Homosexuality: An Investigation of Its Ethics and Future
In A Christian Context

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

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I. INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION OF HOMOSEXUALITY

"Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (Mt. 7:12). This verse, more familiarly known as the Golden Rule, is the summation of the biblical message concerning horizontal relationships between human beings. Yet, despite this mandate and others directing Christians to love their neighbors, various groups of people have not found the compassion in the Church that was to separate it from the rest of the world. Among these groups is that of the homosexual.

Condemnation of homosexuality dates back to the time of the Old Testament, where the death penalty was prescribed for some forms. Penalties are not as severe today, but some form of punishment is still present, whether it be the denial of certain occupations, police harassment, and even prison terms and fines in most states. The same can be said for the majority of the religious world as denials of ordination and church membership can be expected by those known to be openly "gay". Still, with the advent of Gay Liberation, some churches are reexamining the entire issue and coming up with findings much different from those supported by tradition. It is the purpose of this paper to discuss these new findings and the changes that must occur both in the ethical thinking and the ministry of the Church if they are accepted.

Before one can discuss the Christian viewpoint of homosexuality,
it must first be decided who the homosexual is. Literally, the word "homosexual" means "same sex"; thus it could be used to describe any and all organizations, societies, gatherings, etc., which are composed entirely of just one of the sexes.¹ This would include football teams, ladies' circles, some forms of religious service, fraternities, as well as many others with which all are familiar, although these aren't the contexts in which one normally uses the word. The major usage is usually confined to sexual activity engaged in by members of the same sex. Not all who participate in such activity, though, can be classified as being homosexual. Circumstances such as lengthy confinement with members of the same sex may cause such activity to arise, but it most likely abates once that confinement has ended. A proper definition of homosexuality should therefore not only take into account a particular form of behavior but also the emotional responses that give rise to it with more emphasis on the latter.² The definition stated by Paul Gebhard, director of the Institute of Sex Research at Indiana University (also known as the Kinsey Institute) makes the following distinctions:

We have found the most practical definition of homosexual behavior to be: physical contact between two individuals of the same gender which both recognize as being sexual in nature and which ordinarily results in sexual arousal. Psychological homosexual response may be defined as sexual arousal from thinking of or seeing persons of the same gender.³

Studies at the Institute show that there is a wide range of possibilities both in overt behavior and psychological response. A scale ranging from zero (used to designate exclusive heterosexuality) to six (designating exclusive homosexuality) is used to plot both the individual's sexual activity and psychological responses in regard to both sexes. Those who fall somewhere in between show varying amounts of both homosexual and heterosexual activity or response, depending on the placement on the continuum. Lower-valued numbers such as 1 or 2 show most activity or response is heterosexually oriented while the higher-valued numbers of 4 and 5 show mainly homosexual inclinations. A rating of 3 shows equal homosexual and heterosexual inclinations. Although a person's sexual activity rating will usually be the same as his/her psychological response rating, it is possible for the two to be different. For instance, a person may be rated 5 on the psychological response rating showing almost exclusive preference toward homosexuality, while the overt behavior may be 1, showing almost total heterosexuality. Of such cases, Gebhard states, "a discrepancy of two or more points indicates stress and/or emotional and social disturbance."  

With such information, the Institute recognizes those persons who rate 4 through 6 on the scale as being predominantly homosexual, which their studies show would include about 5 percent of the American males and about 2 percent of the American females. Other studies in-

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4 Ibid.  
5 Ibid., p. 76.  
6 Ibid., p. 77.
dependent of the Institute show that 13 percent of the males and 8 percent of the females have homosexual inclinations without actually acting on them. As a whole, about 25 percent of the males and 10 percent of the females would be rated at least a 2 on the continuum.  

What is really important in these findings is the idea of the homosexual orientation, said by some not to have been recognized until the 1890's. For some people, it is entirely "natural" for them to feel an emotional attraction toward members of their own sex, while feeling some kind of aversion toward members of the opposite sex. As shall be seen later in the section dealing with the Scriptural view of homosexuality, biblical writers did not know of such an orientation; they simply assumed that all were heterosexually inclined and that homosexual behavior was some kind of perversion, a turning from the natural to the unnatural. With the added knowledge gained through the social sciences about human sexuality, moralists are perhaps in a better position to accurately describe such phenomena. Yet, any claim made concerning Christian ethics must include some discussion of the biblical view of homosexuality, to which this discussion will now turn.

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7 Weltge, p. 8.
8 Scanzoni and Mollenkott, p. 71.
II. HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE BIBLE

A. General Considerations

Theologically, there are many views concerning the proper way of interpreting the Bible's message, ranging from complete literalism to the attempt by some to totally discredit all of its contents. Depending on one's theology, therefore, the Bible will play varying roles in the formation of a Christian ethical system. Instead of arguing the advantages of one view over another, the views of Dr. Robert Treese, Associate Professor of Practical Theology at Boston University's School of Theology will be used concerning the use of Scripture in ethics.

(1) The Bible is not the Word of God, but the words of men, in which, and through which we believe the living, active, constantly contemporary Word of God comes to men.

(2) A Bible passage is to be interpreted in terms of the experiences, life setting and problems of the specific writer and with respect to the purposes for which it was written.

(3) A passage is to be further explicated in the light of our contemporary experience and knowledge. We must try to see it in relation to our social-psychological-historical-philosophical understanding as well as to our existential knowledge. There may not be agreement, for sometimes—in fact, often—the Bible stands in judgment of our contemporary life, but the task is to discern, as nearly as possible, the meaning for us today.

(4) Although the Bible writers faced the same basic existential questions we face, many of their answers are time-caught, as ours are, and valid only for them. But the values they affirmed by their answers are of significance to us.

(5) The whole Bible is to be seen in light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the experience of the early Church.9

This study will now turn to the five main passages in the Bible in which homosexuality is mentioned, always keeping in mind the above contentions.

B. Old Testament Passages

1. Genesis 19:1-14ff.: Sodom and Gomorrah

The first passage that allegedly deals with homosexuality is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. This passage has perhaps been the most important for those who oppose homosexuality because, as they claim, the destruction of the cities shows how God feels toward the homosexual. It has been used throughout the history of the Church to explain such natural occurrences as famines, earthquakes, floods, etc.; thus for the safety of the communities involved, civil laws were legislated against homosexual acts in an attempt to ward off future visitations of such disasters. Yet upon closer examination of this story and its various interpretations throughout the time when the Bible was being recorded, such reasoning becomes rather uncertain and the question arises whether homosexual acts were even involved in the cities of the plain, let alone being the reason for their destruction.

