

Theological Reflections on the Issue of Homosexuality and the Church

The Rev. Thomas W. Strieter, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Churches today are in ferment over the issue of gays and lesbians, their role in the church, and the church's relationship and ministry to them. In the recent past, various Protestant denominations have addressed this issue by mandating exhaustive studies, including careful exegesis of the biblical passages that have traditionally been marshaled to speak to the issue of homosexuality. For example, studies have been published by the Lutheran Church in America (1986), The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., (1978), and the United Church of Christ (1977).¹ The same kind of careful study is currently taking place within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in preparation for bringing the issue before the 2005 Church-wide Assembly, which will decide on issues related to gays and lesbians and the church.

In my lengthy ministry I have come to know as friends, and have counseled with, a number of gays and lesbians, many of whom are committed Christians. Some have expressed their deep frustration that they cannot serve in the ordained ministry because they are in committed same-sex relationships.

Since the early 1990's, I have been involved in presenting workshops, most of them under the auspices of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod of the ELCA, on the issue of the church and its ministry to gays and lesbians. This essay is the fruit of my study and presentations. Although I will allude to various related subjects, my primary intent is to, first, offer my understanding of how Martin Luther interpreted Scripture in light of the Gospel and what this means when we look at Biblical passages related to homosexuality

and, second, to discern how Luther's approach can inform us regarding the role of gays and lesbians in the church. Although we do not uncritically emulate Luther's sixteenth century method of interpreting Scripture, nevertheless his gospel principle still speaks to us in our situation. Some of the discussion and thinking within the ELCA today related to this issue tends to be at odds with Luther's hermeneutical method. For that reason, it seems appropriate and timely to restate a "Luther-an" position.

THE THEOLOGICAL TASK

Overview

Most theologians in the mainline traditions, including myself, consider themselves to be "mediating theologians," who are in dialogue both with scripture and the cultural milieu of today. For them the theological task involves a great deal more than merely explicating biblical texts or reconstructing what later tradition says. Their primary concern is to relate the gospel in such a way that it speaks with relevance to our society today. They believe that the Holy Spirit was not only creatively at work in the "there and then" of history and the biblical record and has definitively revealed the light of God to us in the face of Jesus Christ, but that same Spirit of the Lord also fills the world and still reveals to us in our own time.

The theological task, then, is to struggle to perceive how the "there and then" enlightens and gives insight into what the Spirit is saying in the "here and now." As theologians, pastors, and thoughtful lay persons, we must grapple with how to go about the task of doing theology in dialogue with human experience and the disciplines of learning, including the insights and discoveries of the sciences. This, as I will posit, is the stance inherent in the thinking of Martin Luther and the Reformation, in contrast to the thinking of theologians who consider themselves "traditionalists" who tend to stress

the unchanging nature of what the Bible says and to discount the implications of scientific discovery and the disciplines of learning.

Luther and the Lutheran Hermeneutic

Central to the controversy raging in the churches over the issue of homosexuality is the need to understand how Scripture is the Word of God for us. How do we interpret and apply Scripture? In the Lutheran tradition, Scripture remains for us a living Word when we see in it the light of God that shines in the face of Jesus Christ. This is faithful to Luther's understanding. For him, Scripture is living, for God comes to us in the here and the now speaking judgment and grace. Until the Spirit teaches us that this is *pro nobis, for us*, "nothing is learned but empty words and prattle."² Above all, Martin Luther was a student of the Bible and was a powerful exegete within the limitations of the tools of his time. How Luther and the Reformation understood the Scriptures and how this affected their interpretation of the text can still inform us. While so-called "traditionalists" tend to focus on verbal inspiration and inerrancy, Luther focused on justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake as key to the Scripture.

When Luther and the Reformers said that Christ is the key to the Scripture and that Scripture interprets Scripture, they meant that the inner logic of Scripture is rooted in the gospel, which takes precedence over the letter of the law. This was Luther's "canon within the canon." Scripture was Luther's authoritative rule (canon), but it portrayed a higher rule or canon, Jesus Christ and his gospel.

Luther at times criticized various canonical books when he felt they did not measure up to the standards of the gospel. He says, "For the gospel teaches nothing else but Christ, so the Scripture knows nothing other than Christ."³ He insists that without the gospel principle before our eyes, Scripture simply becomes a book of laws, many of which are not relevant to contemporary society.⁴ Luther fully understood, with Paul, that Christians are not free from obedience to God's good and gracious will for us,

but he did not operate with the *letter* of biblical law. Luther held that what applies to us is that which is reasonable, just, and consistent with the New Testament (which Luther also critiques in light of the gospel of Christ).

Luther's *Prefaces to the New Testament of 1522* are a witness to this dynamic view of Scripture. He says that the New Testament must be seen as gospel proclamation, not as a legal or doctrinal textbook. "See to it, therefore, that you do not make a Moses out of Christ, or a book of laws or doctrines out of the gospel, as has been done heretofore."⁵

This gospel understanding of Scripture also made Luther and the Reformation open to new scientific theories and discoveries, even if it meant a change in traditional interpretations of Scripture passages. Werner Elert, in his classic, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, speaks to the issue of the receptivity of the Lutheran tradition to the sciences. Our world picture (*Weltbild*) can change, but it is the gospel which is crucial to our understanding of our world (*Weltanschauung*). The gospel informs any world picture, and that includes the biblical world picture.⁶ As a classic case in point, Elert notes that the Catholic church of Luther's time was hostile to the newly-published heliocentric theory of Copernicus, because it displaced the earth and humankind as the central focus of creation. What is more, it went against the church's teaching and against the literal interpretation of scripture concerning the earth as the center of the cosmos as pictured, for example, in the story of the sun "standing still" in Joshua 10:12-13. Nevertheless, many Lutheran scholars actively espoused Copernicanism, because the scientific evidence was convincing and because it did not negate the Lutheran center of the authority of the gospel at any point.

Luther personally, at least to begin with, was dubious about the theory. His influential colleague, Philip Melanchthon was very much against it. In spite of this, Luther

never used his tremendous influence to suppress Copernicus' teachings. At the University of Wittenberg, and wherever Luther's authority ranged, colleagues could embrace the insights of scientific investigation without fear of Luther's censorship. As earth-shaking as Copernicus's novel theory was to Lutherans, it did not compromise the gospel, even though it called for a new understanding of scriptural passages.⁷ If the Reformers could be open to something as earthshaking as the heliocentric theory, which radically changed the course of human thought, it equally suggests that we in our day can be open to new understandings of homosexuality.

