiastical bodies, to which the former only have loose ties. Such scholars, who consider the freedom to pursue the release of biblical scholarship from the control of the Church, as Fowl and Jones claim, are captive to particular "political arrangements" and cannot interpret the authoritative Scripture of Christian communities satisfactorily. On the other hand, no interpretative practice is free of some kind of political presumption, Fowl and Jones argue, because "hermeneutics is inevitably, though not restrictively, a 'political' discipline".<sup>106</sup> On this account, the authors conclude:

Because no one interpretative strategy can deliver *the* meaning of a text, there is no hard and fast method that will ensure faithful interpretation. No particular community of believers can be sure of what a faithful interpretation of Scripture will entail in any specific situation until it actually engages in the hard process of conversation, argument, discussion, prayer and practice.<sup>107</sup>

Fowl's and Jones' view on hermeneutics is not totally new. They are in much agreement with T. Ogletree or B. Birch and L. Rasmussen, who argue similarly in this context.<sup>108</sup> While pointing out the importance of character and community in this issue, they contend that attention to character needs to be put alongside such other elements as rules, principles, values and assessment of consequences. However, Fowl and Jones partly disagree with these scholars, because Birch and Rasmussen accept the concept of separate

spheres in ethics, as if character-forming is one sphere that could be separated from another sphere, consisting of rules and principles. Fowl and Jones insist that character is not only a mere component of an ethical method, but is "a different perspective on the shape of ethics itself. It is not something that can be combined with a rule-based or consequence-based ethical method without loss".<sup>109</sup> Thus, Fowl and Jones indicate that the socially-embodied traditions of Christian communities have an essential or even exclusive part in character-forming and ethical decision-making.

This of course raises the question whether universal or absolute moral rules and norms are of any importance in such a view? Fowl and Jones insist that such rules are not unimportant in an account of ethics.<sup>110</sup> But again, similar to Barton's view, it is difficult to see that this claim is actually realised in their proposal. In Fowl's and Jones' view some moral rules are open for revision due to new situations, the wisdom of tradition over time, or the "contextualisation within friendships and practices of particular communities". Other moral rules, however, are relatively stable and authoritative, especially due to their place in a "tradition's moral vision".<sup>111</sup> In this view, moral descriptions are embedded in the contexts of traditions and sociology and it is wrong to detach them from these realms and to apply them universally. They are either affirmed or reformulated by these factors and so they get their meaning and value for the people of the community.

Obviously, the *people* with their individual convictions and viewpoints, coming from different circumstances and life-situations are the main focus in this view. It is argued that the way those people describe and evaluate texts and issues are shaped by their individual backgrounds and by the kind of people they are and want to become. In other words, people somehow shape the Bible and ethics and consequently the community as well. But if the people come with their preconceived ideas about how they want to or should become it is difficult to see how "obedience to rules and assessments of consequences will invariably play a role" in the way those people describe and evaluate texts and issues, as Fowl and Jones insist.<sup>112</sup> It is not clear who shapes whom in this view. If the community is constantly shaped by individual people, yet these people are supposed to be shaped by the people of a particular community with its tradition's moral vision, than a notion like 'obedience to rules' is increasingly

difficult to comprehend. Thus, there is an integral uncertainty about this view. What are these rules which "invariably will play a role" in such communities? And who defines and pronounces or rejects them? Is such a community very capable to decide certain issues individually without any definite standard to which it has to measure up?

One who is supportive towards "interpretative community", yet at the same time dampens and criticises the contemporary enthusiasm of certain "post-modern" scholars, as he classifies them, is D.A. Carson in his recent book *The Gagging Of God*.<sup>113</sup> The main thrust of his book is directed against the post-modern claim that "objective truth" cannot be drawn from the biblical texts or at least not fully comprehended by the interpreter. Carson argues it can. Parts of this book deal with post-modern hermeneutical methods and the "disappearance of objective truth" that is caused by it.<sup>114</sup> In this context, the writer also refers to the arguments of today's post-modernists who lay "considerable emphasis on commonality of meaning achieved in the community".<sup>115</sup> He presents some objections towards an uncritical embracing of "interpretative communities".

For him, firstly, it is far from certain that people who are part of an interpretative community are not in danger of being captured by a kind of "communal solipsism". Just as the Marxist historians in the past, who also formed an interpretative community, were able to explain every difficult historical document or biblical text in line with their commitments, so theologians are equally able to make biblical texts to say what meets the needs or expectancies of their own interpretative community. Thus, one point is to see, as Carson points out, that Christians not only share an agreed understanding of certain texts, but also a more or less shared *experience* of the living God.

And further, Carson points out that it can be of tremendous advantage to be reared and nurtured by such a shaping community of believers that has been shaped by the biblical texts and their sincere, committed, and knowledgeable interpreters. That is because "there may be a much earlier and deeper grasp of the message of Scripture than would be the case if the individual belonged to an entirely alien interpretative community".<sup>116</sup> However, Carson objects that

such communities can be too far removed from the biblical text because traditions tend to wander off in time. He goes on to explain:

That is one of the reasons why constant checking and reformation are needed. Interpretative communities can also keep one from hearing the gospel: one thinks, for example, of societies that are tightly tied together by sets of cultural assumptions (e.g. the Japanese - though perhaps the ties are showing signs of loosening). One also thinks of the community of post-modern relativists! But that is why the Christian community must consciously seek its own reformation by conformity to the Word of God, and all that means for conduct, worship, service, creed, God-centeredness, repentance, faith, and so forth.<sup>117</sup>

Thus Carson does not accept the thought that tradition develops autonomously in a positive way without needing Scripture as a constant checking-point. The same criticism he further applies when it comes to the vague understanding of certain post-modern scholars concerning the commonality of meaning and truth. Carson especially refers to the views of S. Smith, who understands himself as a post-modern Christian.<sup>118</sup> This scholar, like Fowl and Jones described above, thinks that the interpretative community is absolutely decisive when it comes to understanding and shaping meaning, perspective, and truth. According to Smith's view, the history of the interpretation of Scripture reveals that Christian communities always acted according to the interpretations and understandings dominant for their particular time and place. Thus he concludes from this that "the post-modern thesis that humans can assert only interpretations, not absolute knowledge, strikes me as a very orthodox recognition of the finiteness of human understanding".<sup>119</sup>

Carson's objection to this proposal is primarily directed against Smith's understanding of truth, since this view implies that it is not *objective* truth which is achieved by the interpretative community but "merely the "truth" perceived (created?) by the community".<sup>120</sup> The antithesis "only interpretations" versus "absolute knowledge" is striking here for Carson. That is because from a Christian point of view the question *must* be asked (apparently not by an atheist) whether all the "interpretations" of a community are equally acceptable to God? When it is enough, Carson further explains, to hold the beliefs of one's "Christian" community, what about the interpretative community of Jehovah's Witnesses? Mormons? Or how about the community of Muslims? Buddhists? Materialist Marxists?<sup>121</sup> Thus Carson points out in Smith's proposal

the faulty or at least dissatisfying reasoning that can be recognised in Fowl's and Jones' book as well.

If the Christian interpretative community has a determinative or decisive role in understanding Scripture, than one is left in a position of great uncertainty about the question of how this will work out in practice without the aid of the Bible as a definite truth-source. Carson agrees with Smith in so far "that all understanding is interpretative, and that the interpretative communities in which we find ourselves are extremely influential. But this does not mean, on the one hand, that we cannot articulate objective truth, and on the other that our interpretative communities bind us utterly."<sup>122</sup> Clearly, the concept of an interpretative community that is decisive in ethical matters is not without its problems. In fact the question of "truth" is brought to the fore-front of the discussion.

### **Summary**

There are some important implications for the hermeneutical task implied in what has been discussed thus far. Firstly (I), we are reminded that biblical texts should be allowed to speak on their own without making them say what our theological viewpoints expect them to say. Any compromise and any attempt to harmonise the apparent diversity of the canon by appealing to universal principles or themes should be rejected. R.B. Hays thinks the best way to deal with the "synthetic task", as he calls it, is to let the tensions stand. "When we find ourselves caught between contradictory New Testament teachings, it is always better to choose one resolutely than to waffle and to seek artificial compromises."<sup>123</sup> This will keep us honest in our "synthetic" proposals and is also respectful to the biblical texts because we do not erode their particular integrity.

Secondly (II), the feminist theological approach to hermeneutics rightly emphasises the fundamental "liberating" message of the Gospels, particularly regarding the relations between the sexes. Jesus clearly has set a new standard for interrelationship of the sexes and since it is women who are predominately (with dependent children) the poor, this is sometimes summarised in the phrase "the hermeneutical privilege of the poor".<sup>124</sup> However, this "redemptive" character of Scripture is not all there is to it, since

Scripture frequently demands that the reader puts himself into the dock because humanity is described as being depraved and intrinsically sinful which questions the rightness of the reader's motives in the first place. Scripture must also be read "against ourselves", as Dietrich Bonhoeffer used to put it.<sup>125</sup> Thus, the identity and self-understanding of a group must not be the primary focus in biblical interpretation, because it can distort the meaning and the truth of the text.

And thirdly (III), it is more faithful to biblical texts, when their historical context are taken into account and not either ignored or insufficiently explored. As Barr rightly pointed out, faithful interpretation has to wrestle with the question of *truth*. Historical criticism does matter when it comes to answering this question.<sup>126</sup> While this is an important area of biblical exegesis that should not be neglected, it is, nevertheless, appropriate to mention, as R.B. Hays does, that "critical exegesis exacerbates the hermeneutical problem rather than solving it."<sup>127</sup> Hays argues that it is naive to assume that more sophisticated exegesis will solely determine the proper ethical implication of the Bible.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, being aware of the complexity of bridging the historical and cultural gap between biblical times and ours and the indisputable level of uncertainty that remains concerning all historical reconstruction of historical criticism, Scripture is more than a source whose "facts" are only relevant for contemporary hermeneutics for it remains "the book of God" for the Christian community.<sup>129</sup>

Fourthly (IV), the proposal that assumes that the interpretative community may well be able to make right moral decisions while denying the authority of Scripture is problematic. It is not clear how the characters of people who enter such a community and have no Christian background will be formed by a Scripture-shaped tradition and by the exemplary lives of some experienced members alone. This proposal fails to show how obedience to rules will be of any significant value in such a process. The authority of Scripture is annulled and the "truth-claims" of Scripture are questioned and doubted here. This leads to the question whether the Bible includes "truthful" revelations, descriptions, and claims (including anthropological statements) which can be objectively discerned and which are neither unchangeable nor relativisable.