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening; and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed himself with his face to the earth and said, "My lords, turn aside, I pray you, to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may arise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the street." But he urged

10McNeill, pp. 42, 43.
them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Behold I have two daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door. But the men put forth their hands and brought Lot into the house to them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves groping for the door.

Then the men said to Lot, "Have you any one else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or any one else you have in the city, bring them out of the place; for we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it." So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up, get out of this place; for the Lord is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

The basis for the homosexual interpretation of this story rests entirely upon the request of the Sodomites to "know" the two angels. The verb "to know" (yadha in Hebrew) can, admittedly mean "engage in coitus." Yet, this is not its main meaning.

The Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament notes that of the 943 uses of yadha, it is used only 10 times without qualification, apart from this text in Genesis and its derivative in Judges 19:22, to denote sexual coitus. And again with the possible exception of this text, it always refers to heterosexual coitus. The word normally used in the Old Testament for both homosexual coitus and bestiality is shakhabh.11

The majority of the other uses of this word simply refers to the act of getting acquainted with someone. Although there is the possibility that the Sodomites did intend to have sexual intercourse with the angels,

11 Ibid.
one would not help but wonder why this particular word was used, especially since we are told that both the angels and those making the request were all male and that this word is normally used to describe heterosexually-oriented acts. If, as Church tradition states, this request inferred homosexual acts, it would have made much more sense for the Yahwist recorder of the incident to have used the word in Hebrew to describe such acts.

It has been argued that Lot's offer of his daughters was simply an attempt to divert homosexual lust into heterosexual acts. "However, [D.S.] Bailey claims, this episode can be reasonably explained as the most tempting bribe Lot could offer at the spur of the moment to appease a hostile crowd."\(^{12}\) Simply because Lot's offer included the possibility of sexual acts does not necessarily mean that was the original intention of the Sodomites.

Disregarding the sexual interpretation of *yadha* for the time being, the possibility that it was just a request to get acquainted with the two angels will be explored. To properly understand this, some background information of the situation is quite helpful.

In Genesis 13 it is recorded that Abraham left Egypt, taking with him his wife, Sarai, his nephew, Lot, and all of their possessions. They journeyed into the Negab as far as Bethel and there a problem arose as the land could not support the flocks and herds of both men. To overcome this, Abraham invited Lot to choose whichever area in the land that he wanted to dwell and Abraham would take a different one. Lot therefore

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 44.
took the Jordan valley which included the city of Sodom and Abraham continued to live in Canaan, which was west of Lot's choice.

Genesis 14 describes a rebellion by the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela against the kings of Shinar, Ellasar, Elam, and Goiim who had ruled over the five cities for twelve years. The rebellion was put down, the kings and armies of the five cities fled to the mountains, and Sodom and Gomorrah were captured, including some of the townspeople, of which Lot was one. This news was brought to Abraham who took 318 of his own men and defeated the four rulers, freeing Lot and all the goods of the cities. The king of Sodom returned from the mountains, greeted Abraham, and offered to let him keep all the goods as long as he allowed the people to go free. Abraham refused the goods, but let the people go. The narrative then leaves Sodom and Gomorrah and follows Abraham for the next four chapters, until the angels arrive at the city to judge it because of its sins.

When the angels arrive at Sodom, they are met by Lot, who is a ger or a resident alien, not a citizen of the city. D.S. Bailey, in his book, Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition, states that, "In return for the toleration and protection of the city to which he attached himself the ger acquired certain obligations, and there were, no doubt, limitations to his civic privileges which would vary from one community to another." 13 One of Sodom's limitations upon these sojourners might possibly have concerned the right to entertain foreignors who had not been checked out by the proper authorities of the city. For

all the people of Sodom knew, the two angels could have been spies sent out to determine the strength of the city in an effort to recapture it. Thus, when Lot met the two strangers at the gate and bypassed the "credential-checking" committee, the men of Sodom naturally got suspicious, even to the point of gathering outside Lot's home and demanding the appearance of the two. Lot's extension of his rights, compounded with the recent liberation of the city from its oppressors, gave the townspeople sufficient cause to suspect foul play.

However, if yadha is used here to mean "get acquainted with", it may be asked what the sin was that confirmed the reports of the city's wickedness and caused its destruction. Bailey feels that the main sin was one of inhospitality.

Perhaps the most mysterious feature about the tale is its close general correspondence to others of a similar character in the folklore of various people. These legends tell how strangers (sometimes divine beings in disguise, like the angels in the Sodom story) visit a city, where they are refused hospitality. Eventually they find lodging, often with people in humble circumstances—Lot, though not poor, was only a ger in Sodom; and they help their hosts escape before the city and its inhabitants are destroyed. Of such legends, the best known is that of Philemon and Baucis....Their ethical teaching is obvious, though it is doubtful whether they were intended to be didactic when they first took shape. Nor do we know whether any of them had their origin in an actual catastrophe, though this is not improbable. Underlying them all, however, there seems to be an unexplained mythological motif, and this may account for the particular form which the Sodom story itself assumed during the course of transmission prior to being written down.

Although it is not recorded whether the angels tried to gain housing for the night before they met Lot, it might be implied in their de-

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14 Ibid., pp. 4-5
15 Ibid., pp. 7-8.
cision to sleep in the street, perhaps as a last resort. Also, it can be seen that the intentions of the Sodomites were not entirely innocent in the comment to Lot, "Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Perhaps this aspect can be seen more clearly in the derivative story found in Judges 19:1-21:25, where the inhabitants of Gibeath surround the house of an elderly man who has taken in a Levite and his female consort. The inhabitants make the same request to know the stranger, who sends out his consort instead. The Gibeans misuse her that she dies, and, when the tribes of Israel gather later to find out what happened, the stranger replies:

I came to Gibeath that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night. And the men of Gibeath rose against me, and beset the house round about me by night; they meant to kill me, and they ravished my concubine, and she is dead. (Judges 20:4,5)

"In the book of Judges' derivative, then, the crime of inhospitality included the design to murder the stranger." This might have also been the intention of the Sodomites; in fact, it could have been a regular occurrence with which Lot was familiar, thus his comments, "I beg you my brothers, do not act so wickedly...only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof."

This idea of inhospitality is also supported by the great amount of detail that the writer goes into to describe the reception of the angels by both Abraham and Lot. In both cases, each went out of his way to make them feel welcome, they both are reported to have prepared feasts and they both offer their guests a place to rest. This is contrasted with the treatment given out by the Sodomites, who apparently ignore

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16 McNeill, p. 48.
the angels when they enter the city and later surround the house and demand for the two to be brought out.

A final confirmation of this sin of inhospitality can be found in Luke 10:10-13, where Jesus tells the seventy what to do in case of an inhospitable welcome:

But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your streets that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you; nevertheless, know this, that the kingdom of God has come near." I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

Besides the specific sin of inhospitality, the Bible lists several others as the reason for the destruction of the cities, none of which is homosexuality.

Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord. (Gen. 13:13)

(Speaking to Judah and Jerusalem) "Hear the words of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah....Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me....Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. (Is. 1:10, 13, 16, 17)

But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evil doers so that no one turns from his wickedness; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah. (Jer. 23:14)

Behold this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did abominable things (to'ebhah) before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it. (Ez. 16:49, 50)

Of this last verse, Bailey says

17Ibid., p. 46.
The word to'ebhah,..., is sometimes thought to denote abomination of a particular sexual kind, and might therefore, in this context here suggest the commission of homosexual acts. Primarily, however, it refers to idolatry, for which it is a conventional term in the Old Testament; and undoubtedly this is its meaning in Ez. xvi. 50. It has no warrantable homosexual implications, though it is admittedly open to misinterpretation in the light of later presuppositions concerning Sodom.18

Even in the extra-biblical books of the Apocrypha, the same message is maintained.

Having passed wisdom by, not only were (the inhabitants of the cities) disabled from recognizing the things which are good, but they left behind for human life a monument of their folly; to the end that when they went astray they might fail even to be unseen. (Wisdom 10:8)

Whereas the men of Sodom received not the strangers when they came among them; the Egyptians made slaves of the guests who were their benefactors. (Wisdom 19:8)

God spared not those with whom Lot sojourned, whom he abhorred for their pride. (Ecclus. 16:8)

In fact, as Bailey has discovered in his research, the sin of Sodom is never identified with anything sexual until the century before Christ in the writings of the Pseudopigrapha and those of Philo and Josephus.19

The book of Jude picks up this influence as it is recorded:

And the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day; just as Sodom and Comorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust (hetera sarx), serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. (Jude 6, 7)

The angels spoken of here are referred to as the Watchers in Jewish literature and are the sons of God in Genesis 6 who take for themselves human wives. Their sin was one of not keeping their position, i.e.

18 Bailey, pp. 9-10.
19 Ibid., p. 10.
keeping within the limitations of divine beings. The "likewise" found in Jude 7 would therefore seemingly mean an equivelency between the sin of the Watchers and that of the men of Sodom. If this is so, that would mean another attempt to sexually mix the divine and the human.

The King James Version brings this out with its interpretation of *hetera sár̂x*, "strange flesh."

In his (Jude's) view, therefore, the sin of Sodom, though admittedly sexual...was only, as it were, incidently homosexual; the emphasis is rather upon the sexual incompatibility of the angelic and human orders than upon any particular kind of unnatural coitus between persons of the same sex. 20

A different sexual interpretation of the sin of Sodom is brought out by Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Mollenkott in their book, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* It is their belief that violent gang rape and not simply homosexual acts is what finally caused God to destroy the city, along with the sin of inhospitality. They pose the question that if the men had accepted Lot's offer of his daughters and committed sexual intercourse would God have left the city stand because of their show of heterosexuality? They feel that the destruction would have still come, and, accepting the logic with which the Church presently arrives at Sodom's sin as being homosexuality, the only conclusion could be that their sin was heterosexuality! Yet, the Church would therefore set the situation in its proper context, that of rape. 21 The Sodomites refused Lot's offer, but this does not lessen the fact that rape was possibly intended.

20 Ibid., p. 16.

21 Scanzoni and Mollenkott, pp. 57, 58.
This view of rape is also supported by a Jewish midrash on Genesis: "The Sodomites made an agreement among themselves whenever a stranger visited them they would force him to sodomy and rob him of his money." Bailey also reports the fact that sodomy was used as an act of indignity and humiliation, especially upon defeated enemies by the Egyptians and other nearby peoples. Thus, even rape was just one more way that the inhospitality of the Sodomites took form and that its incidence does not necessarily portray the actual sexual appetites of the inhabitants.

Thus, upon closer examination of the Sodom story, it becomes all too apparent that a simplistic and dogmatic attitude towards the reason for its destruction easily falls prey to dispute when it is questioned. By applying the hermeneutical principle of allowing the Bible to interpret itself ("Obscure passages in Scripture must give way to clear passages."), the homosexual interpretation finds no clear support; in fact, the only hint of Sodom's sin being anything sexual in nature is found in Jude, which was shown to refer to a disregard of natural and divine orders. It would therefore appear that inhospitality, pride, ignoring the plight of others less fortunate, as well as many others, were the clear sins of Sodom, coupled perhaps with the attempted gang rape of the angels. Yet, this rape was not necessarily the result of homosexual lust, but was, in itself, an attempt to humiliate passing strangers.

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22 McNeill, p. 74.
23 Bailey, p. 32.

Two verses found in Israel's Holiness Code are the next references to homosexual acts found in the Bible.

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (Lev. 18:22)

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them. (Lev. 20:13)

In order to understand the significance of these verses, it is necessary to first set them in their proper context. At the beginning of chapter 18, it is written:

And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I bring you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall do my ordinances and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God."

Thus one reason for these laws was to attempt to keep the Israelites separated from the practices of their neighbors, to build a land based on other standards. It was already stated that the Egyptians did indulge in sodomy, not necessarily because of a particular sexual appetite but because it was thought of as an extreme act of humiliation and indignation. 25 Also, if the midrash was correct, the agreement of the Sodomites to force strangers to sodomy may also come into play here as Lev. 19:33-34 tells the Israelites

When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as a native among you, and you shall love him as yourselves; for you

25 Bailey, p. 32.
were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

Other verses in this section give commands against oppressing and robbing neighbors (vs. 13), abusing the physically impaired (vs. 14), treating neighbors unjustly (vs. 15), and slandering neighbors (vs. 16). The key point is found in verse 18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Thus any action that did not have love for the neighbor as its main goal was expressly forbidden, as this did not typify the people of God. Forced sodomy then did not find favor in God's sight because it did not have love as its main goal.

Another reason for these two commandments may have to deal with the use of homosexual acts in idolatry. The first seven verses of Leviticus 20 have to deal with idolatrous practices among the neighboring peoples and how the Israelites were to deal with them. Immediately following these is a list of forbidden sexual practices including incest, adultery, sodomy, and bestiality. That these two sections fall in such manner is no accident as the religious practices of Israel's neighbors did include many types of sexuality. Halley reports that Temples of Baal and Ashtoreth were usually together. Priestesses were temple prostitutes. Sodomites were male temple prostitutes. The worship of Baal, Ashtoreth, and other Canaanite gods consisted in the most extravagant orgies; their temples were centers of vice.26

This same idea is found in Deut. 23:17, a prohibition of such practices.

There shall be no cult prostitute of the daughters of Israel, neither shall there be a cult prostitute of the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot, or the wages of a sodomite into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow; for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God.