Approaching the Biblical Texts

As we have said, central to Luther's thinking was the belief that the Bible is understood and interpreted in light of the gospel of Christ. This means that Christians need not be shackled by the cultural restraints of the Biblical milieu. The Bible was written over centuries in various cultural contexts, and in three ancient languages. It is often difficult to establish word meanings in ancient and dead languages. Although we are familiar with Scripture, it is not always easily *discernible*, because many times what we think we are reading may not necessarily be what it meant for the ancient writers and hearers.

If we turn the Bible into a manual of do's and don'ts, we can easily fall into the trap of idolatry, letting the letter of Scripture take precedence over the Spirit of God, which still is speaking today. A popular bumper sticker proclaims, "God says it; I believe it; that settles it;" but any serious student of Scripture knows it is not that simple. The same Scripture that seems to denounce homosexuality also affirms slavery, rules out divorce, avows the subordination of women, and calls for obedience to any government, no matter how corrupt or tyrannical it may be. How can we denounce one and accept the

other? In what sense, then, is Christ “the end of the law for righteousness?” The biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann, writes,

Our faith is evangelical, linked to the good news and not biblicism, thus recognizing the potential tension or distinction between good news and lesser claims....The Bible is not a fixed, frozen, readily-exhausted read; it is rather a “script” always reread, through which the Spirit makes new.⁸

This perspective frees us to see that biblical statements are bound to their context, and what God demands in one situation may be overruled in a different situation. For instance, Deuteronomy 23:1-8 states that no emasculated person or foreigner can enter the worship assembly, whereas Isaiah 56:3-8 overturns this exclusive law, welcoming in the eunuch and the alien within the worshipping people of God. As Brueggemann says, a reading “in a particular time, place, and circumstance can never be absolute, but is more likely to be displaced by yet another reading in another time and place....There is not one voice in Scripture.”⁹ We *must* interpret for our time. But then, again in Brueggemann’s words, we must fall back on “the sure apostolic claims that lie behind our extremities of imagination, liberal or conservative.”¹⁰

Theologian Nancy J. Duff writes that “God’s revelation is dynamic....When revelation is understood to be a movement of God’s freedom and power, it cannot be reduced to an absolute law which, in turn, we apply to situations.” This does not mean that we are antinomian, that anything goes. “Rather Christians seek to act in ways consistent with our vocation as believers in Jesus Christ and members of Christ’s church.” If the divine will is simply reduced to absolute commands, then “once the moral code has been extracted from the Bible, one no longer has to discuss God’s present movement in the world; God’s will is always known in advance.”¹¹ Insights such as these seem to me to reflect Luther’s hermeneutical approach and its application in our time.

Key Issues in the Current Controversy

It is clear that at the heart of the current controversy over homosexuality and the church is not only a difference of understanding regarding how Biblical interpretation is done, but also what should be the appropriate role of science and the disciplines of learning in shaping our world view. So-called “traditionalists” tend to feel that scientific evidence is either irrelevant or it threatens their literalist interpretation of scripture. On the other hand, “mediating theologians” believe that we must be open to how the gospel informs our understanding of the society in which we live. This viewpoint, which was also the view of Luther, has particular significance in light of increasing data concerning the nature of homosexuality.

There has been a decisive shift in the understanding of the nature of homosexuality over the past four decades. Since 1973, the American Psychological Association has removed homosexuality from the category of mental illness which must be treated, but instead it is seen as a variable in the human sexual scheme of things. Social and biological scientific studies give more and more credence to the conclusion that homosexuality may be established prenatally or in the early formative years. Dr. Kelly Ducheny, a psychologist and co-presenter with me at informational workshops sponsored by the Metropolitan Chicago Synod, notes that most qualified health professionals now agree that being gay or lesbian is no more of a choice than being heterosexual. From her own experience as a psychologist, she has discovered that even when people wish *not* to be same-sex oriented, they cannot change the same-sex nature of their sexual fantasies. Many specialists suspect that homosexual orientation may be related to prenatal hormones, although the causes of homosexuality are not yet fully known.¹²

Traditionalist critics, on the other hand, argue that current scientific research does not speak all that conclusively on issues pertaining to homosexuality. Because the traditionalist argument has often been caricatured, we will present it in the words of Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse who espouse the following position:

God has revealed that heterosexual expression in marriage or chastity are the two desired outcomes with regard to genital sexual experience for which God created humans, and that God commands us to refrain from all non-recommended sexual behaviors, including homosexual ones, regardless of the source of our urges to do otherwise.¹³

What is more, traditionalists say that whether science can establish if people are born that way or not does not affect the ethical conclusions. Science can contribute to the church's ethical debates, but the "moral and political issues must be resolved on other grounds." Even if it were determined that homosexuality was caused by genetic factors and the "orientation itself were utterly inevitable, the traditionalist vision of sexual morality would still have to be engaged on ethical and theological grounds, not on the grounds of science."¹⁴ This is the position, for instance, taken by Robert Gagnon in his book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, which is receiving a substantial hearing in ELCA circles these days.¹⁵ We will speak further of Gagnon's position below. He, too, questions much of the recent research and espouses conversion therapy, which attempts to change people from homosexual to heterosexual orientation.

It is a matter of heated controversy whether sexual orientation, once fixed, can be changed. In the words of theologian Christina Gudorf, many of these attempts to change sexual orientation "seem to have been in convincing homosexual and bisexual persons not to act on their homosexual desires, a decision which often did not endure long term."¹⁶ In spite of attempts at conversion therapy it is the position of the American Psychiatric Association and other professional groups that conversion therapy is not an appropriate path of treatment, because it frequently causes greater damage.¹⁷

It is true that there is a good deal of overstatement and contradiction by those espousing both sides of the issue. Surely, scientific data is subject to various interpretations. Nevertheless, it is clear that we cannot deal with this issue without seriously examining the growing body of scientific information that is currently available.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES RELATED TO THE ISSUE OF HOMOSEXUALITY

As we study Scripture, we find that there are surprisingly few biblical texts that refer to homosexual activity. As we have stated, recovery of the precise meaning of

ancient words can be very difficult and, at times, impossible. The only way to establish the meaning of a word in a “dead language” is to analyze the word in as many contexts as possible in the literature. When an issue is controversial, such as with homosexuality, it is important to be wary of reading one’s own views and biases into the ancient texts. Thus, translations may represent *eisegesis*, reading into the text, rather than *exegesis*, extracting the meaning from the text.¹⁸ One must therefore approach translations, and even lexicons, with a certain caution, because they may simply repeat inadequate or errant translations for a given word. With these cautionary notes in mind, we will analyze the scripture passages most often cited in discussions on homosexuality.