And lastly (V), the discussion about hermeneutical principles has shown that the homosexuality debate in the church is essentially related to the question what view of Scripture and its authoritative credibility is taken and attached to it by the individual interpreter of the relevant passages. The different evaluations of this moral issue, which might be classified as supportive of homosexual practice, as critical but open for exceptions, or as negative can be traced back to those theologians' or scholars' hermeneutical standpoint: either they adopt a hermeneutics of "suspicion", of "reduction", or of "submission". Therefore, the religious problem that the church has with homosexuality is bound to the problem of biblical interpretation that "wrestles" with the acceptability of Scripture's supremacy in ethical discourse.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Whether this thought is of any significance regarding the homosexuality debate will be discussed at a later point in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> W. Stegemann, "Keine ewige Wahrheit", in: *Was auf dem Spiel steht, op.cit.*, p.280-83.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.283.

<sup>4</sup> Stegemann realises that and mentions the concluding remarks of G. Strecker ("Homosexualität in biblischer Sicht", *op.cit.*, pp.139f.): "Das Verbot der Homosexualität ist nach neutestamentlichem Verständnis nicht nur eine zeitgebundene Randerscheinung der Ethik, sondern eine unbedingte Forderung, die sich einer verbreiteten, frühchristlichen, jüdischen und hellenistischen Überzeugung anschließt". Prof. Stegemann's finds it difficult to understand how historical-critical scholars can argue in such a "fundamental" way, being "die kompromißlosesten Vertreter des göttlichen Gesetzes in Blick auf die Homosexualität" (*cf.* "Keine ewige Wahrheit", p.283).

<sup>5</sup> *Cf.* e.g. J.D.G. Dunn, "The Task of New Testament Interpretation", in: *The Living Word* (London: SCM Press, 1987): pp.3-24; *ibid.*, "The New Testament as History", in: A Walker (ed.), *Different Gospels, Christian Orthodoxy and Modern Theologies* (London: SPCK, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> W.C. Spohn, *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984): p.134.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Cf.* J.D.G. Dunn and J.P.Mackey, *New Testament Theology in Dialogue* (London: SPCK; Philadelphia. PA: Westminster, 1987): pp.2f.

<sup>9</sup> *Cf.* Cahill, *Between, op.cit.*, pp.19f.

<sup>10</sup> *Cf.* B. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970): p.113.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979): p.76; On equal lines *cf.* R.E. Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981): pp.30-31.

<sup>13</sup> *Cf.* *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989): pp.175-77.

<sup>14</sup> *Cf.* *The Use of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975): pp.182-97. *Cf.* J.D.G. Dunn observes a unity in the diversity that centres on the man and Lord Jesus of Nazareth in: *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1977): pp.29-32, 56-59.

<sup>15</sup> J. Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (London, SCM Press, 1983): p.145. Along the same line is the objection of Paul Hansen who writes that "the desire to remove the various offences of the Bible, that is, to rewrite the Bible as to reflect a contemporary theology, participate in the desire to create a biblical proof text for our own theological position. The Bible has always resisted that, for the Bible cannot provide proof, whether to the slave owner, the liberationist, the socialist, the capitalist, or anyone else (P. Hanson, *The Diversity of Scripture: A Theological Interpretation, Overtures to Biblical Theology* 11 [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983]: p.104).

<sup>16</sup> *Holy Scripture, op.cit.*, p.119; *cf.* pp.71-72, 145-47.

<sup>17</sup> *Holy Scripture, op.cit.*, p.47-48.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.102f.

<sup>19</sup> E.S. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Co., 1983)

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, "Contemporary Biblical Scholarship: Its Roots, Present Understandings, and Future Directions," in: *Modern Biblical Scholarship: Its Impact on Theology and Proclamation*, ed. F.A. Eigo, O.S.A. (Villanova, Pa.: Villanova University Press, 1984): pp.21-22.

<sup>21</sup> *Cf.* *In Memory of Her, op.cit.*, p.59.

<sup>22</sup> K. Stendahl, "Ancient Scripture in the Modern World", in: *Scripture in the Jewish Christian Tradition: Authority, Interpretation, Relevance*, ed. F.E. Greenspahn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982): p.211.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.208.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.207.

<sup>25</sup> *Between the Sexes, op.cit.*, p.30.

26 *Ibid.*, pp.30-31; cf. *New Testament and Homosexuality, op.cit.*, pp. 123-29. See the discussion above.

27 *Ibid.*, p.123.

28 *Between, op.cit.*, p.30.

29 Scholars like H.S. Reimarus, D.F. Strauss, M. Kähler, A. Schweitzer, or R. Bultmann argued that the Gospels are interpretations of the early church and not historically reliable accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. See: N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, London: SCM Press, 1967): pp.207-48.

30 R.H. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction of the New Testament* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. 1966): pp.94-98; N. Perrin, *The New Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1974): pp.281-82.

31 Cf. C. Braaten, R. Harrisville, eds. *The Historical Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964); J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament, op.cit.*, pp.205-216; L.E. Keck, *Future of the Historical Jesus: The Place of Jesus in Preaching and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980): pp.17-46.

32 *In Memory Of Her, op.cit.*, p.41.

33 *Future of the Historical Jesus, op.cit.*, p.131.

34 *Between the Sexes, op.cit.*, pp.34-35.

35 J.M. Gustafson, "Christian Ethics", in: *Religion*, ed. P. Ramsey (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965); cf. *ibid.*, "The Changing Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics", in: *Readings in Moral Theology No.4: The Use Of Scripture in Moral Theology*, eds. C.E. Curran and R.A. McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1984): pp.133-50.

36 Cf. Gustafson, "The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study", *Interpretation* 24 (1970): pp.430-455, see p.455; emphasis mine.

37 "Nature, Sin, and Covenant: Three Bases for Sexual Ethics", *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* (Spring 1981): pp.483-97.

38 A. Verhey, *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1984): pp.174-79.

39 *Ibid.*, p.177.

40 Cf. *ibid.*, pp.169f.

41 Cf. *ibid.*, pp.22f.

42 *Ibid.*, pp.178-79.

43 *Ibid.*, p.179.

44 Gustafson uses the Cambodian invasion as an example for his methodological study here, cf. "The Place of Scripture", *op.cit.*

45 *Ibid.*, p.450.

46 L. Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics, op.cit.*, p.159.

47 "Response", *op.cit.*, p.206.

48 Cf. "Homosexuality: A Case Study in Moral Argument", in: *Homosexuality in the Church, op.cit.*, pp.66f.; *Between the Sexes, op.cit.*, pp.73f.

49 Verhey argues similarly to Cahill here. cf. Verhey, *The Great Reversal, op.cit.*, pp.172f.

50 Cf. J.R. Donahue, "Divorce: New Testament Perspectives", *The Month* 14/4 (1981); pp.113-120. He claims that "virtually all scholars would admit that Matthew represents some kind of exception to an absolute prohibition of divorce" (p.116).

51 Cahill, *Between, op.cit.*, p.74.

52 Cahill writes regarding this point that verse 11a is likely to be Paul's own comment, since no other parallels associate it with Jesus (*ibid.*, p.82, fn.35).

53 *Ibid.*, p.76.

54 *Ibid.*, p.77.

55 Different from Cahill, Verhey does not give any weight to "moral laws" but insists that Matthew's use of the divorce texts shows that we should not identify his human words with God's words, and further it reveals his intention to "appropriate and apply Jesus' disposition towards marriage for his Jewish-Christian community." In the same way we should appropriate and apply Jesus' teaching in "ways and words bound to our time rather than the first century and relative to our place rather than Jewish Christianity in confrontation with the Jewish synagogue" (*The Great Reversal, op.cit.*, p.173).

56 Cf. Andrew Cornes, *Divorce and Remarriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993): p.195; cf. pp.186f.

57 D. Atkinson, *To Have and to Hold - The Marriage Covenant and the Discipline of Divorce* (London: Collins, 1979): p.130; cf. Cornes, *Divorce and Remarriage, op.cit.*, pp.201f.

58 Comp. J. Murray, *Divorce* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1961): pp.61f.; G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987): pp.290f.; M.E. Thrall, *Greek Particles in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962): p.81.

59 Cf. Hermas, *Mandate*, 4.1.4-10; Justin Martyr, 1 *Apol.* 15; 2 *Apol.* 2.1-7; Athenagoras, *Leg. pro Chr.* 33; Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*, 3.13; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.15.2; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.23.145; 3.6.50.

60 Cf. Cornes, *Divorce and Remarriage, op.cit.*, pp.230-31.

61 D. Parker, "The Early Traditions of Jesus' Sayings on Divorce", *Theology* XCVI (1993): pp.372-383.

62 Cf. *ibid.*, p.376, 382, fn.2.

63 *Ibid.*, p.379.

64 *Ibid.*, p.380.

65 *Ibid.*, p.381.

66 J. Fitzmyer, "The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some new Palestinian Evidence", *Theological Studies* 37 (1976): pp.224-25.

67 "Scripture Shaped Community", *op.cit.*, pp.50-51.

68 *In Memory Of Her, op.cit.*, p.32.

69 "Scripture Shaped Community", *op.cit.*, p.51.

70 R.R. Ruether, *The Church Against Itself* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967): p.226.

71 Cf. *Sexism and God-Talk* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1983]: p.12. It must be added here, that Ruether expresses an apparently extreme view on oppressive patriarchal biblical texts and traditions of an andocentric church. She even goes so far to suggest an "exorcism" of patriarchal texts in her book *Women Church*, where one finds descriptions of suggested exorcism rites and litanies of "disaffiliation from Patriarchal Theology". These descriptions include phrases like "casting out the oppressive messages" of texts, or "From the evil power of this tradition, O Holy Wisdom, deliver us" (*Women Church* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985]: pp. 137, 139-40). See for a good overview of Ruether's positions: J.S. Siker, *Scripture And Ethics: Twentieth-Century Portraits* (New York/Oxford: Oxford Press, 1997): pp.170-202.