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Again, this word "abomination" is to'ebah and is used both in this verse and Lev. 20:13. Besides Bailey's comments reported on page 13 concerning this word, he also says:

This term, we have seen, is clearly associated with idolatry and designates not only false gods but also the worship and conduct of those who serve them. By a natural extension of meaning, however, it can also denote whatever reverses the proper order of things and this seems to be the connotation [of abomination in these verses]...

Such acts are regarded as an "abomination"...because, as a reversal of what is sexually natural, they exemplify the spirit of idolatry which is itself the fundamental subversion of the true order...

They [these laws] condemn homosexual acts...between males as typical expressions of the ethos of heathenism which Israel must renounce no less than religious and cultural syncretism with the nations which bow down to idols.27

Finally, a third reason may be given for these two commands, the avoidance of ceremonial uncleanness. A commandment found in chapter 20 of Leviticus concerns the prohibition of sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman, clearly because of ceremonial uncleanness. Also, in verses 25 and 26 of the same chapter, the Lord gives a command concerning clean and unclean beasts and birds, again in an effort against possible ceremonial defilement. Finally, "an emission of semen rendered men ceremoniously unclean (See Lev. 15). Thus a kind of 'double uncleanness' might have been associated with homosexual acts."28

One thing that might be noticed is the absolute silence in these verses and the whole book concerning homosexual acts between women. It seems that the attitude concerning lesbians was much more lax than that towards their male counterparts.

According to the Talmud, the only concern over sexual acts between women centered around whether or not such acts constituted a loss

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27 Bailey, pp. 59-60.
28 Scanzoni and Mollenkott, p. 60.
of virginity. If so, the women would be disqualified from possible marriage to a priest. "Women that practice lewdness with one another are unfit for the priesthood," instructed one rabbi. Evidently, there was some disagreement over this point among rabbis, with one argument being that while sexual relationships with a man would clearly mean a loss of virginity and thus rule out marriage to a priest, "when it is that of a woman, the action is regarded as mere obscenity."29

The obvious discrepancy between the two attitudes is that of the punishment prescribed for those who commit such acts. For those committed by men, the death penalty was prescribed, while those between women were punished by this mere exclusion of being a priest's wife. This discrepancy alone is enough to question the prohibitions, for if God really did view the acts as abominations, it seems that the punishment meted out for them would be equal for either sex, as it is in cases of adultery, incest, bestiality and intercourse during menstruation.

This prohibition of male homosexual acts is probably not based on divine decree but on the attitudes arising from the social conditioning of the male-oriented society in which the Israelites lived. In studies conducted by C. Rattrey Taylor of patriarchal societies, results always show a "strongly subordinationist view of women with a repression and horror of male homosexual practices."30 On the other hand, societies based on matriarchal principles show an improved status of women and a more tolerant attitude towards the male homosexual. Patriarchal societies stress the masculine qualities of aggression and dominance, both of which are seemingly absent in the passive role of

29 Ibid., p. 61
30 McNeill, p. 83.
homosexual acts. Furthermore, the active role forces or at least convinces another male to give up such traits and "play the part of the woman," ending in the supposed degradation and humiliation of the male sex. Thus, sodomists were seen as trying to undermine the male authority. Proscriptions, both in religious and civil areas, were then created to prevent any further abandonment of masculinity. Any efforts were deemed acceptable to prevent harm to the male, thus Lot's offer of his daughters in the Sodom story and the Levite's offer of his concubine in the Judges' derivative. The female was seen as merely expendable in such situations and this may explain the attitude taken toward lesbian acts, allowing them to occur as long as the virginity of the partners was maintained. If virginity was lost, the attitude again was one of almost total indifference. 31

One final word concerning these verses has to do with other commands found in the book of Leviticus. Intercourse with a menstruating woman, interbreeding of cattle, eating blood, eating certain types of seafood, mixing two kinds of cloth in a garment and many other things are all prohibited in Leviticus, yet these prohibitions have all been disregarded and are now deemed acceptable. It would seem that if the prohibitions concerning homosexual acts between males were still thought of as binding for the Christian today, all other commandments in the book would be also. What is present today is a selective approach to this book's message, resulting in an acceptance of those things which do not detract from a given lifestyle and a rejection of those things

31 Ibid., p. 84.
which do. Instead of trying to decide which commandments are still bind-
ing today, several verses in the New Testament provide guidance for
the Christian's relationship to the Jewish Law.

For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may
be justified. (Rom. 10:4)

Owe no man anything, except to love one another; for he who loves
his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall
not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You
shall not covet," are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love
your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor;
therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom. 13:8-10)

For the whole law is fulfilled in the one word, "You shall love
your neighbor as yourself." (Gal. 5:14)

On this note, attention will now turn to the New Testament and its
attitude toward homosexuality.

C. New Testament Passages

The first reference to homosexual acts in the New Testament is
not located in the Gospels but in Paul's epistles to the various
churches spread throughout the Roman Empire. For all that is known,
Jesus was absolutely silent about this form of behavior, and He even
supported the idea that the sin of Sodom was one of inhospitality, not
homosexuality. Paul, on the other hand, did make mention of some of
these acts in his letters and this discussion will now turn and focus
on Paul's thoughts.

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32Joseph C. Weber, "Does the Bible Condemn Homosexual Acts?"
1. Romans 1:26 and 27.

The first reference is found in Romans 1:26 and 27, but in order to understand the totality of Paul's message here, the surrounding verses are included.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they were gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them.

Paul's flow of thought in this passage looks something like this when condensed:

God revealed Himself through nature to all of humanity → Humanity refused to honor God and worshiped the creature instead → Because of this God abandoned humanity to improper conduct, both sexually and socially
Thus, Paul sees problems in relating to fellow human beings as the result of idolatry, which causes every horizontal relationship to be affected in one way or another. Because of this refusal to honor God, "the lower and the higher, the creature and the Creator, are exchanged ('perverted') and the result is a perverse supremacy of the inferior desires over the spirit." This passage, then, is not a condemnation of homosexuality per se, but is simply a description of the origin of humanity's social problems.

In the sexual realm, Paul lists two results of man's refusal to worship God: women exchanging natural relations for unnatural ones, and men giving up natural relations with women for relations with other men. There are several things that should be noted in these two verses. First, it does not say exactly what unnatural relations the women were involved in. It has been understood to refer to homosexual acts between women, but Paul does not specify them to the degree that he does in describing the actions of the men. He uses a different word to describe the actions of each sex. Paul says the women exchanged (metallaxan) the natural for the unnatural, while the men were said to have given up or left (aphantes) relations with women for those with other men. It may be simply understood that the unnatural acts indulged in by the women were just variations of heterosexuality, an idea supported by several theologians, both early and modern. These theologians describe natural relations as those in which the woman lies beneath the man, while unnatural relations have the woman "adopting an incum-

33 Gearhart and Johnson, p. 37.
The logic behind this can be seen in the thought that "woman's subordination to man requires her to assume a succumbent role--and subordination was a cardinal feature of the Pauline theory of sexual relations (1 Cor. 11:3 ff.)". If this is the case, it is just one more example of how the patriarchal society has influenced the thinking of the biblical writers.

