

HOMOSEXUALITY

Statement by the Extended Theological Study Commission of ELCSA(N-T) 1996 A Summary

1. Sexuality and Homosexuality

Homosexuality is to be seen in conjunction with and in relationship to sexuality in general, which we understand as God's order of creation and preservation and which in the last instance finds its fulfilment in marriage. **Homosexuality** or **Homophilia** (from Greek "*homos*" = "equal" and Latin "*sexus*" = "gender", resp Greek "*philein*" = "to love or like") is understood as the short or long term emotional preference for persons of one's own sex. However such a person does not necessarily have to be sexually active. We distinguish between the homosexual preference and the active practice. In women this sexual attraction to one's own gender is referred to as *Lesbianism* (after the Greek poetess Sappho on the island Lesbos). It is less common, more inconspicuous and often more enduring than the masculine form. Both sexes use the term "gay". Some 3-4% of men and some 2% of women are said to be gay. Men and women who are attracted to both sexes are referred to as "bisexual", those attracted to the opposite sex are called "heterosexuals".

2. Types of Homosexuality

1. One speaks of *Development homosexuality* when some people have an erotic phase towards their own sex during their puberty. This tendency usually is overcome with time.
2. In prisons, camps etc often relationships between people of the same sex may develop, the so-called *Pseudo-homosexuality or Need homosexuality*; from which they usually can dissociate themselves again.
3. In the *Inhibition homosexuality* people avoid the other sex and seek alternatives in homosexual practices.
4. When people during their whole lives have a predominant or exclusive preference towards their own sex one speaks of *Inclination homosexuality*. This form usually results from early childhood conditioning and experiences or inherited disposition, some say from a deep-seated self-pity. It can usually not be treated by medicines and most psychologists view it as irreversible and not changeable. The two positions, whether a homosexual inclination may be changed or not, cannot finally be scientifically proven. These should therefore not be classified as *either-or* cases, both view points have to be respected.
As homosexuals are mentally, physically and socially especially exposed, they need specific requirements in society.

3. The judicial foundation in South Africa

In the past "sodomy" was punishable. Since the inclusion of sexual orientation and thereby of homosexuality in the list of human rights and equality before the law and protection in the new South African Constitution (1996), the church also has to question herself in what this means for her ministry, for church life and church practice.

4. Biblical-theological aspects:

In *Genesis 19* (the men of Sodom = therefore the word "sodomy") and in *Judges 19:22* God's judgement turns against the male inhabitants who desire to homosexually rape the foreigners in the city, but are not able to do so. *Ezekiel 16:49f*, *Wisdom 10:6ff* and *Sirach 16:8f* mention other reasons for the punishment of Sodom, not in the first instance their homosexual desire. The Holiness Code sets down laws and rules of God's people in contrast to the surrounding pagan people, and according to *Leviticus 8:22 and 20:13* also homosexual practices are condemned. In some classes of Greek and Roman civilisation homosexuality was known and accepted. And so homosexuality is mentioned in the New Testament, *Romans 1:24-27(-31)*, in the broader connection of the ungodliness of the pagan worshippers. The unrestrained sexual desires, including forms of homosexuality, are described as expression, consequence and punishment of their godlessness. These expressions of human desires are seen as symptoms of the fundamental sin of humans, to glorify the *created* (i.e man himself) instead of the *Creator*. In the catalogue of vices, besides fornicators, idolaters, adulterers etc are also mentioned the male prostitutes and "*sodomites*," (the terms probably means paedophiles, who abuse children) *1. Timothy 1:10 and 1. Corinthians 6:9-11*.

Even if the Biblical texts verbally condemn homosexual practices unequivocally yet the Biblical judgement of that time should not indifferently be translated directly and unreflectively into our context. We should also take into consideration the present insights of those in similar fields of expertise. The church's approach to e.g.

alcoholics or divorcees differs from previous times, more caring than judgmental. Essential is that Jesus Christ as living Word of God, being the centre of Scripture, be proclaimed in this world.

5. Arguments in the discussion of the Church

Within the church the discussion on how the church should relate to homosexuality arrives at different conclusions. In this paper four types of arguments are being discussed without attempting to propose one of them as the final answer. Each one of us has to decide on this theme according to ones own personal knowledge and conscience. An answer without "*acceptance of suffering*" will not be possible.

1. The open form: the Biblical assertion against homosexuality are to be viewed as to be tied to a specific time, essential for the Christian is alone the commandment of love as Jesus Christ taught it. For today it would be most important that the sexual relationship is characterised by responsible love. It would thus be secondary whether this relationship should be heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. One could only help the homosexual if his/ her preference would be accepted as equal to other preferences by church and society.
2. Since there is a irreversible homosexual inclination, this could be understood as a lot which God has placed on the person. As the Evangelical Church can not demand someone to live celibate, so a pastoral compromise might be seen therein that the homosexual is granted to live in a responsible long-term relationship.
3. The Biblical understanding of human relationships is that of living in a polarity between male and female. This concept has to be accepted and supported anew within religion, culture and in society. The Christian congregation has to support the right of life of the homosexuals in their as fateful characterised special status, without thereby changing the Biblical understanding of sexuality.
4. The narrow form: Not the inclination but the sexual relationship and sexual practice as such are sinful. The encounter with Jesus Christ could renew the life of those who on their own could not have the courage and power to change. They and congregation members are called to pray for the healing of the homosexual. The church should therefore demand that homosexuals abandon and renounce their sexual relationships.

6. Advice for church leaders, congregations and homosexual church workers

In general, congregations are called to be open for homosexuals to be congregation members. Those responsible in Church Councils, Theological Training etc, are advised to relate to gay church workers in the following way:

1. It is important to understand and accept homosexual workers in the church more consciously, without thereby encouraging a homosexual practice or by presenting homosexuality as a desirable example.
2. Such preconditions should be instituted in the church that no one need feel necessitated to conceal or suppress his/ her inclination towards homosexuality. No co-worker in the church should need to feel compelled to go public with his/ her problem or flee into marriage.
3. It is advisable that homosexual church co-workers and theology students go for pastoral counselling so that problems could be discussed concerning the rules of employment before starting church work.
4. Church workers and pastors who realize that they have a homophile inclination should know and trust that the church would discuss their appointment from the point view of pastoral care. The church should make pastoral counselling available as early as possible. However church workers have to realize that the situation in a congregation might be such that they would have to decide to either withhold from practising their homosexuality or resign from their ministry.
5. If pastors or church workers have a homosexual inclination this does not immediately exempt them from working fruitfully in a congregation. One may expect from a Christian congregation to be prepared to work together with a pastor or co-worker who has a homosexual inclination. However it is advisable not to place a homosexual in a position of leadership and authority.

7. Standpoint concerning the blessing of homosexuals and the adoption of children

Due to our understanding of Christian marriage, a public blessing or marriage service for homosexual partners is not accepted within our church. This does not exclude the pastor to pastorally accompany such partners. In general, our church would advise homosexuals against adopting a child into their partnership.

8. Conclusion:

Wherever the church comments on homosexuality she will be aware of her one-sided attitude towards homosexuals in the past, e.g. where she did not pastorally care enough for homosexuals and their problems. She rejects the attitude of judging homosexuality from a general moralistic view-point simply as ethical misconduct. The church confesses to be a communion of forgiven sinners living out of grace alone: "*For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 3,22-24). Baptised homosexuals are members of the church just as all the other members. Before God a distinction between terms often used, such as "normal" and "deviant", can have no lasting meaning: heterosexuals as well as homosexuals need acceptance for Christ's sake, each according to their needs and they need our prayer.