72 *Between the Sexes, op.cit.*, p.36.

73 Cf. Gustafson, "The Place of Scripture", *op.cit.*, p.455.

74 Cf. P.A. Bird, *The Bible as the Church's Book* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982); D. Jodock, *The Church's Bible: Its Contemporary Authority* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990): see esp. pp.129f. These authors shaped the notion of Bible as the "book of the church".

75 *Between, op.cit.*, pp.37-38.

76 "Scripture Shaped Community", *op.cit.*, p.51.

77 Cf. Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality, op.cit.*, pp.123-29; *ibid.*, "The Bible as Foundational Document", *op.cit.*, pp.27f.; Furnish, *The Moral Teachings of Paul, op.cit.*, pp.66f.; *ibid.*, *The Bible and Homosexuality, op.cit.*, pp.28f.

78 Cf. R.B. Hays, "Scripture Shaped Community", *op.cit.*, pp.42-55.

79 "Awaiting the Redemption of our Bodies", in: *Homosexuality in the Church, op.cit.*, p.13.

80 "Is the Bible Good News for Human Sexuality? Reflections on Methods in Biblical Interpretation", *Theology & Sexuality* (1/1994): pp.42-54.

81 *Ibid.*, p.46-7.

82 *Ibid.*, pp.45-7, 49-51.

83 This way of proceeding can be recognised in the report of the German Evangelische Kirche (EKD) *Mit Spannungen leben (op.cit.)* that also starts of with an inquiry into the biblical statements on sexuality and homosexuality, similarly to the document of the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England *Issues in Human Sexuality (op.cit.)* to which Barton refers to (p.43).

84 Barton, *op.cit.*, pp.43-44.

85 Barton holds that this tendency is discovered by different authors among each of these groups. Cf. concerning Protestant Fundamentalism: K.C. Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So* (London: SCM Press, 1990); on Feminism: A.C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in*



*Hermeneutics* (London: Harper & Collins, 1992); on Historical Criticism: S Hauerwas and S. Long, "Interpreting the Bible as a Political Act", *Religion and Intellectual Life* 6 (1989): pp.134-42.

<sup>86</sup> Barton, *op.cit.*, p.48.

<sup>87</sup> "The Bible as Foundational Document", *Interpretation* 49/1 (1995): pp.17-30.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>91</sup> "This may seem like a radical - indeed heretical - proposal...", *cf. ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>92</sup> *Cf. ibid.*, pp.23, 28 (ftn.2).

<sup>93</sup> *Cf. D.L. Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding - An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991). Migliore criticises four inadequate approaches to the authority of Scripture (biblicism, historicism, privatism, and aestheticism), yet, contrary to Scroggs, proposes some new principles for interpretation of Scripture. His proposal shows that one does not need to give up on exegesis and hermeneutics altogether, but that the interpreter may be able to learn from others' mistakes (pp.40-55).

<sup>94</sup> *Cf. Smith, "Ancient Bisexuality", op.cit.*, p.250 (see above).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27-28. Verhey argues similarly here. He thinks that to view Scriptural authority in terms of only *one* part of an ongoing and changing tradition would "respect the moral agency of persons and their capacity to give and hear reasons. The quest for an autonomous ethics, for some impartial principle, based on reason, rejects the "reasons" provided by the moral agent's identity and integrity" (*The Great Reversal, op.cit.*, p.178).

<sup>96</sup> *Cf. "Methods in Biblical Interpretation", op.cit.*, pp.51-54.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

<sup>98</sup> *Cf. Luke 7:36f.; 14:1-6; 15:1f.; 18:9f.; 20:27f.*

<sup>99</sup> *Op.cit.*, p.53.

<sup>100</sup> *Cf. pp.53-54.*

<sup>101</sup> *Cf. K. Stendahl, "The Bible as a Classic and the Bible as Holy Scripture," Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984): 3-10.

<sup>102</sup> *Reading in Communion. Scripture & Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8. *Cf. R. Hays, who argues that Paul's readings of Scripture (OT) reflects an ecclesiocentric reading and it is done in the context of pastoral situation for the up-building of the community of faithful disciples; Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>104</sup> *Cf. Reading in Communion, op.cit.*, pp.6-9.

<sup>105</sup> *Cf. ibid.*, pp.14-21.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16. Regarding the place of the canon Fowl and Jones argue: "The canon provides the normative standard for the faith, practice and worship of Christian communities", *cf. ibid.*, p.19. However, the authors hold that the canon should not be used as a fixed list of books, but has to be read with the aid of practical wisdom that helps to decide the pressing issues accurately, *cf. pp.36-50. Cf. W.C. Spohn, fn.6 above.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>108</sup> *Cf. T.W. Ogletree, The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983); B.C. Birch and L.L. Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1989).

<sup>109</sup> *Reading in Communion, op.cit.*, p.10; *cf. J.H. Yoder who also seems to indicate contrary to Fowl / Jones that character is merely one component alongside rules and consequences, cf. "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood", in: The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics and Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984): pp.35-7.

<sup>110</sup> *Reading in Communion, op.cit.*, p.10.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.10-11.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>113</sup> *The Gagging of God* (Leicester: Apollos, IVP, 1996).

<sup>114</sup> By "objective truth" Carson means "having extra-mental reality or validity". Carson explains this further and writes: "Objective reality exists independently of individual or communal states of human consciousness; objective truth is distinct from individual or communal states of human consciousness and obtains regardless of whether anyone happens to accept it as truth", *ibid.*, p.120.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p.128.

- 116 *Ibid.*, p.127; cf. A. Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), to whom Carson refers.
- 117 *The Gaggling*, *op.cit.*, p.127.
- 118 S. Smith, "Words of Hope: A Postmodern Faith," *Faculty Dialogue* 20 (Winter 1993-94): pp.132-33.
- 119 *Ibid.*, p.133.
- 120 *The Gaggling*, *op.cit.*, p.128.
- 121 *Ibid.*, p.129.
- 122 *Ibid.*
- 123 R.B. Hays, "Scripture-Shaped Community: The Problem of method in New Testament Ethics," *Interpretation* 44 (1990): p.47.
- 124 Cf. D.L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991): p.55.
- 125 D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: ET, 1948).
- 126 Barr, *Holy Scripture*, *op.cit.*, pp.102f.
- 127 Hays, "Scripture Shaped Community", *op.cit.*, p.43.
- 128 *Ibid.*
- 129 Cf. K. Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (New York: Harper, 1957).

## **Homosexuality and Truth in a Postmodern Society**

The homosexuality debate has taken such a dominant place in modern ethical discourses that one wonders why? Lisa Cahill complains that Christian communities expend disproportionate energy discussing this issue. There are other sexual sins for the Church to deal with, she explains, that are more damaging for the institutions of marriage and family, like "domestic violence; sexual abuse; marital rape; callousness of men to the daily burdens of wives; wives' and mothers' emotional manipulation of husbands and children; sexual objectification or coercion by men or women; neglect and abuse of children; narcissism...; consumerism; drugs and alcoholism; ... irresponsible divorce..."<sup>1</sup> This is certainly a very important suggestion for the church to bear in mind, since there is danger in losing the right perspective when dealing with the homosexuality issue due to an excessive religious moral zeal. But nevertheless, we should not ignore the point that the homosexuality debate not only deals with questions about one particular form of sexual behaviour and its acceptable or unacceptable morality, but has reached the level where the authority of Scripture and its truth-claims regarding anthropology and sexuality are at stake and seriously questioned. The pressing question for all ethicists today, which has been emphasised by the homosexuality debate, is whether the Bible tells us truths about human sexuality. It is therefore no surprise that much ethical discourse has centred on this topic. That a practising homosexual person is a recognised member of a Christian community clashes with the definite biblical command against all forms of sexual activity other than between a man and a woman in marriage. Or in other words, the claim 'it is right to engage in homosexual activity' stands in opposition to the "biblical" statement 'it is only right to engage in heterosexual activity within marriage'. This of course is an over-simplification of the issue, but in the end this remains the central point of dispute because the biblical position cannot be altered as we have seen in the discussion above. The question is who is right? What statement is correct?

In view of such questions one easily discovers that these questions are not often asked in public discussions as well as in theological and scientific debates on homosexuality. The following discussion in this dissertation intends

to show that there actually exists a link between the topic of homosexuality and contemporary society that is nowadays frequently described as postmodern, postliberal or pluralistic society. This society is marked by religious pluralism, and a *Zeitgeist* that is dominated by attitudes of openness and tolerance to every new trend and spirit, and a strong aversion to any form of absolute truth-claims.

### **Sexuality and Power**

At first it is necessary to look at some authors who stand for the development of certain postmodern viewpoints in society, theology as well as philosophy and the construction of a new worldview other than the Christian worldview. The French philosopher and self-proclaimed paedophile Michel Foucault has in many respects prepared the way for the contemporary postmodern relativisation of knowledge and morality, especially in the area of sex. His name and writings frequently appear and are referred to in contemporary discourses on sexual ethics. Foucault is very suspicious about any concept of morality that has its origin in antique Roman time, constituted and formulated in total isolation from the world by some "morally austere philosophers" and taken up by Christianity and its clergy.<sup>2</sup> Foucault talks about the "Prinzip des Isomorphismus zwischen sexueller Beziehung und gesellschaftlichem Verhältnis", and explains that sexuality was primarily understood with social control and reaffirmation of the positions and roles of women and men in and outside the family.<sup>3</sup> "Repression" was the predominant factor regarding sex he argues. Such an understanding and use of sex, Foucault goes on to say, had been sustained throughout the centuries right into the present time. Consequently, ancient homosexuality was intrinsically inter-woven with the hierarchical structure of antique Roman society and was only known and practised as "Knaben- und Sklavenliebe".<sup>4</sup> Thus it is totally wrong to refer to biblical prohibitions of homosexuality simply because the Bible represents an outmoded and completely irrelevant description of an ancient situation.