Another point to be kept in mind is that neither Paul, nor any other biblical writer knew of a homosexual orientation in which such acts were "natural"; all writers simply assumed that everyone was heterosexually inclined and that homosexual acts were just "evidences of perversion." Paul's use of the phrase "against nature" (para phusin) was therefore used by some theologians to support a "natural theology," which traditionally dates back to the early Church Fathers. In this, homosexual acts are seen as "crimes against nature," supposedly because in no other species of animal do they occur. Yet, recent studies have shown that when we examine other species of animal, we find homosexual activity, sometimes to the point of ejaculation, in all of the species studied. This is true of animals in the wild as well as animals in captivity. It is rare, however, for individual mammals to show an exclusive pattern of homosexual behavior. The majority have both heterosexual and homosexual activity, but heterosexual behavior predominates. Thus homosexual activity is "natural" in the sense that it occurs commonly in nature. Instead of asking, "Why do human beings engage in homosexual behavior?" it is more meaningful to ask, "Why doesn't everyone engage in homosexual behavior?" in-

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34 Bailey, p. 41
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., p. 38.
asmuch as it is a part of our mammalian heritage. 37

Such a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality can be seen in societies in which homosexuality is not seriously prohibited—males participate in homosexual activities but are predominantly heterosexual in nature. Only in the more patriarchal societies such as the one in which we live do we find the dichotomy of "either/or". This again might point to the fact that culture has a lot to do in determining attitudes concerning this issue. 38

When comparing the traditional attitude towards homosexuality which pervades our society with that of others in the world, results show that

A study of 193 world cultures, for example, showed that 28 percent accepted male homosexuality and only 14 percent rejected it; in the remaining 58 percent, there was some partial acceptance or equivocation involved. As for female homosexuality, 10 percent accepted it, 11 percent rejected it, and there was partial acceptance or some equivocation in 79 percent. Homosexuality was even more widely accepted among 225 American Indian cultures. Some 53 percent of these cultures accepted male homosexuality and only 24 percent rejected it. Female homosexuality was accepted by 17 percent and was rejected by 36 percent. Our own culture is plainly in the minority, not only in rejecting homosexuality but also in rejecting male homosexuality more forcibly than female homosexuality. 39

It may be argued that these other cultures which accepted homosexuality were not under the purifying aspects of the Judeo-Christian beliefs, but it must also be remembered that even in this belief system, there was some acceptance of female homosexuality, not the total rejection of

37 Weltge, p. 4.
38 Ibid., p. 6.
39 Ibid., p. 4.
all forms for either sex.

It must be asked exactly what Paul meant then when he called such acts "against nature" (para phusin). Paul uses the word, phusis, translated nature, several times in his various epistles, and by comparing the conditions in which the word is used, it is easier to see how Paul understood this concept.

We are told that in Rom. 2:14, it is possible for the Gentiles to keep the law by nature, even if they do not have it in written form. Gentiles are said to be uncircumcised by nature in Rom. 2:27. There is reference to a wild olive tree (by nature) contrasted with a cultivated (by nature) olive tree in Rom. 11:24. Paul claims that nature itself points to the fact that it is degrading for a man to have long hair in 1 Cor. 11:14. Galatians 2:15 says that the Jews are Jews by nature. The same book tells that Gentile idols are, by nature, not gods at all (Gal. 4:8). And finally, Eph. 2:3 says that all men, by nature, are children of wrath.

When all of these uses of phusis are compared, it is easy to see that only in the minority of the cases was Paul speaking of something that was inately part of the subject. Instead, most refer to the process of socialization, whether it be into Jewish or Gentile society. In fact, "the basic meaning of phusis is 'the process of growth' and hence that which comes into being by such a process."40 Human nature, or how a human being behaves, is not expressly passed on by the genetic process. Instead it is something that is learned as the individual grows up.

Human nature is not simply a given. It is a given for the individual born into a specific environment, but looked upon historically and collectively, human nature has been created by the actions of people bound together by institutions and a common set of symbols. For this reason, theologians hold that what is called human nature in various cultures must be looked at critically. Since it has been produced over a long period of time, it may include elements that are dehumanizing. Since a culture usually calls "human nature" the self-understanding of the dominant class and since this usage then greatly extends the ideals and the power of this class, the theologian must try to discern in the inherited, historically constituted human nature the possible structures of oppression.\textsuperscript{41}

The Jews, growing up in a society that was based on the dominance of the male and the inherent traits of masculinity, were, by nature, anti-homosexual. Different societies, on the other hand, did not feel as strongly against homosexuality and were, by nature, more accepting of such practices. Paul, being raised in the Jewish culture, received the antihomosexual teachings of his society and passed them on, accepting them as what was natural for people in that society. The Romans, to whom this letter was written, grew up in a society which was more tolerant of homosexual practices and therefore a clash resulted in what was "natural" in each society.\textsuperscript{42}

Finally, one other point must be made concerning this passage. Used for so long to condemn homosexuality, Paul's true intent has been overlooked. When it was written, chapter breaks were naturally not included, so the message carries over into what we now call chapter 2:

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same thing. (Rom. 2:1 ff).

\textsuperscript{41} Gregory Baum "Catholic Homosexuals", Commonweal, February 15, 1974, p. 480.

\textsuperscript{42} Gearhart and Johnson, p. 102.
Paul's intent was not to provide ammunition against homosexuality or envy, or murder, or strife or any other sins that are mentioned in the list. Paul's main purpose was to show that all of humanity has been affected by sin, no matter if it was the Jews who had the law or the Gentiles who didn't. This same message is continued throughout chapters 2 and 3 until Paul states the truth of the gospel:

Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith (Rom. 3:23-25)

By using this passage to condemn the homosexual, the same condemnation rebounds back as all are guilty of some sin in the eyes of God.

2. 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 and 1 Timothy 1:8-10.