Old Testament Texts

Genesis and the “Orders of Creation”

One of the main arguments used against homosexual activity is that it is contrary to “the orders of creation.” Luther uses this terminology particularly in regard to the structures of society in which we fulfill our vocation as God’s hands and feet, doing God’s creative work in the world. During the Age of Orthodoxy, however, the “orders of creation,” that is, the original structures and purposes of creation, began to be viewed as unchangeable. The argument was that this is the way that God has created the world and there must be no variance from the divine intent.

Over the years this “Christian anthropology” has been equated with the norms of a particular society and has become an instrument of oppression. It has been used to enforce the subjugation of women, discrimination within castes and classes of society, and racial superiority. These views have been reinforced through the ages with Bible passages and arguments that these oppressed states correspond to the natural order of

things. European colonialist *apartheid* and slavery in the United States, followed by racial segregation and subjugation, were justified from Genesis 9:18-26, Noah's curse upon Ham and his descendants: "Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers." (*Gen. 9:25, NRSV*). In more recent times, Lutheran theologians such as Friedrich Gogarten and Emmanuel Hirsch in the Nazi era spoke in defense of Adolf Hitler by arguing that the powers that be, including Hitler, are ministers of God for good, and to resist those powers is to resist God's order of creation.¹⁹

The same "orders of creation" argument continues to be used against homosexuals. Robert Gagnon says that God created man and women only for sexual union with each other, and therefore the creation accounts stand against homosexual intercourse:

The anatomical, sexual, and procreative complementarity of male and female is clear and convincing proof of God's will for sexual union....Thus, same-sex intercourse constitutes an inexcusable rebellion against the intentional design of the created order.²⁰

Gagnon posits two arguments: first, that the Bible unequivocally defines same-sex intercourse as sin; and second, no valid hermeneutical arguments or scientific knowledge can override Scripture's authority on these matters.²¹ This sums up the traditionalist view on the subject: the Bible is God's unalterable revelation, and the complementarity of male and female is the order of creation.

Certainly, the early chapters of Genesis, - indeed the whole of Scripture, - see life heterosexually. As we have mentioned, the Bible is also a book in which women are subordinated and slavery is condoned. This was the cultural context in which the Bible was written. Yet, in the creation accounts, there is a dynamic to the unfolding story which does not fit into static categories. The whole narrative describes God dynamically drawing order out of chaos. The Spirit of God moves over the chaotic deep and life and

order is imbued into it.

Lutheran Old Testament scholar Terence Fretheim presented a paper before the ELCA Council of Bishops on the topic, *The Old Testament and Homosexuality*. He points out the subjective nature of biblical interpretation; that we approach it from our angle of vision, and that we are informed by what understandings and experiences we bring to the text.

Speaking of the creation texts, Fretheim says that we cannot make created order a static, unchangeable thing. We cannot limit “the freedom of God to make such new moves” from within his relationship to the world. He points out two significant issues in the creation account: first, that creation is not a finished product; there is a certain openness that leaves room for further development. Second, God involves created beings in the ongoing process of development. “For the created order to have remained fixed just as God originally created it would be a failure of the divine design.”²² This is no static or mechanistic world: “God does not have a final will in place from the beginning regarding the development of every aspect of the creative order.”²³ Just as God brought the animals before Adam, and he named them, and Adam and Eve tilled the garden, so humans continue to have responsibility in ordering the world. This is why human experience and the disciplines of learning must be considered in establishing the meaning of Scripture to the question of homosexuality and other issues. We must recognize that there is “room for irregularity and randomness.” Both Job 38-41 and Ecclesiastes 9:11 recognize this: “Time and chance happen to them all.”²⁴

Fretheim concludes his treatment of the Genesis creation account by saying that our world is “characterized by greater complexity, more openness , and a genuine interplay of law and chance....Proverbs teaches us that human observation and human

experience are very important in discovering the truth about the world.”²⁵ Certainly, Fretheim’s analysis speaks to the reality of homosexuality within God’s created order.

The Finnish Lutheran scholar, Martti Nissinen, summarizes the whole “orders of creation” discussion this way: “If creation is not a static condition but constantly being rejuvenated, we can understand it looks different in different times, in the material world as well as in social communities.”²⁶ As Luther so often insightfully said, God *continually creates* and still is doing so.²⁷

Deuteronomy 23:17f, and parallel references in the books of Kings

It is easy to succumb to mistaken or incorrect translations, and once they find their way into print, to continue the errors in ensuing translations. This is the case in Deuteronomy 23:17f and parallel passages in the books of Kings. First of all, these passages must be seen in the context of the Old Testament condemnation of sexual activity for cultic purposes as it was practiced in fertility religions. Through the “sympathetic magic” of sexual intercourse, it was believed that the gods were influenced to engage in sexual activity themselves, which then encouraged the processes of fertility in agriculture, animals, and humans. Condemnation of these cultic sexual practices are to be found in Deuteronomy 23:17f, as well as I Kings 14:24, 15:12, 22:46, and II Kings 23:7.

A close look at Deuteronomy 23:17 shows how difficult it can be to determine exact meanings. The King James Version, which influenced many ensuing translations, renders the Deuteronomy passage as: “There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a *sodomite* of the sons of Israel.” Thus, this translation has been perceived as an attack on male homosexual activity. (A detailed discussion of the “sin of Sodom” and the misuse of the term “sodomite” appears below.) The New Revised Standard Version of

this passage is somewhat different: “None of the daughters of Israel shall be a temple prostitute. You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a male prostitute [Hebrew: a *dog*] into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are abhorrent to the Lord your God.” (NRSV Deut. 23:17f) Other versions offer a broad range of translations for this command.

The word *qadesh* and the feminine form *qadeshah*, translated in the NRSV as prostitute, mean “holy man” and “holy woman” respectively. Both terms may refer to sacred prostitution, but this does not suggest homosexual activity. *Heterosexual activity* was the function of cultic practice in fertility religions.²⁸ The Presbyterian study of these passages points out that the *qadesh* may not have performed a sexual function at all, but may simply have been a cultic priest. Any sexual function on the male’s part is only inferred by the fact that the *qadeshah* served a cultic sexual function. Again, even if the *qadesh* had a sexual function, it would have been a heterosexual function for the sympathetic magic to have its affect on the fertility gods.²⁹ The same equally applies to the references in I and II Kings.