Whether Foucault is right in his historical reconstruction of sexual behaviour in Roman times (we have seen above that such a view does not represent the

whole picture<sup>5</sup>), the author's radical proposal following his investigations into this topic is telling:

If repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at considerable cost: nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanism of power will be required.<sup>6</sup>

Foucault reveals an extremely negative evaluation of history, particularly regarding sexuality. This negative interpretation of (Church-) history can also be observed in another of his writings where it leads him to the assumption that the true evil to be abandoned is the upholding of every kind of rule:

Rules are empty in themselves, violent and unfinalized; they are impersonal and can be bent to any purpose. The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who have used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them; controlling this complex mechanism, they will make it function so as to overcome the rules through their own rules.<sup>7</sup>

Thus rules or value-systems for Foucault are nothing else but the means for exercising power over others. Foucault is close to Nietzsche's convictions here, as he clearly is a follower of Nietzsche's views on the whole. While Foucault may be described as the most influential figure particularly regarding the postmodern view of sexuality, Nietzsche certainly stands for the most influential figure with regard to contemporary postmodern philosophy in general. Nietzsche left nothing worthwhile on any notion of value-systems or morality. He explicitly dissented from Darwin's notions of 'survival' as mere perpetuation and thus observes that "Where there is a struggle, it is a struggle for power." Even a value-system, namely 'morality' serves primarily as "a means of preserving the community", not as any universal imperative or truth-claim.<sup>8</sup> Thus these views may be summed up in the following statement, using A.C. Thiselton's words, that, "Nietzsche and Foucault... argue that claims to truth often represent disguised attempts to legitimate uses of power."<sup>9</sup> While this is an argument that deserves to be taken seriously, doubts must be raised about the unlimited applicability of such a claim. Thiselton comments:

We do not deny that certain forms of religion, even within Christian traditions, have often been reduced to instrumental devices to affirm the human self, or, worse, to seek to legitimate power over others. But can all Christian claims be interpreted in this way? Such a sweeping diagnosis, I argue, would fail to come to terms with substantial counter-arguments and counter examples.<sup>10</sup>

While space does not allow us to go into an extensive discussion about the postmodern worldview and its origins, some comment on Foucault's research into ancient sexual practices is necessary. His research is widely recognised and frequently used for teaching purposes in schools and universities, although his reconstruction of the ancient history of sexuality is a matter of a hypothesis drawn from the same sources which are used by other-historians who come to different conclusions than he does.<sup>11</sup> Foucault's argument explicitly excludes the existence of a God who constituted rules and laws for the ordering of people's lives and human affairs on earth. In fact, as Philip Goodchild points out, Nietzsche's "death of God" is a precondition for such reasoning.<sup>12</sup> Goodchild constitutes the link between such kind of thinking and *postmodern* philosophy here. He speaks about a "loss of transcendence" as one source for the *postmodern condition*, and goes on to say that "the postmodern condition may be regarded as essentially anti-monotheist, the reign of the Nietzschean 'Anti-Christ'."<sup>13</sup> In view of this observation Foucault's arguments and conclusions cannot be accepted uncritically. As we will discuss later, 'postmodernists' tend to read history excessively pessimistically due to their conviction that persons have constantly be envictimised by competing power-interests.

Nevertheless, Foucault's views on ancient (and biblical) sexuality as dominated by repression are widely shared by contemporary theologians and authors. Particularly feminist theologians appear to adopt the same rather pessimistic and negative view of ancient concepts of sexuality. For example Ruether observes a "sacralization of patriarchy" in the Bible and calls it the single most pernicious, perverse, and destructive biblical tradition. The Bible praises the domination of man and the dehumanisation of women.<sup>14</sup> And D.N. Fewell and D.M. Gunn also uphold the view that the simple creation-story in Genesis 1-3 has constructed an entire social world, "a world in which human sexuality has only one legitimate expression, and that is too often described with domination and subjugation."<sup>15</sup> Other authors reject the biblical account of

sexuality because they think it is obvious that the biblical authors are simply repeating ancient repressive sociological norms and structures by which they have themselves been influenced. For instance W. Stögemann argues:

Wenn ich historisierend, wie ich es getan habe, an den biblischen Befund herangehe, muß ich mich fragen welches Ideal von Gesellschaft bzw. was ich als natürlich heute vertreten will... Natürlich ist für mich..., daß ich mich... von der antiken Mentalität, in der von der Herrschaft das männlichen Partners über den weiblichen ausgegangen wird, befreie, weil mein Gesellschaftsideal nicht das der Herrschaft des einen über den anderen ist.<sup>16</sup>

So it is argued that in the past sexuality was marked by repression and subjugation, and the biblical authors affirmed such a concept of sexuality. That again makes it impossible to accept and adopt any norms for sexual behaviour that have been articulated under such conditions.

However, such an understanding has its difficulties. Firstly, Nietzsche's objection, that the monumental reading of the past where the interests of the present cover up the past and even damages it may well be applied to an excessively negative reading of the past as well. Through the projection of Western twenty-century concepts of liberation or sociological and sexological viewpoints into ancient texts and history in general, history may also be distorted and misunderstood in the same way as a too monumental way of reading history accomplishes. It is far from certain that free women or, taking another example, slaves in biblical times had the same feelings of resentment and the same views regarding equality or emancipation when they looked upon their sociological state as a twenty-century Western person has when considering those times and circumstances the people were in.

It is nothing new that in that respect the interpreter must recognise the distance between now and then and make every effort to think himself back into that time by trying to leave every disruptive modern concept behind which would hinder him in faithful interpretation of the text. This process is addressed by F.D.E. Schleiermacher when he writes that all understanding, including the interpretation of texts, involves stepping "out of one's own frame of mind."<sup>17</sup> Schleiermacher criticised the hermeneutics of some Catholic, Protestant, or philological interpreters of classical literature whose mode of enquiry presupposed a prior understanding rather than establishing the basis for the

possibility of such an understanding. And it appears that Foucault's (postmodern) way of interpreting texts ought to be criticised for the same reason. A.C. Thiselton, particularly being aware of the limits of scientific-empirical methods further explains this point:

Before I ever seek to know how a text relates to me, or how another person's experience relates to mine, it is not good enough simply to approach the text or person with supposedly value-neutral *observation*. For then... we shall at once begin to impose upon what we seek to understand prior categories of thought and stereotypification. The *first* requirement is *respect for the otherness of the Other as Other*. This invites *not observation but listening*.<sup>18</sup>

Thus there remains the challenge for the interpreter not to violate the text by imposing foreign concepts of thought on it and by reading it with prejudiced eyes. Apparently this principle applies regarding the feminist or the postmodernist way of interpreting the Bible in the same way as it applies to, let us say, fundamentalist interpretation. Every interpreter is in danger of committing the fallacy of presuppositional reading of texts.

Secondly, reading biblical morality in the way Foucault does, presupposes that the biblical authors did not derive their morality from some propositional 'word of God' or the Hebrew canon but from their particular sociological contexts. But as argued above, Jesus and Paul based their sexual ethics on the Hebrew law and the Genesis accounts and not on current social norms. This of course introduces the question whether there is something like 'propositional truth' in the Bible on which Christian morality is based. Before this thought is further discussed another aspect of some of the ethical reasoning that we have come across in this dissertation will first have our attention. That will further point towards the fact that postliberationist or postmodernist positions in our pluralistic society play an essential part in the discussion about ethical norms today.

### **The Disappearance of Objective Meaning**

It is frequently emphasised in contemporary discourses about ethical matters that there remains to be a great amount of uncertainty about every interpretation and the meaning of ancient (biblical) texts due to a great historical and cultural distance between now and then. Coming back to the

point just mentioned, it is doubted that the interpreter really is able to think himself into the ancient world to truly discover the full meaning of a text. The German theologian Günter Figal claims for that reason there are "keine richtigen oder falschen, wohl aber einleuchtende oder unmögliche Interpretationen."<sup>19</sup> Others like L.W. Countryman discover a great distance between the people of antiquity and us today, which is made plain by the tool of historical-criticism, and which makes of the biblical accounts a somehow strange and distant literary report not easy to comprehend for the contemporary reader.<sup>20</sup> Michael Vasey supports this assumption. For him not only the biblical accounts are somehow "strange and distant", but also God is a "strange and unpredictable player in human history".<sup>21</sup> The author rightfully points out that "Christians can quickly imagine that their inherited tradition has a monopoly on moral insight", and that "no group" (within the church) "can claim a privileged position in the interpretation of Scripture", or that "the Bible is not simply a book of timeless rules".<sup>22</sup> However, while all of these remarks are right and important observations that need to be considered, and while certainly some wrong ethical decisions had been made due to such assumptions, the author seems to indicate that the interpreter should refrain all together from making decision on ethical matters which are based on the Bible because it is simply too difficult to find out what the Bible really means. Vasey's thorough work is but another contribution that supports an distrusts in the biblical testimony and questions the possibility of finding objective meanings in the Bible. On this account another author, Ernest Gellner, parodies biblical interpretation and writes "There is no meaning but meaning, and Hermeneutics is its Prophet."<sup>23</sup>

So the question is whether it is possible to find out the meaning of biblical texts that enables the reader to make some definite and normative theological or ethical statements. Or is the text as foreign and historically as well as culturally too far removed from our contemporary perspective so that any such statements moreover any propositional truth-claim from the Bible must be rejected? J.T Sanders even suggests that it should not interest us what the Bible says about morality. He thinks that New Testament ethical positions are "alien and foreign to the day and age", so that we must be "freed from their bondage".<sup>24</sup>

The writer Jacques Derrida, who can be called a "postmodern deconstructionist" also proposes a rather radical hermeneutics.<sup>25</sup> Being indirectly indebted to Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, as he himself mentions, Derrida proposes his "deconstructive" theory that language cannot point to any kind of objective reality because words are self-limiting. The meaning of a text is irretrievably bound to the knower rather than with the text, which means that the plain meaning of a text cannot be defined accurately at all by the reader. All univocal meaning of a text disappears, which means that all we have are interpretations of interpretations. Consequently no single interpretation can claim superiority over another since there is no real basis to refer to. Thus, as Derrida explains, the deconstructionist destroys the central focus of understanding and replaces it with "a nonfocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions come into play."<sup>26</sup> Apparently this theory can hardly be called a hermeneutical method, because that would imply that there is a meaning to be recovered. Nevertheless, E.V. McKnight observes that Derrida does not think that texts are completely meaningless, they are rather superfluity in meaning.<sup>27</sup>

Stanley Fish, another author who is supportive of deconstruction, thinks that there is no meaning in any text except the meaning that is assigned to it by the community who interprets it. This is a similar view to what had been discussed above concerning the "interpretative community", yet differs from it in as much as Fish focuses more on the texts and their "non"-meaning. Rejecting classical hermeneutical methods and the new hermeneutics he claims that "it is interpretative communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meaning and are responsible for the emergence of formal features."<sup>28</sup> Fish tries to convince his readers that skilled reading is not a matter of discerning of what is there but rather, when confronted with a particular text or poem, of producing what can thereafter be said to be there. Thus, interpretation, Fish claims, "is not the art of construing but the art of construction. Interpreters do not decode poems, they make them."<sup>29</sup> Simply speaking, Fish claims that that we do not and cannot *find* the meaning of Scripture but we go to the texts to *make* meaning.

