

# **A critical examination of homosexuality through the lens of the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral.”**

## **Introduction**

“God is looking for a society in which there are no outsiders; in which all are within and treated with respect and dignity. To treat some people as less worthy of acceptance on account of their ... sexual orientation brings grief to God, it is unacceptable in his sight.” (Tutu 2007, ix). Discussions regarding homosexuality have increasingly come to the fore in recent years within the Christian setting. While on placement with Charleswood United Church in Canada in July 2008 I witnessed the effect on the church of their first ‘gay marriage,’ which, although acceptable within the legislation of the United Church of Canada, caused great consternation for some members of the congregation who believed that authorising the blessing of committed same-sex unions was in contradiction to the teaching of Scripture and the tradition of the Church. For many in the congregation who are married and for those who have held an unchallenged definition of marriage for their entire lives, the most significant inter-personal relationship possible in their lives was under threat and to be asked to change their definition of marriage was not going to occur simply because those in leadership positions in the United Church had passed legislation.

No such legislation currently exists within the Methodist Church in Ireland; however the Council on Social Responsibility of the MCI has been looking at the topic of ‘Human Sexuality’ over recent years. Following their report to the conference in June 2009, the conference adopted a statement on homophobia<sup>1</sup> and received a statement on pastoral guidelines on homosexuality which were to be published for discussion throughout the church. (Methodist Church in Ireland, 2009, 98). It is easy to feel like an onlooker waiting for a verdict about what is acceptable and

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<sup>1</sup> “The conference adopts the following statement on Homophobia:-

Believing that all human beings are made in the image of God and that Jesus Christ died to redeem all humankind, the Methodist Church strongly condemns all forms of homophobia both within the Church and the wider community. Recognising the many subtle forms in which homophobia is expressed; it urges all our members to carefully examine our thoughts, words and actions before God so that we may not be guilty of any form of homophobia, either consciously or unconsciously.”

unacceptable with regards the current debate on homosexuality within my tradition. As this subject seems to be a controversial one - with views ranging from extreme liberal to extreme conservative ends of the spectrum, as well as all positions in between - I want to be prepared as I enter circuit ministry for questions and discussions regarding this increasingly discussed topic and I want to have thought through the issues for myself before being told by the Church what its stance on the matter is. I believe the issue of homosexuality within the church will be a defining issue of our time. I am coming to this dissertation having already put a lot of thought into my beliefs on this subject and I bring my own theology regarding homosexuality to the table as I begin my research. I am, however, aware that my background and context prior to theological studies have caused me to reach these conclusions and I now want to examine these experiences critically within the context of a model of theology. To this end I have chosen to reflect on this topic through the lens of the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” which I will outline below.

The “Wesleyan quadrilateral” is the name given to a model describing Wesley’s theology in which he looks at the elements of scripture, reason, tradition and experience. I believe this model of theology provides the essential elements with which to study homosexuality and with some preconceived ideas already formed regarding this topic; scripture, reason, tradition and experience appear to form the best environment from which to question my ideas and to engage with the views and opinions of others. Wesley did not invent this terminology nor use it; this term is actually a modern attempt to summarise the fourfold set of guidelines which Wesley used in reflecting on theology.<sup>2</sup> Although Wesley changed the emphasis of his theology over the course of time, his focus remained consistent. His passion was soteriology and he sought to communicate the truth of salvation to ordinary people, without entangling them in nonessential theological jargon and system building (Thorsen, 2005, 37).

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<sup>2</sup> Outler first referred to the Wesleyan quadrilateral in the late 1960s while serving on the commission on doctrine and doctrinal standards of the United Methodist Church. He chose to use the quadrilateral as an analogue to the already familiar term used by Anglican and Episcopal churches, the “Lambeth Quadrilateral,” which represented the essentials for a reunited Christian church. (Thorsen, 2005, 5). In an article in the Wesleyan Theological Journal (1985, 16) Outler states “the term “quadrilateral” does not occur in the Wesley corpus – and more than once, I have regretted having coined it for contemporary use, since it has been so widely misconstrued.”

According to Langford (1998, 35) Wesley's mode of theology was distinctive and intimately related to Christian living and the proclamation of Christian faith, it was neither simply dogmatic nor apologetic theology. "Theology was for the purpose of transforming personal life and social relations and was not so much for the purpose of understanding life as for changing life; theology should help effect the love of God and neighbour."

Wesley has also been described as having a holistic understanding of theology, a theology which catered for the whole person and which grew out of the context of lived experience. Wesley was concerned for practical ministry and hands on involvement with people, rather than ministry through preaching and teaching alone. The Anglican church in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century based their theology around scripture, reason and tradition, however Wesley believed this triad should be broadened to include a fourth component, namely, 'experience' (Maddox, 1998, 215). According to Thorsen (2005, 7), "Wesley's incorporation of experience into his theological method, while it may have initially affected only a small group, was a germinal idea that continues to be important to the historical development of theology."

Wesley was living and writing during the Enlightenment, a time in which reason was advocated as the primary source and legitimacy for authority. The terminology 'Enlightenment' was a set of values which had at its core a critical questioning of traditional institutions, customs, and morals (Cragg, 1990). Wesley attempted to come alongside this modern, scientific and philosophical worldview, and show the relevance of Christianity within this context without denying his belief in orthodox Christianity.