We can conclude, then, that although the King James Version and some ensuing translations ascribe homosexual connotations to the word *qadesh*, there is no suggestion in the Hebrew that this is the case. Instead, it seems clear that the Hebrew words refer to cultic heterosexual activity in fertility religions. Mistranslations and misconceptions, however, have a way of propagating themselves.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 and the Holiness Code

There are two passages in Leviticus that condemn male homosexual acts. “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination (Leviticus 18:22 NRSV); and, “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.” (*Leviticus 20:13 NRSV*). Some scholars feel that these laws may be informed by the Sodom story in Genesis 19, where the focus is on homosexual rape.

These commands are a part of a collection of laws in Leviticus 17-26 called the Holiness Code because of the frequent repetition, “You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from other peoples to be mine” (*Lev.20:26 NRSV*). It is necessary that these commands be seen within the totality of the context of the Holiness Code.

The Presbyterian Study on homosexuality cites a resource paper by Mary Douglas, entitled *Purity and Danger*, which illustrates at length that the Holiness Code condemns any activity which would compromise “the preservation of wholeness and completeness” by confusing classes or categories of creation. Such action would be *tebel*, that is, mixing or confusion.³⁰ Therefore, one could not plant two kinds of seed in the same field, or wear a garment made of two different kinds of material. (*Lev. 20:12*) There should be no contact with a woman while she is menstruating, for she is unclean (*Lev. 15:19-24*). Eating of unclean animals is condemned, ranging from pigs to shellfish, (*Lev. 11:2-12*) One may not approach the altar of God if one had a defect of the eyes (*Lev. 21:20*). Males could not trim the hair around their temples. The death penalty applied to a whole range of things, from cursing one’s parents to marrying one’s half sister (*cf. Lev. 18:6-18*), the latter of which, indeed, had been the relationship of Abraham and Sarah. No one could eat anything with blood in it. (*Lev. 17:10-11*)

Obviously, from the above examples, we cannot assume that the Holiness Code in its entirety, is binding upon the people of God today. But what *does* still apply for us today, and why does it still apply? Throughout history there have been attempts to

respond to that question.

The New Testament church dealt with this knotty question forthrightly at the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem, which dismissed the burden of many Old Testament laws. James, the brother of Jesus, who was the head of the church in Jerusalem, in consultation with the other apostles, concluded, “Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood” (*Acts 15:19-20*). Note that in this Apostolic conclusion only adultery would be seen by us today as a breach of moral law. The apostolic suggestion not to eat blood obviously was tendered so as not to offend Jewish Christians’ sensitivities. Paul, himself, offers different points of view about eating meat offered to idols. New laws were shaped by the needs of the community.

In more recent times it was argued that we must distinguish between moral, ceremonial, and political law in the Old Testament, and that only the moral law still applies. This was a Calvinistic differentiation, but also has appeared in Lutheran textbooks, such as the Synodical Catechism of the Lutheran Church-Mo. Synod, which had long been the textbook for confirmation instruction.³¹ The Holiness Code, obviously, makes no such distinctions.

Martin Luther simply says of Old Testament laws that we must ask what applies to me and what does not. Luther clarified that in Scriptural study one must differentiate between the applicable and the inapplicable. Then what word of Scripture does apply to us? Luther says the *gospel* applies, and that is the yardstick by which we measure what applies and what does not.

The sectarian spirits want to saddle us with Moses and all the commandments. We will just skip that. We will regard Moses as a teacher, but we will not regard him as

our lawgiver - unless he agrees with both the New Testament and natural law.³²

Natural law, for Luther, is not to be equated with the casuistic development of natural law in medieval Catholicism. For Luther, *natural law is that which is reasonable, just, and is consistent with the Gospel. This is what applies to us.*

Why is it that other laws no longer have applicability? How is it that God gives laws in one context and trumps them in other situations (as, for instance the laws of eunuchs in the worshipping community)? Terence Fretheim, says,

Laws change with the realities in creation. "If God is on the move within the creative order, then God's law is also on the move." We must, however, give good reason to change law so that "they are consonant with the scriptural witness and the best interests of the life and health of our communities."³³

Obviously, circumstances have brought about significant changes in the positions of the church, in regard to usury, slavery, ordination of women, and remarriage of divorced persons. We have changed these because *our experience* has informed us; but we also have biblical precedents for this. The Old Testament sets aside previous Old Testament laws, and the New Testament does the same. We cannot speak of immutable, timeless law. Simply to say, "God says so," is insufficient on the basis of the Bible itself. In Fretheim's words: "God has the freedom to change for Israel and for the world."³⁴ There is a "developing process in which experience in every sphere of life over time is drawn into the orbit of law."³⁵ "God's purpose in all the laws was to promote the life, health, and stability of the community."³⁶

Genesis 19: the Sin of Sodom

The most influential Old Testament account seen as condemning homosexual practice is that of Sodom in Genesis 19. This story has become something akin to the

Old Testament *sedes doctrinae* (seat of the doctrine) against homosexuality. Because of the perception that the narrative is the ultimate judgment on homosexual activity, the word *sodomite* has erroneously become part of the English language denoting one who practices male anal intercourse. Our analysis of the text will show that this is somewhat misdirected. The attempted homosexual rape by the men of Sodom was an act of humiliation, control, and oppression.

The context reveals two significant facts. First, in the previous chapter, God says that he will act against Sodom as response to the outcry of oppressed people; and second, the real issue in the Sodom account is the inhospitality, brutality, and oppressive use of power and control by the men of Sodom.

In chapter 18, Abraham offers his hospitality to three strangers (apparently the Lord and two angels). As they bid farewell to Abraham, “The Lord said, ‘How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know.’” (*Gen. 18:20-21 NRSV*) The word “outcry” (*tšaaqah*) means “cry for help” arising from oppressed people. The same word is used when Yahweh speaks to Moses from the burning bush, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters.” (*Ex. 3:7 NRSV*) This would suggest that the ensuing story would describe oppression and injustice in Sodom.³⁷

As the two angelic strangers approach the gates of Sodom, Lot extends the ancient obligation of hospitality to the strangers and invites them to spend the night in his home. Thereupon, we are told that every last man in the city, young and old, surround Lot’s house. The crowd calls to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.” (*Gen. 19:2 NRSV*) Lot pleads with them not

to do this terrible thing and offers his two virgin daughters for them to brutalize in whatever way they may wish. The crowd responds, “This fellow came here as an alien, and he would play the judge? Now we will deal worse with you than with them.” When they try to break the door down, all of the men are struck blind. The angels drag Lot and his family from Sodom and God rains brimstone and fire upon the city. “The destruction that ensued was such that Sodom and Gomorrah became the symbols of God’s judgment *par excellence*.”³⁸