Others do not find Derrida's and Fish's arguing very convincing.<sup>30</sup> Richard Rorty objects to Derrida's claim that 'there is nothing outside the text' that it is "right about what it implicitly denies and wrong about what it explicitly asserts." He offers the following comparison. "The only force of saying that texts do not refer to non-texts is just the old pragmatist chestnut that any specification of a referent is going to be in some vocabulary. Thus one is really comparing two descriptions with the thing-in-itself..."<sup>31</sup> Rorty further criticises Derrida and his claim that 'language does not refer to anything non-linguistic, and thus that everything one can talk about is a text', and writes:

This claim is on par with the claim that Kant proved that we cannot know about things in-themselves. Both claims rest on a phony contrast between some sort of nondiscursive unmediated vision of the real and the way we actually talk and think. Both falsely infer from "We can't think about concepts, or talk without words" to "We can't think or talk except about what has been created by our thought and talk."<sup>32</sup>

Thus it is difficult to maintain that language cannot correspond to reality. D.A Carson uses Iain Wright's words and adds to Rorty's criticism a connection that is often made in American scholarship. "From the assumption that texts cannot talk about 'reality,' it soon begins to appear that the only thing they can talk about is 'their inability to do so.'"<sup>33</sup>

The literary critic Robert Scholes deals with one of Fish's proposals and seriously doubts the correctness of his conclusions.<sup>34</sup> His main objection is that texts themselves normally contain many signals and hints how they are to be interpreted, and people usually learn to master them when they learn how to read. With regard to the reading of Scripture in this context Thomas G. Long maintains that "...encounters with Scripture itself have built up in the community of faith the expectation of Scripture's special character, rather than the other way round. The expectations a faithful interpreter brings to Scripture are not imposed upon those documents entirely from without but are derived from the history of the community's previous engagement with the Bible."<sup>35</sup> On the whole deconstructionist theories are seriously infected by fundamental errors and many of their advocates thoughts resort to "extreme and sometimes duplicitous antitheses."<sup>36</sup>

## **The Influence of Postmodernism**

All this indicates that many scholars today including some of the ones we discussed above in the context of the homosexual debate, are affected by a postmodern worldview. They adapt a line of thinking which presupposes that "all thought and experience is historically and socially mediated". This has been observed by Alister McGrath, who is writing about the challenges of pluralism for the Church today. For this purpose he describes the postmodernist or postliberalist standpoint and by doing so reveals some striking similarities between the postliberal position and contemporary methods of interpretation with their emphasis on communal interpretation of Scripture.<sup>37</sup> His descriptions includes three modes of postmodern thinking: Firstly (1) Postliberalism is antifoundational (in that it rejects the notion of a universal foundation of knowledge); secondly it is (2) communitarian (in that it appeals to the values, experiences and language of a community rather than prioritising the individual); and thirdly it is (3) historicist (in that it insists upon the importance of traditions and their associated historical communities in the shaping of experience and thought).<sup>38</sup>

This description of the postmodern worldview is made by McGrath here without any reference to the homosexual debate. And yet it is apparent how this description clearly shows that many arguments that have been discussed above proceed from the same source of thinking. It cannot be ignored that the postmodern worldview appears to be co-determinational for scholars like Scroggs, Fiorenza, Fowl and Jones, Countryman, or Fish. They tend to emphasise the point that we cannot really determine what the Bible says and means about sexuality because the text is so foreign and irrelevant for our present situation; they emphasise the importance of Christian community and the decisive character of their communal interpretation of Scripture while rejecting almost every concept of universal moral-law and truthful propositions; and they insist that the meaning of biblical texts and ethical pronouncements must be evaluated in the context of their particular *Sitz im Leben*, which means that it is almost impossible to define its meaning. All this is strikingly similar to the postmodern way of thinking and evaluating ancient texts and ethics.

It is not surprising that a postmodern person or author has such a view of history, community, and meaning, remembering that everything is viewed from the perspective that there is no "transcendent Being" nor any "revelation from the absolute". Goodchild argues that the "postmodern condition" should not merely be understood in terms of free market and mass-media culture, "but also as a condition of trauma and impotence resulting from a shock that dislodges us from former sources of meaning."<sup>39</sup> Postmodernists do not have any traditional foundations on which they might build their ethics. Everything that the past held dear, valuable, meaningful, and decisive has vanished and is replaced with a worldview of meaninglessness. For the postmodernist there is no foundational truth to be perceived. But the question is unavoidable: what about the Christian? Are Christian writers in the position to argue that it is impossible to determine the "right" meaning of biblical texts. If they do, do they suggest that it is impossible to perceive any propositional truth from the Bible? If so, that would mean that Christians have no other foundational basis for their ethical evaluations than has today's postmodern pluralistic society.

***Is the Church called to be "neutral" in ethical matters, always eager not to press norms and values on individuals and communities?***

One explicit characteristic of our society is that neutrality on all matters of morality about which there is disagreement among the people is expected from the state and the individual lest the values of some be imposed on others. With other words not what is true or right is of real interest regarding ethical matters but rather what is most tolerant, socially acceptable, popular, or simply most neutral. But this does not work as Francis Canavan argues. He claims that neutrality simply does not exist. The call for such a notion of neutrality "leads to the establishment of the beliefs of the most secularised, materialistic, and hedonistic elements of the population as normative."<sup>40</sup> Brenda Almond agrees with Canavan and speaks about the "Myth of Neutrality". In her understanding this myth consists in the belief that, "in order to avoid indoctrination, it is necessary to take a value-neutral stance."<sup>41</sup>

Canavan further explains his criticism of this stance by citing the case of *Belmont v. Belmont*. A divorced and remarried father applied to the New Jersey Superior Court for custody of his children on the ground that his former wife, who held custody of them, was living in a lesbian relationship that he judged deleterious to the well-being of his children. The court "found him to be suitable as a custodian in all respects," but denied his application anyway. It ruled that "the mother is not to be denied custody merely because of her sexual orientation. Her sexual preference and her living arrangement with her lover are only two of the many factors to be examined in the determining the best interests of the children."<sup>42</sup> Canavan comments on this:

In so ruling, the court committed the State of New Jersey to the proposition that a homosexual union is, or can be, as acceptable a one in which to raise children as is a heterosexual one dignified by matrimony. This is something more than a decision to leave sexual preferences up to individuals. It is a public stand in regard to the institution of the family.

The point is that there is inescapably a public morality - a good one or a bad one - in the sense of some set or other of basic norms, in the light of which the public makes policy decisions.... [This is not] the advent of a truly neutral state but the replacement of one view of men, and the ethic and the legal norm based on it, by another view.<sup>43</sup>

Thus neutrality is a myth. The morality of the public is either grounded in a Christian view of humanity or in an alternative view. This point is not only attached to public policy but equally applies to the area of public education. Richard A. Baer concurs and writes that "Education never takes place in a moral and philosophical vacuum."<sup>44</sup> He further explains this point and argues that "if the larger questions of human beings and their destiny are not being asked and answered within a predominantly Judeo-Christian framework, they will be addressed within another philosophical or religious framework - but hardly one that is 'neutral'." The same principle can now be traced back to the Church situation. The Church, similarly to the public, cannot be neutral in moral matters but must decide whether she reflects an ethics that is based on a Judeo-Christian foundation or on an alternative foundation. Since Christian morality rests upon Christian faith, and since this faith is based upon the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and Scripture, a "Christian" Church has no difficulty in defining her foundation. Otherwise she ceases to be a "Christian" Church. Therefore, issues like sex before marriage, divorce and homosexuality, as David Attwood argues, "have to be addressed in the light of

the *essentials* of Christian faith." The author further defines this statement. "How does human sexuality feature in God's intentions, and how can human sexual love best reflect God's love? Our moral beliefs must be rooted in our Christian faith."<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, there is reason to see the Church-debate on homosexuality in relation to terms like "foundation" and "worldview." What this study attempted to show is that the issue is not only a pastoral problem. It is not only attached to the individual homosexual person who is looking for the concession of personal dignity, identity, and social rights (though this of course is the much more important and relevant side of it regarding the suffering homosexual inclined person). No, it also illustrates that a non-Christian pluralistic worldview has been adopted by the Western society and begins to be adopted by the Church as well. In other words there is more to it than permitting some individual homosexual persons to interrelate sexually on a private level. The permission and acknowledgement of homosexual activity in the state and Church takes the form of a public declaration that a *new* morality other than a *Christian* morality has been adopted. The Church would make a public statement about her beliefs on the biblical or non-biblical view of man. If it is accepted that a homosexual lifestyle is a "good" lifestyle, then the Christian view of sex is up for modification. Then it is declared that the revelation of the Bible concerning sexuality is incomplete and only in part truthful. The Genesis accounts, to which Jesus and the Apostle Paul referred as normative descriptions, are declared to be not authoritative for us.

### **The Question of Propositional Truth and the Homosexual Debate**

As mentioned above Nietzsche and Foucault maintain that claims to truth often represent disguised attempts to legitimate uses of power. Particularly in religion, Nietzsche urges, people using "errors" for their own advantage, self-interest, or power."<sup>46</sup> Somewhere else he spoke about theology as using manipulative tools by means of which the weak, the insecure, and the vulnerable may try to cope with life. Theology offers them "anodyne illusions."<sup>47</sup> These strong words may indicate some ground from which Nietzsche can carry out his attack because throughout Church history until the present days traces

of these accusations can be observed in religious life, also in Christian Churches. However, as Thiselton has already pointed out, this must not generally be applied to all of Christianity. The truth-claims of Christian theology have not always and do not need to be presented in a repressive and manipulative way.