The same point can be made about the other two passages in which Paul makes reference to homosexual acts:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals (malakoi and arsenokoitai), nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9, 10)

Now we know that the law is good, if anyone uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites (arsenokoitai), kidnapers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine....(1 Timothy 1:8-10)

Both of these passages are lists of specific sins which will keep people out of the kingdom of God. Some of the things are universal, such as idolatry and covetousness: any time anyone or anything else is put
above God idolatry occurs; the desire for something not already possessed results in covetousness. Others, such as murder and homosexuality, refer to only a part of the world's population. The whole point of these two passages is that

no unrighteous person will enter the kingdom, no matter what his or her particular brand of unrighteousness may be. But some of Paul's listeners who were once unrighteous have now been washed, sanctified, and justified; they will enter the kingdom. The contrast here, in other words, is the one so often present in Paul's writings: we are unrighteous and cannot please God in our old natures, but through the acceptance of a new nature in Jesus Christ we are made fit for the kingdom. 43

While it is clear that Paul was condemning some type of homosexual behavior here, it is not exactly clear what types are included. Malakoi, the first of the two words used by Paul, means soft or effeminate and probably refers to catamites. The other word, arsenokoitai, refers to those who engage in anal intercourse 44, and has been used to include two men or a man and a woman. 45 Yet, because of the different usages of these words in other writings, it is not at all clear that this is what Paul had in mind. By noting the other types of sins in the lists, it can be seen that

what these acts all have in common is that they either deny the sovereignty of God or do harm to one's neighbor. They are not evil in their very being apart from their consequences. They are unrighteous because of what they do, namely deny God as creator or harm one's fellow human beings. The listing of the malakoi and arsenokoitai along with the sexually immoral (pornoi) and adulterers suggests that Paul is rejecting any expression of sexuality

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43 Scanzoni and Mollenkott, p. 70.
44 Weber, p. 31
45 McNeill, p. 53.
that disregards the unique worth of one's fellow human beings.  

If this is the case, it must be asked then if there is any possibility that homosexual acts can ever be present in a context of love, in which regard is shown for the worth of both parties involved. If it is possible, does that mean that such an act is still condemned?

D. Conclusions

This question and others raised throughout this discussion of relevant scriptural passages simply points out the fact that any simplistic and legalistic condemnation of all forms of homosexuality does not take into account the whole truth of the Bible.

As Herman van de Spijker notes in his summary of biblical teaching concerning homosexual activities: both in the Old and the New Testaments, wherever the Bible clearly seems to refer to homosexual activity, we must recognize a judgment of condemnation. However, every text dealing with homosexual activity also refers to aggravating circumstances such as idolatry, sacred prostitution, promiscuity, violent rape, seduction of children, and violation of guests' rights. As a result one can never be sure to what extent the condemnation is of homosexual activities as such or only of homosexual activities under these circumstances. "Nowhere is there a specific text which explicitly rejects all homosexual activities as such independent of the circumstances."

Also, the Bible does not speak toward the issue of a true homosexual orientation, something not recognized until the 1890's. If this information was known during the time when the Bible was being recorded, it must be asked whether such a vague and uncompromising attitude would

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46 Weber, p. 31.

47 McNeill, p. 60.

48 Scanzoni and Mollenkott, p. 71.
be found in its pages.

And finally, it must be asked to what extent the recorded message was affected by the society in which the writers lived. The discrepancies between the attitudes toward male and female homosexuality points out the fact that the message was in some way affected, but how much so can not be proven. It may be possible that God's attitude toward the whole issue is closer to that taken by the Hebrews concerning lesbians, while the attitude towards the male homosexuals was due to the male-oriented society. Whatever the case, it is hopefully clear that the Bible can serve only as a starting point to determine the ethics of homosexuality. Only when combined with the findings of the social sciences, can a truer understanding of the plight of the homosexual in the Church be arrived at.
III. REVISIONS OF THE PRESENT ATTITUDE

Bailey reveals the fact that he did not bother to trace the development of our attitude towards homosexuality past the Middle Ages as it hasn't undergone any significant change since that time. It would therefore seem that a reevaluation is long overdue, especially with the numerous new findings in both the religious and secular disciplines. Such a reevaluation is taking place, led by theologians and ethicists in most of the major denominations. Although new statements concerning homosexuality sometimes differ little than those before, some churches are radically changing their positions, offering total acceptance to those so inclined. This discussion will now focus on the validity of these reassessments within the Church which propose new ethical teachings and then the actual changes which occurred when they were drawn up.

First, any reappraisal may be questioned on the grounds that the present attitude is the same as that of the Bible, no matter if it is due to the social conditioning and the lack of knowledge concerning human sexuality in general. In answer to this, Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Mollenkott bring out the fact that Peter was faced with the same type of situation in regards to the entrance of Gentiles into the community of faith. Chapters 10 and 11 of the book of Acts record

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49 Weltge, p. 153.
the vision which Peter had while praying, one in which a large sheet descends to where he is at, filled with all kinds of animals, birds and other creeping things. A voice tells Peter to get up, kill and eat whatever he wants, but Peter refuses because of the Jewish law which states that Jews were not to eat such creatures. (Lev. 11:42-44). This vision is repeated two more times and Peter again disregards the voice of the Lord each time, even though God tells him not to consider something unholy that He has cleansed. The sheet is taken away and Peter is left wondering what it could have meant.

Immediately afterwards, three men arrive from the house of Cornelius, a prominent Gentile in the area, requesting Peter to come with them to their master's house. God again speaks to Peter telling him to go, and Peter makes the connection between the vision and the arrival of the strangers. Just as Jews were not to eat certain kinds of animals because of defilement, they were also to refrain from visiting the house of a Gentile for the same reason. Both commands had been given by God; yet God spoke to Peter and told him to ignore the commandments of his past training and do something totally unheard of by any Jew before. Peter went with them to Cornelius' house and there, the first Gentiles received salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit without first converting to the Jewish faith. Other Jews heard of Peter's actions and immediately brought up the issue of visiting the house of a Gentile. Peter's only defense was the vision and the directions from God telling him to ignore the Law, backed up with the proof of the Holy Spirit that God had accepted these people.

Scanzoni and Mollenkott point out that this story
indicates that there are times when human beings are directed to transcend general laws of God and society because of the specific work God has chosen them to do. Gone is the certainty of assuming that all we need to do is simply cling to the rules handed down to us by decent people. Gone, even, is the simplistic use of Scripture....Although the biblical rule had been a perfectly good one, intended to keep the Jews from slipping into idolatrous ways, Peter was made to realize that in his situation it no longer applied, and that he should obey instead the directions given him personally by God’s voice. Attention to this story warns us that thoughtless obedience, even to a passage of Scripture, can be disastrous in its effects on our moral life.\textsuperscript{51}

It is their belief that Christians today face the same type of situation, one in which the laws of God must again be transcended to offer acceptance to the homosexual. It is on these grounds that they base a reevaluation of this issue.