To refer to the “sin of Sodom” as merely the intent to indulge in homosexual activity is to seriously abuse the point of the story. This is no act of mutuality between consenting adults. It is attempted gang rape; an act of violent, outrageous inhospitality, the ultimate abuse of the “stranger in the gate.” The fact that Lot would offer his daughters to be gang-raped suggests many things: the relatively low value placed on women that such a crime could even be suggested; the great shame on a person if the sanctity of his obligation as hospitable host would be violated; and also that the sexual penetration of women was at least in accordance with the cultural understanding of the role of women. As the Presbyterian Study states, “A man’s being penetrated was violently inconsistent with its [ancient Near East culture’s] basic male gender *schema*. Thus, for a man, being sexually assaulted was an attack not only on his person, but also on his essential masculine being.”³⁹

Martti Nissinen, in *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, has a section of depictions from the ancient world, one of which is that of a Greek soldier about to rape a Persian soldier at the Athenian victory over Persia by the River Eurymedon in 460 B.C.E.⁴⁰ Thus, it was not uncommon in biblical times for homosexual rape to be practiced by a conqueror in order to brutalize, degrade, and assert dominance and control over the

vanquished. *This* is the sin of Sodom.

The Presbyterian Study concludes, “What little evidence there is suggests that the violent assault in Gen. 19 was a brutal act through which the manliness and the power of the Sodomites could be asserted while humiliating and de-masculinizing the foreign guests.”⁴¹ There are other references, both in Assyrian law and Egyptian literature that male anal intercourse was used as a means of domination.⁴²

It is of interest to note that whenever there is reference to Sodom in the Scriptures there are varying understandings of its sin, but nowhere is it condemned for homosexual practice. For instance, Isaiah says that Sodom’s sin was lack of justice (*Isaiah 1:10, 3:9*). Jeremiah accuses Sodom of adultery, lying, and unrepentance (*Jeremiah 23:14*). Ezekiel says that Sodom’s sin was pride, gluttony, and prosperous ease (*Ezekiel 6:49*). Other sins are mentioned as well, including idolatry. Jesus refers to Sodom in the context of possible inhospitality to his disciples, whom he is sending on a missionary journey. He says that if townspeople are inhospitable to his disciples, it will be better for Sodom in the day of judgment than for those who turn the disciples away. (*Matthew 10:14-15; Luke 10: 10:12*)

Additional passages often cited against homosexual acts are found in *II Peter 2:4-8*, and *Jude 6-7*. Both are obscure, and one copies from the other. *II Peter* makes reference to a story that “God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the day of judgement.” (*II Peter 2:4, NRSV*). The text follows in verse six by saying that Lot was “a righteous man greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the lawless.” (*II Peter 2:7 NRSV*) *Jude* parallels *II Peter 2:4* by saying, “And the angels who did not keep their position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness

for the judgment of the great Day.” (*Jude 6 NRSV*) This is immediately followed by a reference to the sin of Sodom: “Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality, and pursued unnatural lust serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.” (*Jude 7 NRSV*) Thus, the passages have been perceived as pejorative against homosexual acts.

In response to this interpretation, V.P. Furnish in his *Moral Teaching of Paul*, refers to some Jewish sources, especially *The Testament of Naphtali 3:4-5*, that see the sin of Sodom as desire to have sexual relations with *angels*.⁴³ Martti Nissinen traces the reference to the Watchmen, or angelic creatures, who had intercourse with human women (*Jubilees 7:21, quoting I Enoch*). In this citation their sin is linked with Sodom’s sin. The parallel may be that the men of Sodom wanted to have intercourse with the angels, similar to the intercourse of Watchmen (i.e. angels) with the human daughters.⁴⁴ John Boswell agrees that the Jude 6-7 passage is a reference to the Book of Jubilees, which in turn refers to the passage in Genesis 6:1-4, in which the sons of God had intercourse with the daughters of men, and there were giants in the earth. The Book of Jubilees says that this story refers to Sodom, where *angels and women had intercourse*.⁴⁵

At best, it is a stretch to cite these passages as proof against homosexual acts, and one wonders exactly what they prove. Luther says that II Peter and Jude are among the *antilegomena*, the books questioned by the early church, and should be approached with caution. In Luther’s view, the last books of the New Testament (excluding I Peter and I John) should be last, not simply because their apostolicity was questionable, but because he saw aberrations from the gospel in them.⁴⁶

In light of all this material, it can be said that the narrator in Genesis 19 does not perceive the sin of Sodom as merely referring to homosexual acts. Certainly, it is not descriptive of consensual sex. Rather the issues of the story are, first of all, the intrusion by the men of Sodom into Lot's sacred responsibility of hospitality, and second, that the attempted homosexual rape is an act of dominating debasement of the strangers.

Judges 19-21

A narrative with strong parallels to the Sodom account is found in Judges 19-21. In the light of the foregoing analysis, this story can be dealt with in less detail. Whatever the conclusions are as to the sin of Sodom, they apply as well to the sin in this narrative. The setting in Judges 19-21 occurs in the twelfth and eleventh century B.C.E., during the time of the Israelite tribal confederation, prior to the time of the prophet Samuel. The story takes place in a tumultuous time, akin to the American wild west. As a Levite and his concubine are traveling toward their home, they decide to spend the night in the town of Gibeah, which is inhabited by people of the tribe of Benjamin. Finally, a resident immigrant from the tribe of Ephraim gives them the hospitality of his home. The men of Gibeah gather and demand that the Levite be turned out of the house so that they might "know" him. The host attempts to placate the mob by offering the Levite's concubine and his own daughter to do with them what they will. (The parallels between Judges 19:22-24 and Genesis 19:4-8 are strikingly similar.) The concubine is thrown out to the men and is gang raped throughout the night. In the morning, she staggers to the door and dies. The Levite takes the corpse and cuts it into twelve pieces, sending a piece to each of the twelve tribes of Israel as a call to holy war against the tribe of Benjamin. As with the story in Genesis 19, the intent of the mob in the Judges' story is same-sex rape, but it ends in

brutal heterosexual rape-killing. One can hardly conclude that this story, as in the Sodom narrative, deals with homosexual activity between consenting adults. It cannot be stated with any certainty that condemnation of homosexual acts *per se* are the intent of the stories. Both accounts do, however, vividly declare that God's judgment is upon such acts of dehumanizing violence.