This is well expressed by Thiselton. Being aware of the seriousness of this challenge to theology, he writes that although other disciplines like philosophy "share the same loss of truth", theology has more at stake than they do. That is because theology serves to establish "critical-informed trust", whereas the postmodern perspective "rests on suspicion."<sup>48</sup> Responding to the criticism of Nietzsche Thiselton further comments:

Theology seeks to recover the elements of the authentic and the genuine from among the chaff of self-interest, manipulation and power-claims. It would also become problematic to claim that at the heart of Christian theology stands the paradigm-case of non-manipulative love, namely the theology of the cross and the free gift of resurrection if all that exists is manipulative interpretation.<sup>49</sup>

Nietzsche's other observation that the Christian truth-claims are mere means for purchasing power or comfort by the consumer is refuted by the words and life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. For him the belief in God is much more than a mere help for coping with insecurities or difficulties. Thus he writes: "If it is I who say where God will be, I will always find there a false God who in some way corresponds to me, is agreeable to me, fits in with my nature. But if it is God who says where He will be... that place is the cross of Christ."<sup>50</sup> And in a different place he continues on those lines when he reminds the reader that this is why the beatitudes in the Sermon of the Mount do not declare "blessed are the powerful", but "blessed are those who mourn", "blessed are the poor". And the parallel "blessed are the pure in heart" further demonstrates that belief in God has nothing to do with manipulative interests.<sup>51</sup> It is well demonstrated here that Christian truth-claims are neither meant to be manipulative nor repressive for people. The essence of Christian theology is sacrificial service to the neighbour motivated by love and humility, quite the opposite to the postmodernist view. How far this Christian ideal had and has been accomplished by its followers is another question of course, but at the heart of

the Christian message lies "submit to one another" and not "repress one another."

Due to the failure of postmodernists to acknowledge this (though the postmodernists' suspicious attitude towards religious truth-claims is not incomprehensible when looked at the history of the Church and at general history), there remains a strong aversion against absolute truth-claims among the majority of people in the Western society. In fact pluralism discourages us from asking the truth question. Allan Bloom outlines the position of pluralism as follows: "Claims to be right constitute an intolerant intellectual fascism." He explains:

Openness - and the relativism that makes it the only possible stance in the face of various claims to truth and the various ways of life and kinds of human beings - is the great insight of our times. The true believer is the real danger. The study of history and of culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really to be right: rather it is not to think that you are right at all.<sup>52</sup>

This tendency to "throw the baby out with the bathwater" is distinctive for the postmodernists' position. Ultimately the truth question cannot simply be ignored or rejected, because, as we have seen above, everyone acts, behaves or decides according to some kind of foundation or life-philosophy and never proceeds from a neutral stand. And here it must be of essential importance whether this foundation, worldview or philosophy is true or false. It must matter if people base their life on an illusion and a blatant lie or on truthful propositions. It is an "intellectual shallowness and moral irresponsibility" to claim that truth-questions are irrelevant but "openness" and "tolerance" are the major decisive criteria.<sup>53</sup> In this context McGrath explains why the postmodern assumption that something can be "true for me" but not "true" is a hollow one.

Is fascism as equally true as democratic libertarianism? Consider the person who believes, passionately and sincerely, that it is an excellent idea to place million of Jews in gas chambers. That is certainly 'true for him.' But can it be allowed to pass unchallenged? Is it as equally true as the belief that one ought to live in peace and tolerance with one's neighbours, including Jews? Should one tolerate the burning of widows in Hindu funeral pyres?<sup>54</sup>

As mentioned before, against religious pluralism D.A. Carson vehemently defends the view that the Bible incorporates "objective" or "propositional truth."

He claims that "the Bible's appeal to truth is rich and complex. It cannot be reduced to, but certainly includes, the notion of propositional truth."<sup>55</sup> This claim is stated in the context of recognising that there is a wide semantic range of "truth" in the Bible<sup>56</sup> and that the "Bible contains more (though certainly not less) than propositions." One instance in the gospels, that illustrates that the whole Bible is not made up of "inerrant" or "truthful" propositions, is, when Jesus cried out on the Cross "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Apparently, this is not an inerrant proposition. This claim, however, that not everything in Scripture is easily described as "inerrant" or "propositional", has always been recognised by Christians, and "they always said that the Bible is not simply a book of facts."<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Carson further acknowledges, that words like "truth" have to be read in context, and that contexts shape the semantic weight carried by a word (e.g. John 8:32).<sup>58</sup> However, remembering these thoughts, Carson insists that absolute biblical truth-claims cannot be excluded from the Bible and "lines must be drawn" in midst of the contemporary plurality of truth-claims as well as in midst of all the attempts of relativizing truth. "Truth itself," he writes, "however imperfectly we grasp it, demands that lines be drawn."<sup>59</sup>

This view is nowadays frequently described as being refuted due to the devastating effects of biblical and historical criticism.<sup>60</sup> It is argued that no religion can ever claim to possess propositional truth by referring to a "holy Scripture". Armin Kreiner for instance argues that "keine heilige Schrift vermag in einer nicht-willkürlichen Weise den Besitz der Wahrheit zu garantieren." Kreiner further states that to claim that something is true simply because it is found in Scripture is unacceptable, because "die Wahrheit einer Aussage bemißt sich *per definitionem* nun einmal nicht darin, ob und wo diese Aussage »geschrieben steht, sondern an ihrer Übereinstimmung mit der Wirklichkeit." For the author it is therefore not of real importance where to look for truth, if it is the Bible or the Qur'an or the *Veda*. "Von entscheidener Bedeutung ist in diesem Kontext weniger die Wahl des Ausgangspunktes als vielmehr die Wahl der Methode." And this method is his "erfahrungsorientierter Ansatz". Truth is to be perceived through our experiences with reality. The "Erfahrung der tranzendenten Wirklichkeit Gottes" is the essential "Fluchtpunkt" in which all

other experiences run together. The authenticity of our experiences is decisive for the author.<sup>61</sup>

This view presupposes that it is possible to know reality, and to know truth, by means of our experiences alone, and that there is no need for propositional truth which God has revealed to "blind" people. McGrath reminds the reader that the doctrine of redemption affirms that human nature is not as God intended it to be, but describes it with "fallen nature" and makes a sharp distinction between "the ideal and the real, between the prototype and the actual."<sup>62</sup> Really, what Kreiner's proposal shows is that his worldview is simply different from the biblical one and is not necessarily an objective or neutral perspective. McGrath agrees and writes that

one of the more significant developments within the recent sociology of knowledge has been the realization that there is no neutral point from which a religion or culture may be evaluated. All vantage points imply a valuation... [It is] naively [to] assume that [the] liberal pluralist approach is detached or objective, whereas it is obviously nothing of the sort.<sup>63</sup>

Therefore, it must be maintained that the Bible includes propositional truth in the process of seeking understanding and truth as a Christian.

In this respect Carson accuses Walter Brueggemann of being too shallow in his attempt to articulate a "relevant" hermeneutics within the postmodern condition.<sup>64</sup> For Brueggemann interpretation has to be controlled by an "evangelical imagination" in a complete new pluralistic, postmodern situation.<sup>65</sup> The author takes a critical stance towards doctrinal arguments or sheer cognitive appeals and towards moral appeals, because he thinks that these tools are not effective tools for the aim of transforming people. While affirming the importance of doctrine and moral appeals, Brueggemann, however, pleads for letting them function as a basis for "reflection" and "communication." Postmodern people change, in Brueggemann's view, "by the offer of new models, images, and pictures of how the pieces of life fit together - models, images, and pictures that characteristically have the particularity of narrative to carry them. Transformation is the slow, steady process of inviting each other into a counterstory about God, world, neighbour, and self."<sup>66</sup> Thus Brueggemann puts much emphasis on the narrative aspect of the Bible, and encourages the preacher to use the biblical material for *imaginary* purposes

that will stir the mind of the listeners and conveys the biblical message to them in a way they can understand.

There is a lot of valuable material in Brueggemann's approach to consider that helps to find ways to make the biblical message more applicable to contemporary people and mindsets. Carson writes that Brueggemann rightly observes that the entire Christian worldview is at stake in the postmodern condition. Nevertheless, Carson objects that in this approach Brueggemann appears to be utterly embarrassed when it comes to notions like propositional truth.<sup>67</sup> Brueggemann so strongly voices his repudiation of truthful propositions that it becomes questionable what he means by "challenging the worldview of secularism... by an alternative worldview, not by bits of disparate truths." If biblical construals like "God is the Creator" or "God alone brings in the consummation" are set out against popular construals of secularism without a clear affirmational stance towards an ontological reality, then such construals lose their authority. Slightly overdrawing his point Carson adds: "Why not instead deploy the configurations of reality imagined in, say, the *Bhagavad Gita*, or in the Qur'an? Or in Mother Goose, for that matter, provided the imagination is stirred?"<sup>68</sup>

The fact remains: propositional truth is part of the biblical canon. There is space for applying doctrines and moral appeals to individual situations and people, but these parts of the Christian teaching can neither be abandoned altogether nor relativized to the point of being disrupted from every objective truth-claim.

### ***What is the significance of these observations for the issue of homosexuality in the Church?***

As we found out above, the question whether the Bible includes "propositional" or "objective truth" is an important issue that affects the homosexual debate as well. R.B. Hays pointed out above that it is necessary to assume that the Bible's view of sexuality is true. Since there is so much confusion about sexual matters in our time we had better stick to the rules that are given to us in Scripture. Others, like W. Stegemann, argue that he does

not want to accept the biblically secured "ideal of society" with its implied norms for sexuality, because it is antiquarian and inapplicable to today's situation.

However, as this study intended to show, the New Testament writers did not base their sexual-ethics on sociological norms but on the Hebrew canon and its implicit laws for sexuality, particularly on the creation accounts. They did that because they understood these texts and laws firstly as being divinely given to men through revelation and further because they accepted them as a true foundation for Christian morality. Thus homosexuality was condemned because God had revealed his will about place and boundaries for sexual activity when he created man and woman and ordered them to live in a union that remedies the incompleteness of the sexes, is relationally complementary and has the capacity to be reproductive. The New Testament assumes that this is the truth about human sexuality and every departure from this norm is understood as being sinful.