Others may accept such reasoning but still refuse to accept the gay person into their midst because he/she is seen as being abnormal and deviant. They base such an opinion on certain psychological studies and theories, although these theories tend to radically disagree about the origin of the homosexual condition. A quick overview of them would reveal the following differences:

From a psychoanalytic standpoint, homosexuality is viewed by some as an arrested state of development—a failure to pass beyond a normal "homosexual" stage of life and go on to more "mature" sexual relationships. Others argue that it is the result of an incestuous attachment to the parent of the opposite sex which creates a sense of "forbidden attraction" with regard to that sex. Conversely, some have postulated an attachment to the same-sex parent, with the other parent being seen as a rival, along with all persons of the "rival's" sex. Still others suggest that the problem lies in a failure to identify with the same-sex parent. Some psychoanalytic theories relate homosexuality to castration anxieties among males; others relate it to feelings of hostility toward, or fear of, the opposite sex based on disturbed parent-child relationships. According to still other theories, the choice of a same-sex love object indi-\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., pp. 17-18.
cates a narcissistic quest for a symbol of one's own self.\textsuperscript{52} Perhaps the most notable point that all of these theories have in common is that they are all based on the assumption that homosexuality is some kind of illness that needs a cure. Until quite recently, most studies were still involved in the search for such a cure. Also, results were usually based on patients which the various researchers were involved with in treatment of some kind. It wasn't until the studies of Evelyn Hooker that an attempt was made to study homosexuals who weren't undergoing psychiatric treatment. Using matched samples of thirty homosexual males and thirty heterosexual males, Hooker performed several tests on both groups and then sent the results in for analysis. When they came back, it was found that the clinicians were unable to tell the two groups apart, pathology levels in both groups proved to be equal, and there were equal numbers who rated superior in both groups. Theories based on the "medical model" of homosexuality were proven to be based on false assumptions.\textsuperscript{53}

As more and more studies were undertaken arriving at similar conclusions, it became apparent that previous notions concerning the nature of homosexuality were indeed incorrect, a fact which caused the American Psychiatric Association (APA) to remove homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in 1973. In its place, it created a grouping entitled "sexual orientation disturbances" for those people who wish to change their homosexual inclinations or are troubled with their present sexual

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., pp. 79-80.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., pp. 79-83.
Researchers William Simon and John H. Gagnon feel that studies based on the illness model are in fact simply seeking to place blame for the disturbed homosexual totally on the origins of the sexual orientation and not on other aggravating circumstances. They point out that the same or similar problems faced by the heterosexual are not blamed on his/her sexual orientation, but because deviation in this area is present in the homosexual, its significance is blown out of proportion. Any problem should be seen as occurring, "after he becomes, or conceives of himself as homosexual, rather than upon original and ultimate causes." It is their belief that the same standards that are used to judge the mental health of others should also be applied to the homosexual. These standards would include the following questions:

Is the individual self-supporting? Does he manage to conduct his affairs without the intervention of the police or the growing number of mental health authorities? Does he have adequate sources of social support? A positively balanced and adequately developed repertoire of gratification? Has he learned to accept himself?

If all of these questions can be answered affirmatively concerning the individual, his/her mental health should not be questioned, regardless of sexual orientation.

In coming to the discussion of the actual revisions made to past views one must first remember certain principles upon which the Christian faith is built and work from such a starting point.

54 Ibid., p. 84.
55 Weltge, p. 16.
56 Ibid., p. 17.
Basically, the whole principle on which the Christian religion is founded is the fact that all people have fallen short of God's divine standards and nothing that they will do will ever change this reality. It is only through the grace of God that persons can be accepted: any attempt to earn righteousness will always fail short. When God does choose to redeem a person, it is in spite of all the individual's past actions, no matter if they were good or bad. Nothing, not even homosexuality, can therefore stand in the way of a person receiving this grace from God if it has been so ordained.

Secondly, if all people have sinned in all types of situations, including both heterosexuality and homosexuality, this would disclose the fact that "no 'natural' human condition or lifestyle is 'intrinsically justified or righteous.'" Simply because a person is heterosexual does not mean that he/she can be declared righteous by virtue of it. The ability to, and presence of, sin in every situation shows that all are open to possible misuse.

Thirdly, the fact that all have sinned means that the Church is entirely made up of such sinners. No one is a member because he/she has done it all by himself/herself. Thus to recall Paul's words in Romans 2, any attempt to condemn others backfires. Unless one is willing to personally accept such condemnation, it would perhaps be best to live by Jesus' words: "Do not judge lest you be judged yourselves." (Mt. 7:1)

Moving from these general principles to the area of sexual ethics, one finds a recent shift from thinking based on specific acts, as included in the Bible, to more updated thinking based on sexual orientation. McNeill quotes moralists O'Neil and Donovan as saying, "the moral quality of sexual activity cannot be judged from a specific act; rather it involves a 'responsible orientation toward growth and reconciliation.'" Thus he asks whether homosexual activity can ever be found in such an atmosphere of growth and reconciliation. This again echoes the point made earlier that there is no particular lifestyle that is automatically free from sin. While it is recognized that some forms of homosexuality may be sinful, it must be asked if, like heterosexuality, other forms may indeed promote love. If such forms are present, McNeill feels that they are therefore morally right as, "a general consideration of human sexuality in the Bible leads to only one conclusion: those sexual relations can be justified morally which are a true expression of human love."  

Perhaps one of the major stumbling blocks which hinders acceptance of some forms of homosexuality is the idea of the stereotype. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines stereotype as, "something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; especially a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, affective attitude, or uncritical judgment."

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58 McNeill, p. 18.  
59 Ibid., pp. 18-19.  
60 Ibid., p. 65.
One such stereotypical picture of homosexual relationships is that of almost total promiscuity, which, admittedly, does exist in the homosexual world. Yet, there are many other types of relationships also present. As McNeill points out, the presence of promiscuous relationships doesn't justify the prohibition of all homosexual relationships, both good and bad. Rape and child seduction are other problems that are also brought up to combat acceptance, yet both of these and promiscuity are present in the heterosexual world also and no move has been made to prohibit all heterosexual acts. The point is that problems should be acknowledged where they are present and strides made to overcome them, but one should be open to accept those relationships in which true love is promoted. Such a stand was taken by the Christian Association for Psychological Studies at their 1975 annual meeting. It was their belief that

promiscuity, fornication, and adultery should be regarded as sinful for both homosexual and heterosexual persons, but that a loving, committed permanent relationship between two persons of the same sex was an entirely different category and was not condemned in Scripture.62

It is with such material that the new ethical model is built on the biblical foundation already laid. The homosexual condition has been seen as being unalterable in most cases. Thus, as the German evangelical theologian Helmut Thielicke states in his work, The Ethics of Sex, the only choice we have is to accept it. In accepting it, though, Thielicke feels that the homosexual should seek the "optimal ethical potential of sexual self-realization."63 In his view, required celibacy is not

61 Ibid., pp. 112-113.
62 Scanzoni and Mollenkott, pp. 120-121.
63 Ibid., pp. 125, 126.
the answer as the Bible shows that it is a special calling to be chosen, not something forced on the individual because of certain desires. Relationships which Thielicke accepts, both in the homosexual and heterosexual realms, are expressed in this model from Scanzoni's and Mollenkott's work: 64

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God's Ideal For the Sexual Expression of Love</th>
<th>Abuses of God's Plan For Human Sexuality</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A covenantal heterosexual relationship (marriage).</td>
<td>Fornication (sex apart from having entered the permanent committed covenant relationship.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A covenantal homosexual relationship (for persons of homosexual orientation.)</td>
<td>Adultery (unfaithfulness to the person to whom one is committed, or causing another person to be unfaithful to the one to whom he or she is pledged.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Promiscuity (sex with a variety of partners, casual sex based on lust, exploitation of others, etc.)