New Testament Texts

Homosexuality in the New Testament World

Before we analyze the New Testament passages directly, we must first be aware of the whole homosexual milieu in the Greco-Roman world. This is thoroughly examined by such scholars as Robin Scroggs in *The New Testament and Homosexuality*,⁴⁷ as well as the afore-mentioned works by V. P. Furnish and Martti Nissinen. These authors clearly establish from the extant writings of the period that the primary form of homosexual practice in the Greco-Roman world was *pederasty*, – “love of boys.” The literature is filled with references and passages which extol male love of young boys. In the older Greek literature, the love relation is sublimated, so that sexual activity is reflective of the whole idealized relationship. In Roman literature, the descriptions are often lustful, debasing, and the relationship between the adult lover to the young partner is often not consensual and is dehumanizing.

What was the nature of the society that perpetuated this homosexual practice? Scroggs summarizes that, with important exceptions, “public culture of these centuries was male oriented, and the apposite intellectual and, indeed, affective partner to a male was another male.”⁴⁸ Women were often seen as primarily for breeding and family purposes, incapable of being the male's intellectual and aesthetic equal. Greeks placed

stress on the idea of beauty, which was primarily seen as physical comeliness. The beautiful male youth was the center of adult male eroticism. Scroggs says, “The culture we are investigating can fairly be said to be bisexual, since many adult pederasts were or would be married and carry on sexual relations with both sexes.”⁴⁹

The older male was the active partner and the younger, the beloved “passive” partner. Scroggs says that in the literature *he finds no evidence of homosexual relationships between same-age adults.*⁵⁰ Scroggs summarizes that, first, there was inequality in the relationship and that it could very easily have destructive results; second, there was impermanence in the relationship, for as soon as the youth lost his youthful characteristics, the relationship would end; and third, there was potential humiliation with the possibility of abuse and dehumanization.⁵¹ This helps us to understand what Paul pictured as depraved conduct.

Some non-Christian writers spoke of the practice with revulsion (e.g. Seneca, Plutarch, and Dio Chrysostom). It is described as debauchery, with gross exploitation of one’s slaves. Stoics typically described it as “contrary to nature” (a term we will meet in Romans chapter 1) and is perceived as an act of insatiable lust (again a description found in Paul).

Overt homosexual behavior was not common among Jews. Josephus and Philo write of Jewish abhorrence of the practice. Being penetrated by another male was to sacrifice one’s male role. Jewish literature sees this as a pagan vice, and also perceives it as “against nature.”

V.P. Furnish sums up by stating that three things must be kept in mind when studying the Pauline and deuterio-Pauline texts: 1) Nothing is known of “sexual orientation” in Paul’s world. It was assumed that people are by nature heterosexual, and

that behavior could be controlled through force of will. 2) Homosexual/pederastic activity was perceived as insatiable and a dehumanizing decadent practice. 3) It is depicted as exploitative, often without consent of the other.⁵² All of this would imply that the proscriptions against homosexuality in the New Testament actually were a protest against the Greco-Roman practice of pederasty, with all the debasement that it entailed.

I Corinthians 6:9-10

Excluding the passage in II Peter and Jude, which have already been addressed, there are three passages in Pauline and deuterio-Pauline literature which have been seen as condemnations of homosexual practice. They are Romans 1:26-27, I Corinthians 6:9, and I Timothy 1:10. We will examine the latter two passages first, since the Romans passage is of primary importance in the whole discussion of the subject at hand.

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be

Be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers - none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. (*I Cor. 6:9-11, NRSV*)

In the midst of Paul's discussion of Christian freedom in I Corinthians 5-6, he twice presents lists of vices (*I Cor. 5:10-11 and 6:9-10*). This cataloging of vices is a typical Hellenistic Jewish form for decrying the flagrant sins of pagans. Such lists neither differentiate between gradations of sinfulness -- idolatry and drunkenness are listed together; nor does Paul differentiate between drunkenness and alcoholism, which we today classify as a treatable sickness.

Paul sees *porneia* (sexual immorality) as a sign of the world's sinfulness, which stands under divine judgment. Justified believers are to leave such activities behind.

The second list in I Cor. 6:9-10 is of particular interest to the subject at hand,

because it includes the terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. Almost all recent English translations see these words as describing persons involved in homosexual activity. There is sufficient differentiation in the translations, however, that it indicates the ambiguity of their original meanings.

The common assumption by scholars addressing this question is that the *malakos* and *arsenokoites* were partners in a pederastic relationship, the *malakos* as passive and the *arsenokoites* as the active partner. Nissinen and others point out that both terms are ambiguous: *malakos* means “soft”; *koite* refers to “bed” and “arsen” means “male.” Scroggs says that the word *malakos* means “effeminate call boy” and is a reference to homosexual prostitution, in which the younger partner, is exploited by the *arsenokoites*. Other literature speaks of *malakos* simply as one who is effeminate. John Boswell, on the other hand, says that *malakos* applies to *masturbation*. Boswell’s studies indicate that the word *arsenokoites* is rare. It meant male prostitute until the fourth century; later it suggests disapproved sexual activity and homosexuality.⁵³ Thus, we sense the ambiguity of both words. The scholars which I have cited conclude that they refer to exploitive pederastic practices.

I Timothy 1: 8-10

In the I Timothy 1:8-10 text, once again we see ambiguities in interpretation regarding what Paul considers “lawless” activities.

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching. (I Tim. 1:8-10, NRSV)

Most scholars agree that I Timothy is deuteropauline, written in a succeeding generation, but using Paul’s name. The writer is concerned that Christians must

understand the proper use of the law. The function of the law is not for the righteous, but the lawless. The author then lists a catalog of the lawless. Again, as in the I Corinthians 6 list, *arsenokoitai* appears.

Scroggs sees a significant pattern in the three successive words *pornois* (fornicators), *arsenokoitai* (translated as sodomites), and *andrapodistais* (slave traders). Scroggs says that together they constitute a unit of meaning: the male who desires pederasty, and the slave dealer who kidnaps or entraps the boy for pederastic prostitution.⁵⁴ Thus, the meanings are too vague to make specific application to our modern understanding of homosexuality. The words, however, do imply the exploitation of persons.