Thus, the doctrine of creation is important for the constitution of a Christian sex-ethics. Paul frequently refers to the created order to establish theological truths about God and morality (Rom. 1:20). The apostle believes that the creation-order includes foundational statements which he uses for evangelistic and apologetical purposes (Acts 14:15-18; 17:24-29). His worldview is built upon the belief that God has revealed truth about himself and about human nature in the Jewish Scripture, particularly at creation. Referring to this point, D.A. Carson observes a fundamental difference between Paul and Immanuel Kant. Kant, who was prepared to say that "the intellect does not derive its laws (*a priori*) from nature but prescribes them to nature" differs from Paul's view here.<sup>69</sup> The philosopher, Carson explains, "begins from below, and wants human reason to be the test of all things. Paul begins with the personal/transcendent Creator-God of the Hebrew canon, and looks at the reality from his perspective, insofar as God has disclosed it. God has left traces in his created work."<sup>70</sup> The importance of these creation structures cannot be overlooked here. In this context Oliver O'Donovan writes:

That which most distinguishes the concept of creation is that it is complete. Creation is the given totality of order which forms the presupposition of historical existence. "Created order" is that which is not negotiable within the course of history, that which

neither the terrors of chance nor the ingenuity of art can overthrow. It defines the scope of our freedom and the limits of our fears.<sup>71</sup>

That agrees with Paul's understanding. For Paul is clear that elements of God's nature "have been clearly seen, being understood by what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). Thus he believes that the revelation of God in Scripture is true and complete, and that it is the basis for Christian thought and life.

It must be added here, while the creation is the starting point for the formulation of theology and morality, it finds its continuation in the doctrine of the Fall and redemption. The biblical view of men includes the reality of the consequences of the Fall, which accomplished that humanity became corrupted by sin and is in need of the Creator's gracious redemptive intervention in this human dilemma. Thus, the Bible not only points towards the creational ideal of human existence but also towards the divine act of redemption in Christ who came to meet humanity in its desperate situation and now offers power for the believers to live according to the creational ideal and even beyond that. Among other aspects of life, corrupted sexuality can now be reversed and come under the sanctifying and disciplining rule of the Spirit.<sup>72</sup>

Now, the question is what does the Church believe as being true about sexuality and homosexuality? On what basis does she build her sex-ethics? Neutrality is excluded. When the biblical view of sexuality is accepted as true, then it is difficult to argue as Lisa Cahill does, that the homosexual act can be accepted as an exceptional case. Cahill argues very much according to what has been argued so far, but her conclusion does not fully condemn homosexual behaviour. She agrees with the judgement that "those sexual relations and acts that best embody the Christian vision are heterosexual and potentially parental acts within a permanent commitment," yet goes on to explain:

Yet even in this sort of specific assessment, the proper focus of Christian ethics is on character and moral values or characteristics (for example, honesty, fidelity, love, service, self-denial), rather than on physical values and material acts (for example acts of genital sexuality). If because of conflictual situations, the material acts usually conducive to and expressive of moral values do not actualize them or in fact inhibit them, then these acts are not to be commended in the situation. The action or relationship which in a concrete situation is the best alternative is the positive and morally commendable one. It should be appreciated in the light of the Christian values, qualities, and ideals which it positively achieves. This amounts to a

suggestion that while heterosexual marriage is the normative or ideal context for sexual acts for the Christian, it is possible to judge sexual acts in other contexts as non-ideal but objectively justifiable in the exceptional situation, including that of the person with a strongly homosexual identity.<sup>73</sup>

Cahill addresses an important point here as she shifts the emphasis from "material acts" to character and values. It is certainly right, and in the spirit of Christ, that not "material acts" are in the fore-front of the Christian moral concern. However, there are some serious problems with her perspective that need to be pointed out here which will help to clarify the whole issue.

Firstly, if Cahill intended to express the opinion that the New Testament is exclusively concerned about those kinds of "moral values" or "characteristics" mentioned by her and is not interested in prohibiting certain non-negotiable "material acts" (e.g. adultery, prostitution), then she would clearly be in the wrong as we have seen above. Secondly, it is not clear in what way sexual intercourse between a heterosexual person and a "strongly homosexual" inclined person would neither "actualize" nor "inhibit" those moral values/characteristics which she mentions. Such acts would count as being emotionally or psychologically problematic but certainly not immoral. Thirdly, Cahill does not go far enough in view of the main thrust of her argument. If she argues that heterosexual marriage is the "*ideal* context for sexual acts", according to the Bible, then she must insist that in those "concrete conflictual situations" a homosexual relationship receives the same institutional status and appreciation from the Church as a heterosexual marriage. There would be no moral reason to discriminate against a faithful homosexual relationship (granted that "moral values/characteristics" are lived by the homosexual couple) because in such case there is nothing that the Bible would condemn as being immoral. If the "biblical" condemnation of homosexuality in its totality is rejected and it is assumed that homosexual activity can also be "good", then it is declared that another possibility exists beside marriage.<sup>74</sup> That leads to the last objection towards Cahill's proposal.

Cahill does not deal with the question of truth. The question which has been brought up in the last view paragraphs remains: Is the claim that a (certain) homosexual relationship is morally "good" based on truth? Or, to put it in different terms: if God calls heterosexual intercourse "good" and condemns

every other form of sexual activity outside of a heterosexual marital bond, on what basis do we ground the assumption that a faithful and ethically responsible homosexual relationship is also "good"? To decide that such a relationship is an exception to the norm is reasonable from the perspective of empirical observation, but nevertheless, it means that a departure from the biblical view of humanity with its ethics and norms is accomplished and a different view is accepted. As we have argued the Bible does not provide a precedent with regard to norms for sexual activity that would encourage the interpreter to make such a step. There remains an uncertainty about the question what is really good or the best for the homosexually inclined person.

So the two ethical decisions on this wing of the debate in the Church that accepts the biblical view of heterosexual marriage as the norm and ideal for sexual activity revolve around two different assumptions. On one side it is assumed that from a Christian point of view a homosexual relationship between two strongly homosexually inclined persons can be called good if "general" moral values or characteristics are respected and part of such a relationship. On the other side it is assumed that "homosexual practice constitutes a denial in practice of the good instituted by God from the beginning. Homosexuality is a declaration in practice that something else is good,<sup>75</sup> although Scriptural revelation about the purpose for sexuality is complete and true and excludes the possibility of a homosexual relationship because it is contrary to that purpose and revelation.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics, op.cit.*, p.157-8.
- <sup>2</sup> *Sexualität und Wahrheit III, Die Sorge um sich* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986): p.301.
- <sup>3</sup> *Sexualität und Wahrheit II, Der Gebrauch der Lüste* (Frankfurt; Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984): p.273.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.245f.
- <sup>5</sup> See above, p....
- <sup>6</sup> From the English translation *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1, An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1980): p.5.
- <sup>7</sup> *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977): p.151. R. Goss quotes this paragraph sympathetically in his book *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993): p.62.
- <sup>8</sup> Cf. F. Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 18 vols., ed. O. Levy (Eng. London: Allen & Unwin, 1909-13), here vol. 16: *The Twilight of the Idols*, p.71, and vol. 7: *Human, All-Too-Human* (vol.2): p.221.
- <sup>9</sup> *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self - On Meaning, Manipulation, and Promise* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995): p.6.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. E. Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World, op.cit.*; H.I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity, op.cit.*; M.D. Smith, "Ancient Bisexuality", *op.cit.*; comp. P. Brown, *Die Keuschheit der Engel. Sexuelle Entsagung, Askese und Körperlichkeit im frühen Christentum* (München, 1984); H.Cancil-Lindemaier / H. Cancik, "Gesellschaftliche Bedingungen der Römischen Erotik," in: L. Hieber / R.W. Müller (eds.), *Gegenwart der Antike* (Frankfurt, New York, 1982); pp.29-54.
- <sup>12</sup> "Christian Ethics in the Postmodern Condition", *Studies in Christian Ethics* 8 (1995/1), p.22.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* Foucault's view of history is similar to Nietzsche's view. Nietzsche opposed the, what he called, "Monumentale Betrachtung der Vergangenheit" and argued if the loyalty to the tradition is the decisive reason for reading history, than the past is covered by the interests of the present and "leidet...selbst Schaden", cf. F. Nietzsche, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben. Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen II, Sämtl. Werke II* (München, 1980): p.262.
- <sup>14</sup> "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion: Principles of Ideological Critique of the Bible," *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament* 22 (1982): pp. 54-66; cf. Phyllis Bird, "Images of women in the Old Testament," in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. R.R. Ruether (New York: Simson & Schuster, 1974). pp.41-88.; J.S. Siker, *Scripture and Ethics, op.cit.*, p.174.
- <sup>15</sup> *Gender, Power, & Promise, op.cit.*, p.38.
- <sup>16</sup> "Keine ewige Wahrheit", in *Was auf dem Spiel steht, op.cit.*, p.283.
- <sup>17</sup> *Hermeneutics. The Handwritten Manuscripts*, ed. H. Kimmerle (Eng. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977): pp.42, 109.
- <sup>18</sup> *Interpreting God, op.cit.*, p.50-1.
- <sup>19</sup> "Der Sinn des Verstehens," *Zeitschrift für Theology und Kirche - Beiheft* 9 (1995): p.6.
- <sup>20</sup> *Biblical Authority or Biblical Tyranny?* (Pennsylvania, Boston: Trinity Press Int./Cowley, 1994); see esp. pp.85f.
- <sup>21</sup> Michael Vasey, *Strangers and Friends – a new exploration of homosexuality and the Bible* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995): p.18.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*: p.52; cf. p.142
- <sup>23</sup> *Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion* (London/New York: Routledge, 1992): p.24.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ethics in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975): p.130.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. J. Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. R.M. and E. Donado (Baltimore; Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1970): pp. 247-72.
- <sup>26</sup> J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago; Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978): p.280; cf. *ibid.*, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Chakrovorty (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976).
- <sup>27</sup> *The Postmodern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader Orientated Criticism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988); cf. D.A. Carson, *The Gagging, op.cit.*, p.73-75.