Theodore Jennings, another theologian, feels that there might be yet another alternative to either celibacy or the committed relationship, that of the responsible use of sexuality outside of the committed relationship.

If we are persuaded that there may be a third category of sexual vocation, then the homosexual may further ask: How is my homosexuality to be acted out in such a way as to contribute to God's purposes for me and my fellow human beings? What are the features

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64 Ibid., p. 123.
of a homosexual pattern of relationships which point toward or bring to expression the lordship of Christ? Responses to such questions are possible only on the part of persons who understand themselves as claimed by Christ in their homosexuality.65

Whether one accepts just the committed relationships of Thielicke or Jennings' view of the third category, the whole emphasis of both is the idea of a responsible use of sexuality in a Christian context.

This, then, concludes the discussion of the Church's reevaluation of homosexuality. The next and final section will deal with my personal view of homosexuality and the Church's obligation to the gay-oriented person.

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65 Jennings, p. 141.
IV. PERSONAL CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, I would like to state a few of my own thoughts which have been formulated during the research and writing of this paper.

Since my own ethical system most closely resembles the deontological "Law of God" theory, most of my argument was therefore based on Scripture. Still, I believe that proper biblical hermeneutics must be applied in trying to discover its relevance for today, so we may find that some parts need revision. In such instances, the Spirit of God must be trusted to direct us in ways that both remain true to the attitudes and values of the original words, yet take into account knowledge gained since the time the message was recorded.

Because Jesus stated that the whole Law could be summed up in the two commandments, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," (Mt. 22:37-40), I would include some aspects of Fletcher's "Situation Ethics" as part of my ethical system. Yet I feel this needs to be balanced by Kant's "Respect for Persons" theory, so that no person could be used as a mere means to some particular goal, no matter if it could be argued that love would require this.

This balance is very important in judging the moral quality of gay relationships. Thus, in my ethical system, relationships in which agape love is present and neither partner is used for mere sexual gratification would be accepted as moral. I do not condemn those relationships
in which such standards are not met, yet I feel that ideally, the committed relationship is the goal toward which the homosexual should strive, which studies show is at least the desire of the majority of respondents. Naturally enough, this goal will not always be reached, therefore the Christian homosexual should seek to bring his sexuality under the control of Christ and attempt to use it as responsibly as possible in each individual situation.

Up to this point, this paper has been concerned with the ethics of homosexuality. If the preceding findings are seriously considered as a viable alternative to the traditional view, acceptance is merely the first step among several in which the Church needs to act in order to redeem itself from its past errors. A whole new area of ministry opens up to the Church in light of these findings and a few ideas are listed below, although any form of ministry must be designed to meet the needs of the specific community involved.

One area in which the Church could work is in that of support, both within the local church and the community. Growing up in a society which is antagonistic towards them, homosexuals very often accept such negative attitudes as the truth which leads to self-destructive behavior.

By offering acceptance, the local church could help troubled gays

66 The Spada Report (New York: New American Library, 1979) found that 41% of the respondents were involved in a lover relationship and 88% of those who weren't desired one. (pp. 332-333). Also, the most recent study conducted by the Institute for Sex Research, Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978) showed that 51% of the respondents were involved in a lover relationship (p. 318) and that 67% felt that a permanent living arrangement with a partner was at least somewhat important to them. (p. 322)
overcome inferiority feelings and affirm those qualities which lead toward a more healthy self-image. This can be done both in individual pastoral sessions as well as in groups situations, involving gays alone or mixed groupings of gays and straights. Gay couples could also be accepted and made welcome in the church, with pastors being allowed to officiate at gay unions. This would almost reverse the present attitude in which a repentant promiscuous gay can receive forgiveness no matter how often he "backslides", yet those living in committed relationships are condemned for living in a state of sin.\(^67\) Finally, groups designed to offer information and guidance could be set up to aid confused parents and friends of gays better understand their loved ones and keep channels of communication open.

A second area in which the Church needs to work involves reeducating its members, since many of the myths concerning homosexuality are due to the various teachings the Church espouses. Such a ministry includes offering the alternate scriptural conclusions stated earlier in this paper, as well as other findings of the social sciences. The belief in the homosexual stereotype needs to be replaced, and people taught that homosexuality is just one of many traits in the individual making him/her unique.

A third area in which the Church should work is that of equal rights for everyone, at least in the spheres of employment and housing, and hopefully wherever else discrimination occurs. The truth concerning

\(^{67}\) Scanzoni and Mollenkott, p. 63.
homosexuality and child molestation should be stressed, keeping occupational fields open to gays which also involve children. Instead of separate standards for gays and straights, a single standard, such as the following should be applied to both groups: "The sexual orientation or behavior of an individual should be irrelevant as long as it is reasonably private, and unless actual performance on the job can be shown to be negatively affected." On the same token, the Church would have to rethink its own attitude towards ordination and church membership. If the candidate is ably qualified, sexual orientation should not even be brought up.

The key to the whole situation is simply understanding and putting the Golden Rule into practice, no matter who is involved or what the cost. The Church would do well to recall a parable which Jesus told in Matthew 18:23-35:

For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle accounts, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. The slave, therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything." And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began

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68 The Gay Report (New York: Summit Books, 1977) states the findings of Susan Brownmiller, author of Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975, p. 278): "Ten girls are molested for every one boy' and 75% of the offenders (97% of whom were male) knew the child. And yet no one condemns all heterosexual males for the actions of a minority." (p. 4)

69 Scanzoni and Mollenkott, pp. 100, 101.
to choke him saying, "Pay back what you owe." So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, "Have patience with me and I will repay you." He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, "You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?" And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall my heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from his heart.

Without forgiveness and mercy, the Church itself may only find condemnation on the day of judgment.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