Romans 1:18-32

The Romans text is the best known and most explicit passage in which Paul decries same-sex activity in Roman culture.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their 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 eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though 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 they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading 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 degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received to 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 debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil covetousness, malice. Full of envy, slander, murder, strife, deceit,

craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die – yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them. (*Rom. 1:18-32, NRSV*)

The point of the passage must be seen in the context of the whole *schema* of the book of Romans, - which is Paul's argument for justification by grace through faith without the deeds of the law. Paul begins his argument in Romans 1 by condemning the Gentiles for their idolatry. He says that monotheism was known to the Gentiles because it can be perceived from God's creation; but they rejected it. Paul argues that when we forsake the true God for idols, our whole life becomes idolatrous. Luther says something similar in his explanation of the First Commandment in his *Large Catechism*, when he points out that our God is that in which we place our love and trust. Worshiping created things rather than the creator, – and their own passions - these idolatries stand culpable before God. Their idolatry has obscured their vision; they have become “futile in their thinking.” Therefore, God has abandoned them (*paredoken*) to their own devices. Their lives became dominated by uncontrolled lust, debased sexual conduct, and other sinful behavior.

It is to be noted that only in this passage in all of Scripture is there reference to women engaging in same-sex activity. Nissinen makes the case that women's homoeroticism is heinous to Paul because it crossed gender barriers. Women's role was to be passive with her husband. Her function was as bearer of children. Lesbian conduct disturbed the patriarchal role structure and was regarded as “contrary to nature.”⁵⁵

Paul says that men also gave up intercourse with women, “changing” their sexual behaviors “contrary to nature” (*para phusin*), being driven by a consuming passion to same-sex activity. Paul, thus, is condemning those whom he perceives as *heterosexuals*

who are committing homosexual acts; who have rejected the *natural* inclination to monotheism and the *natural* inclination to the opposite sex. This is “against nature.” Although Stoics spoke of natural law, and certainly Hellenistic Jewish authors say in essence the same thing, the concept must not be given more content than it warrants. Natural law theory was not developed for centuries.⁵⁶ Nissinen stresses, “The distinctions between sexual orientation is clearly an anachronism that does not help to understand Paul’s line of argumentation.”⁵⁷ The understanding of homosexuality as a constitutional condition simply is not a part of the ancient biblical understanding. Nonetheless, this in no way detracts from the judgment of Paul -- and the judgment of God -- upon the practice of lust-filled pederasty by those who were inherently heterosexual, which, as Paul says, surrenders the natural order of things. My point, however, is that Paul’s condemnation does not speak to the issue of adult homosexuals who live in a non-exploitative, loving, monogamous faithful relationship, which is the issue under discussion in the church today.

Paul then introduces a whole list of sinful actions that are the result of human’s idolatrous rebellion against God, including a number of actions which strike uncomfortably close to home, such as envy, gossiping, and rebellion against parents. For Paul, all these acts are the result of human idolatry, found throughout the Gentile world, which places humanity under the wrath of God.

Paul continues his arguments by stressing that *all* humanity is under the judgment of God, *including those who stand in judgment against all of this gross conduct!* Paul’s argument culminates in Romans 2, when he says that when we self-righteously stand in judgment against others, we are appropriating the role of God as judge. By taking the place of God, we, too are idolaters! “All have sinned and come short

of the glory of God,” Paul declares, and, “the wages of sin is death.” As Nissinen says,

He actually uses Jewish weapons against the Jews themselves. What matters here is the theology of justification by faith, not homoeroticism as such. Paul’s rhetorical strategy in Romans 1 and 2 seems to be to stimulate his reader’s moral indignation by listing sins traditionally associated with Gentiles in conventional Jewish wordings – but this is a rhetorical trap. Paul turns the force of his criticism against the potential readers... All alike have sinned and we are justified by God’s grace alone.⁵⁸

Conclusion

Reformation studies show that justification by grace through faith for Christ’s sake is not only our answer for being at peace with God, but it is the key to our scriptural interpretation. In light of Luther’s gospel hermeneutical principle, there are a number of questions that must be addressed in the E.L.C.A.’s discussions and decisions regarding homosexuality and the church.

1) How does Luther’s gospel principle specifically address the issue of homosexuality as science is continuing to enlighten us on the nature of sexual orientation?

As Luther was open to disciplines of learning, so we must be in our understanding of the issues of homosexuality. If - as scientists are concluding more and more - sexual orientation is shaped by innate physiological processes, then are we talking about perversion or sin when we speak of the homosexual state of being? Are we not talking about how God creates human beings?

2) Must we not filter all the Bible passages used to reject homosexuality through Luther’s gospel principle?

Ultimately, we must struggle through the issue of homosexuality in light of the gospel of the one who welcomed the outcast and the alien and who became outcast and alien for us. Only the gospel can save us - heterosexual and homosexual alike - because

the judgment of the law is but a prelude in Romans to the sweet gospel that “all have been justified freely by his grace” “All who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Any attitudes which we have, and any pastoral approaches we apply, must be informed by the fact that in baptism we are dealing with sisters and brothers whom Christ has redeemed.

3) Does St. Augustine’s dictum here apply, that if Scripture seems to conflict with clear and certain reasoning, we must reinterpret the Scripture?

We have done this regarding the heliocentric theory, a three story universe, the age of the world, the realities of evolution and relativity, the emancipation of slaves and women, divorce, the ordination of women, and many other issues. As Werner Elert points out, if the sciences establish something that seems contrary to a clear text of Scripture, then, insofar as they do not deny the gospel, we must see the text of Scripture in light of the new scientific data.

4) Are not many of those with so-called traditionalist views who are directing criticisms against the ELCA’s agonizing reappraisal of sexual issues being inconsistent with Luther’s thinking?

Must we not return to the heart of the Lutheran hermeneutic, that Christ is the key to the Scripture? This gives us the freedom - even the obligation - to separate the theological kernel from the legal and cultural husk. The Lutheran gospel hermeneutic frees us from the necessity of being fundamentalists or replicating the first century world picture.

5) How can homosexuality be against “natural law” or, in Lutheran parlance, “the orders of creation,” if it is inherent in the creative process?

Have we come to grips with the reality that God’s way is infinitely more dynamic -

and surprising -than our own static definitions and mind-sets?

6) Must we not rethink the whole issue of celibacy for both lay and clerical homosexuals?

Many are saying that homosexuals must remain celibate to be in the church. But does not Scripture tell us that celibacy is a unique gift, and that it is not good for man - or woman - to be alone? Did not God make us for personal and communal relationships?

This is not antinomianism. This does not suggest that we close our eyes to libertinism, whether that be heterosexual or homosexual. Some forms of homosexuality are pathological and need to be treated as a deep-seated sickness. Homosexual orientation, however, need not be exploitative of others, or take bizarre forms, which were so evident in Paul's time. Cannot people in a loving, self-giving same-sex relationship be reflective of God's new creation? Among the baptized, we are to strive for the high calling which is ours in Christ Jesus, both those heterosexually and homosexually oriented.