- <sup>28</sup> *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980): p.14.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.326-27.
- <sup>30</sup> Cf. Iain Wright, "History, Hermeneutics, Deconstruction," in J. Hawthorn, *Criticism and Critical Theory* (London: Adward Arnold, 1984): pp.89f.; Richard Rorty, "Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism," in his *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982): pp.152-56.
- <sup>31</sup> Rorty as cited by I. Wright, "History, Hermeneutics, Deconstruction", *op.cit.*, p.89.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> *The Gagging, op.cit.*, p.111; cf. I. Wright, *ibid.*, p.90.
- <sup>34</sup> Cf. *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985): pp.158-59.
- <sup>35</sup> T.G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989): p.29.
- <sup>36</sup> Carson, *The Gagging, op.cit.*, p.114; cf. John M. Ellis, *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1989): pp.18-28.
- <sup>37</sup> "The Christian Church's Response To Pluralism", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35/4 (1992): pp.487-501.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.498.
- <sup>39</sup> P. Goodchild, "Christian Ethics in the Postmodern Condition," *Studies in Christian ethics* 8 (1995/1): p.23.
- <sup>40</sup> "Pluralism and the Limits of Neutrality," in *Whose Values? The Battle for Morality in Pluralistic America*, ed. Carl Horn (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1985): p.160. R.B. Hays argues similarly in a different context, responding to the nowadays often contended conviction that contemporary empirical studies have placed us into a 'new Nietzsche situation' with regard to the homosexual innate disposition. He writes that "if we are in a new hermeneutical situation, it is not primarily because we know something that Paul did not know about "sexology"; rather, it is because prevailing social attitudes have changed so that the value-neutral ideal of empirical investigation has tacitly come to acquire near-normative force in the formation of popular moral judgements about sexual behaviour." ("Response", *op.cit.*, p.214, fn.15); cf. G.R. Edwards, *Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984): pp.13-23.
- <sup>41</sup> "New Occasions Teach New Duties? 3. Seven Moral Myth", *The Expository Times* 105 (1994): p.165.
- <sup>42</sup> Cf. *Family Law Reporter*, "Belmont v. Belmont", 6 FLR 2785-86 (N.J. Sup. 1980).
- <sup>43</sup> "Pluralism and the Limits of Neutrality," *op.cit.*, p.162-63; comp. Leo Pfeffer, "Issues That Divide: The Triumph of Secular Humanism," *Journal of Church and State* 19 (1977): p.203.
- <sup>44</sup> R.A. Baer, Jr., "'Cosmos,' Cosmologies, and the Public Schools," *This Worlds* (Spring/Summer 1983): p.15. The teacher and author of several English textbooks Frank Zepezauer further writes on this point: "With regard to choices about religion we should at least want our high-school graduates to recognise that they now face two competing ontologies, one affirming a god-centred universe, the other denying it; that men of good will and surpassing intelligence have embraced [both, and] the choice is finally between one *world view* and another...." ("Secular Saints," *The Human Life Review* [Spring 1983]: p.86).
- <sup>45</sup> *What basis for basic values?* (Nottingham: Grove Books Limited, 1995): p.19.
- <sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, *Works, op.cit.*, vol. 15, *The Will to Power* (vol. 2), p.20.
- <sup>47</sup> Cf. *Works, op.cit.*, vols. 6 & 7: *Human All-Too-Human* (2 vols.), vol. 1, esp. pp.1-9, vol. 2, pp. 20-32.
- <sup>48</sup> *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self, op.cit.*, p.16.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.16-17.
- <sup>50</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word* (Eng. Cambridge, Mass: Cowley Publications, 1986): p.45.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (Eng. London: SCM, 1959): pp.93-176; See also: Thiselton, *Interpreting God, op.cit.*, pp.22-24.
- <sup>52</sup> A. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simson and Schuster, 1987): pp.25-26.
- <sup>53</sup> Cf. McGrath, "The Christian Church's Response to Pluralism", *op.cit.*, p.500.
- <sup>54</sup> A.E. McGrath, "The Challenge of Pluralism for the Contemporary Church", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (1992): p.366.
- <sup>55</sup> *The Gagging, op.cit.*, p.163; cf. pp.163-74.

- <sup>56</sup> Cf. A. Thiselton, "Truth," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3: pp.874-902.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.165-67.
- <sup>58</sup> Cf. K.J. Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," in D.A. Carson and J.D. Woodbridge, *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986): pp.53-104, esp. 86-92; J.L. Austin, *How To Do with Words*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).
- <sup>59</sup> *The Gagging, op.cit.*, p.353.
- <sup>60</sup> The Tübingen school is particularly proceeding along those lines. Cf. "Theologie als gegenwärtige Schriftauslegung," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, Beiheft 9 (University of Tübingen, June 1995); See also: Armin Kreiner, *Ende der Wahrheit? Zum Wahrheitsverständnis in Philosophie und Theologie* (Tübingen, 1992).
- <sup>61</sup> "Die Relevanz der Wahrheitsfrage für die Schriftauslegung", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, Beiheft 9, *op.cit.*, pp.58-62.
- <sup>62</sup> "The Christian Church's Response to Pluralism", *op.cit.*, p.495.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.494.
- <sup>64</sup> W. Brueggemann, *Text under Negotiation: The Bible and the Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.vii.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.24-25.
- <sup>67</sup> Comp. e.g. pp.57f.; cf. D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God, op.cit.*, pp.169-172. See also: W. Brueggemann, "The Prophetic Word of God and History," *Interpretation* 48 (1994): pp.239-51.
- <sup>68</sup> *The Gagging, op.cit.*, p.170.
- <sup>69</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Prolegomena to Every Future Metaphysics That May Be Presented as a Science," in *The Philosophy of Kant*, ed. C.J. Friedrich, pp.40-115 (New York: Modern Library, 1949): p.91.
- <sup>70</sup> *The Gagging, op.cit.*, p.182.
- <sup>71</sup> *Resurrection and the Moral Order* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986): p.61.
- <sup>72</sup> Cf. R.B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996).
- <sup>73</sup> "Homosexuality: A Case Study in Moral Argument," *op.cit.*, p.73-74.
- <sup>74</sup> This is true for H. Thielicke's proposal as well. Cf. above.
- <sup>75</sup> Cf. T.E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?, op.cit.*, p.48.

## **Conclusion**

This study has dealt with the issue of homosexuality in the Church and its ethical implications. Now the following concluding remarks can be made. The central focus of this thesis is the question of what to do with the Bible's view of homosexuality, and in particular Paul's contribution to it. Consequently we began by looking at the most important Pauline passage in Romans 1 regarding the topic and discussed its meaning and applicability. Though homosexuality is not the main issue in this passage, nevertheless it reveals that Paul has a condemnatory attitude towards homosexuality. He thinks of it as a clear departure from the norm for sexuality which God constituted in the order of creation. This and other Pauline sayings reveal his conviction that the sexual differentiation between male and female cannot be annulled or disregarded when it comes to sexual relations and living in Christian communities. For Paul is decisive that sexual activity is only possible in a marital relationship where it finds the necessary protection and restriction. This is because all human beings are affected and corrupted by sin and inclined to revolt against the orders of God and to do what is evil instead of what is good. The same is true for the homosexual person, who is somehow "thrown upon" his or her dispositional position, yet at the same time is still able to make moral decisions and consequently responsible for every deed and behaviour. Homosexual behaviour is not an especially bad sin for Paul, but a sin that explicitly reveals the confused moral state of humanity that has its roots in the Creator's decision to leave mankind to themselves due to their own choice.

This argument we corroborated by discussing what Paul and the New Testament writers meant by created order which is described as being violated by homosexual behaviour. Apparently, the norm for sexuality that is affirmed by the apostle as well as by the Jesus sayings about marriage and divorce, is heterosexuality. Particularly the investigation of the creation accounts, their content, meaning, and their use by Paul and Jesus affirmed the view that the early church thought of them as normative for a Christian sex-ethics. Thus the foundational statement of the Bible regarding sexuality is that heterosexual marriage is the only place for sexual expression and exists as a foundational institution for sexual expression, the family, and society. Paul is using the issue of homosexuality for descriptive purposes in Romans 1, but nevertheless he bases his condemnation of homosexual behaviour on the Hebrew canon and shares it with contemporary Hellenistic-Jewish writers. Though he differs from their understanding of the issue slightly, nonetheless, the principle of judging sexual issues in view of what God established at creation is the same. At

creation God established an order for sexuality that cannot be altered nor reduced in its applicability.

The homosexuality debate in the Church today highlights some important questions about the concept of "authority of Scripture". Though experiences of individuals and empirical observation are important areas which deserve consideration, they should not be the decisive factor for the interpretation of Scripture. Otherwise every normative and authoritative use of Scripture loses its meaning. The Bible can only be used as a normative source for ethical decisions when the concept of "authority of Scripture" is maintained. This does not imply an uncritical handling of Scripture but demands a certain amount of trust towards its truthfulness. The Pauline and the Jesus sayings must not be understood as being mere interpretations of interpretations without a real authoritative, revelatory aspect to them, but rather as a illuminative, descriptive, instructing, *and* commanding source for ethical decisions. The concept of moral law cannot be excluded from the Bible, if a meaningful Christian morality is to be constituted and sustained, though this mood is only one part of what the Bible contributes to ethical discourse. Homosexual behaviour must be placed beside other non-negotiable prohibitions of the Bible, prohibitions of, for example, adultery or prostitution, because it is equally not in accordance with the biblical vision of sexuality.

Homosexual behaviour can only be permitted if the credibility of the Scriptural voice is diminished and a departure from traditional Christian norms for sexuality is accomplished. Then, however, such a decision is not based any more on the Bible nor on the biblical view of man and the ethic and the legal norms based on it, but must be described in terms of secular sex-ethics, grounded in a different view of man and its corresponding ethic and legal norms. And further, if the Bible is rejected as an authoritative source for sex-ethics, then the truth-claims of the Bible are in doubt. But this cannot possibly be accepted because it must be assumed that the biblical view of anthropology and sexuality is true and complete, otherwise Christians and the Church deprive themselves of their Premier truth-source for Christian thinking and living. In view of these thoughts it is clear that homosexuality cannot be understood as another variant of sexuality, because the Bible clearly denounces all extra-marital sexual relations other than between a man and a woman. From a Christian point of view it can only be insisted that heterosexual marriage is the *only* ideal sexual relationship and that homosexual activity must be avoided, because the latter opposes an order from creation that has been constituted by God for the good of every human being.

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