Ever mindful of human frailty and the need for forgiveness - first of all, for ourselves - are we being called to lift up the ideal of monogamous, covenantal, and life-long relationships, no matter what one's sexual orientation? If Paul could recognize, as the alternative to sexual immorality, a permanent, loving faithful marriage between a man and a woman (*1 Cor. 7:2*), could not this be the Christian homosexual's alternative to sexual immorality? Should we of the church not recognize the blessing of God on the estate of two persons living together in a same-sex relationship by giving them good counsel and consecrating their relationship with the blessings of pastors and the whole church?

Should we not remove the stumbling block - the "Catch 22," - that we will not

accept people into the clergy who are in monogamous, covenantal same sex-relationships, because the church refuses to bless and recognize these relationships? Of course, it should go without saying that the church expects the same high personal morality, decorum, and professional excellence from both homosexuals and heterosexuals in ministry. Then why not?

The Paradigm in Acts 10

It would seem to me, then, that a passage which speaks dramatically to this issue is the paradigm established in Acts 10: 9-16. Peter has a vision at Joppa of a sheet descending from heaven with both clean and unclean animals in it, and he is called to rise and eat. When Peter demurs because of his Jewish piety, the voice of God tells him, “What I have called clean, do not call unclean.” This meant that God has proclaimed the gentiles to be clean, and the church is called to accept them as such. Thereupon, Peter visits the home of the Roman centurion Cornelius, and Cornelius and his family are filled with the Spirit and are baptized by Peter.

Peter later defends his baptism of Cornelius and his household in their Gentile state. He says, “*If then God gave them the same gift that he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God? (NRSV, Acts 10:17)* If the early church under Peter and Paul’s leadership could make the vast leap of accepting Gentiles for no other reason than because they believed, can we not do the same for those who are homosexually oriented? “Who are we that we could hinder God?” In the words of the *Presbyterian Study*,

Today, in our own context, is God again showing us a new thing? Are we today, like Peter of old, confronted by a phenomenon that defies our traditional understanding of God’s will? Has God fully cleaned and proclaimed clean the devoted homosexual heart?⁵⁹

If Christ has broken down all the dividing walls, then for Christ's sake, for the sake of our sisters and brothers of same-sex orientation, and for our own sake, let us be truly Christian – and truly inclusive. “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female.” Dare we say that there is no longer heterosexual and homosexual? “For all of you are one in Christ Jesus?” (*Galatians 3:28, NRSV*)

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9. *ibid.* p. 16.

10. *ibid.*, p. 19f.

11. Duff, Nancy J. “Christian Vocation, Freedom of God, and Homosexuality,” pp. 265ff in David Balch, ed., Homosexuality, Science and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture.

12. The source of my information, Dr. Kelly Ducheny, is Program Director of Clinical Psychology, Chicago School of Professional Psychology. Dr. Ducheny and I served together as co-presenters at a series of workshops in 2001-02 presented before each all of the conferences of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod of the ELCA under the Synod’s auspices.

13. Jones, Stanton L., and Yarhouse, Mark A., “The Use, Misuse, and Abuse of Science in the Ecclesiastical Homosexuality Debates,” p. 119, in David Balch, ed., Homosexuality, Science, and the Plainness of Scripture, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 2000.

14. *ibid.*, p 199f.

15. Gagnon, Robert A. J., The Bible and Homosexual Practice, Texts and Hermeneutics, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2001.

16. Gudorf, Christina E., “The Bible and Science on Homosexuality,” p. 123, in David Balch ed., Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture.

17. *ibid.*

18. A word of caution is in order here. We must let the text speak for itself, bringing to bear the best in biblical scholarship. It is, however, eminently Lutheran to read the text in terms of our own situation. For instance, liberation and feminist theologians read texts in light of their own perspectives. Luther says that we must read the text so that it speaks *pro me*, for me, and *pro nobis*, for us. This is, indeed, the task of preaching and teaching. Thus, we certainly *read into* the text, but one must honor the text and not do violence to it.

19. See Wolfgang Huber, “The Barmen Declaration and the Two Kingdoms Doctrine,” Lutheran World 24 (1977): 34f.

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21. *ibid.*

22. Terence E. Fretheim, The Old Testament and Homosexuality. p. 2f.
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23. *ibid.*

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24. *ibid.*

25. Luther, Martin, WA 21, 521. Luther frequently expressed the idea of continuous creation.

26. Martti Nissinen, Homoeroticism in the Biblical World, Augsburg Fortress, 1998, p.138.

27. cf. e.g. Luther, Martin, "Sermon for Trinity Sunday," Romans 11:33-36. WA, 21, p. 521.

28. cf. A Study of Issues Concerning Homosexuality: Report of the Advisory Committee of Issues Related to Homosexuality. Lutheran Church in America, 1986, Division for Mission in North America, LCA, p.57f.

29. The Church and Homosexuality, United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., General Assembly, 1978, Blue Book I, p.p.D37ff.

30. *ibid.*, p.D39f.

31. A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism, A Handbook of Christian Doctrine. St. Louis: Concordia, 1943. The inner pages simply identify the book as *Luther's Small Catechism*, so that generations of confirmation students inferred that Luther wrote the entire book.

32. Martin Luther, How Christians Should Regard Moses, 1525, p. 165, LW 35, pp. 155-174.

33. *ibid.*, p. 11.

34. *ibid.*, p.12.

35. *ibid.*, p. 14.

36. *ibid.*, p. 16.

37. cf. A Study of the Issues Concerning Homosexuality: Report of the Advisory Committee of Issues Relating to Homosexuality. Lutheran Church in America, 1986, Division for Global Mission in North America, LCA, p. 57.

38. *ibid.*, p. 57.

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39. Presbyterian Study, p.D-34.
40. Nissinen, figure 3.
41. *ibid.*
42. LCA Study, p. 59.
43. Furnish, V.P., The Moral Teaching of Paul. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1979, p. 56.
44. Nissinen, p. 93.
45. Boswell, p. 117.
46. Luther, Prefaces to the New Testament.
47. Scroggs, Robin. The New Testament and Homosexuality, Fortress Press, 1983.
48. *ibid.*, p. 23.
49. *ibid.*, p. 27.
50. *ibid.*, p. 35.
51. *ibid.*, p. 36f.
52. Furnish, pp. 61ff.
53. Boswell. p. 106f.
54. Scroggs p. 119ff.
55. *ibid.*, p. 108
56. Boswell, p. 109
57. *ibid.*
58. *ibid.*, p. 112
59. Presbyterian Study, p.D-90