Although the term quadrilateral implies an equality of the four aspects of scripture, reason, tradition and experience, Wesley did not weight the four equally. Throughout his ministry Wesley maintained the primacy of scriptural authority, and this is apparent in his writings as he always listed scripture first. His belief was that scripture applies to the entirety of life and that tradition, reason and experience are valuable resources in helping to understand, confirm, illuminate and communicate the truths of scripture. Thorsen (2005, 2) suggests the use of a tetrahedral pyramid rather than a quadrilateral would be more appropriate in describing Wesley's theology, whereby scripture would serve as the foundation of the pyramid and

tradition, reason and experience would serve as the three equal sides. Wesley did not see the need for this hierarchical relationship of scripture to the other three elements to be explained in any detail because he never expected any of the other elements to ever contradict scripture.

In line with Wesley's belief in the primacy of scripture this paper will study scripture first, however I disagree with Wesley's conviction that the other elements will not contradict scripture and I look forward to testing this as I study the topic of homosexuality within the four areas of the quadrilateral. I agree with Hewlett's (2008, 110) comment that belief must be tested against scripture, but that this is not the same as saying that everything in scripture is to be held as a matter of faith.

Wesley did not write anything specifically about the relationship between tradition, reason and experience and in fact all three elements could be discussed in any order following scripture. The most common order when referring to the quadrilateral is: scripture, tradition, reason and experience; and the placement of tradition beside scripture is supported by the fact that Wesley never tried to create a new theology, he encouraged others to read widely with regard to classical, orthodox beliefs and to study the traditions of the church and the patristic fathers (Thorsen, 2005, 76). However, Wesley often referred to the authority of reason in conjunction with scripture and therefore a case could be made for placing reason second in order and likewise a case could be made for experience having second place as it is seen by many as Wesley's most distinctive mark on theology.

The order of my study of the quadrilateral will be – scripture, experience, reason and tradition – this structure is mirroring my theology at the current time as this reflects my view of the importance of the elements of the quadrilateral in regard to homosexuality. I affirm my belief in the authority of the Bible and accept that experience constantly affects Biblical interpretation; however scripture, in my view, must provide the framework within which to interpret experience, rather than the other way around. I have chosen to place reason and tradition in that order as I believe as a church we are less aware of the beliefs and practices of the early Christians and are therefore more likely to use reason in our decision making process regarding relevant issues today. Despite this structure, I am however open to my

views being changed as I study these four areas and their relevance to the topic of homosexuality.

Other models of theological reflection which could have been used include the pastoral cycle which is a continuous process of engagement with, and reflection upon, the world and the word of God and includes the elements of experience, exploration, reflection and response. Another model is Pattison's critical conversation model which involves individual's bringing their own ideas, beliefs and feelings; as well as those of the Christian community and tradition; and the situation itself, to the table. As with the Wesleyan quadrilateral, these theological models and many others, encourage those using them to explore different elements to achieve results and to continuously reflect on conclusions in the light of changing data. Let us now look at the four elements of the Wesleyan quadrilateral.

**Scripture** - 2 Timothy 3:16 'All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.'

"Wesley's appeals to tradition, reason, and experience serve to complete a circle of hermeneutics that begins and ends with scripture." (Thorsen, 2005, 148). Outler (1985, 13) describes the Bible as Wesley's second language and believes his appeal to scripture goes far deeper than the use of texts in support of his own views. Wesley's larger concern was to let each part of scripture be pondered in the light of the whole and in the spirit of prayer. "Scripture is not merely God's address to the believer – it is inspired by the Holy Spirit who in turn inspires the believer's understanding. The Bible is to be read literally, save where such a reading leads to an absurdity or to an impugnation of God's goodness." Wesley's reading of scripture preceded most of the historical-critical questions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and onward, therefore it is speculative to consider how he would have used scripture to respond to the many issues which face Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Wesley's belief in the primacy of scripture was focused within the context of soteriology, and to that end Wesley saw scripture as sufficient to lead people to salvation. Although when faced with challenges to his authority, his first appeal was to scripture, Wesley was also aware that this alone could not settle all disputes of doctrine. Indeed Outler (1985, 9) states that Wesley and his critics repeatedly came to impasses in their games of prooftexting, often with the same texts.

Wesley was not naive in his use of scripture and did not abide by the well-known reformation slogan ‘*sola scriptura*,’ scripture alone. Wesley claimed he would not even believe the literal interpretation of scripture unless it was confirmed by experience, although he expected experience to confirm and clarify scripture. Wesley is described as being open to reconsider his interpretation of scripture when given insights from reason and experience and Thorsen (2005, 88) cites the example of Wesley’s biblical understanding of entire sanctification. He believes that Wesley’s doctrine of entire sanctification sprang primarily from observation of Christians’ experience of God’s sanctifying grace in their lives, which Wesley had already found to be true in scripture.

### **Experience**

“Many consider Wesley’s insights into experience as a source of religious authority one of his greatest contributions to the development of Christian theology. Wesley was concerned at the tendency to overemphasise the cognitive, formal dimension of religious belief at the expense of the affective, vital dimension of Christian experience, which involves a personal, interacting, and loving relationship with God.” (Thorsen, 2005, 129). Personal experiences are difficult to measure because they are personal and each individual may rate the same experience very differently. Wesley described the personal relationship with God as ‘heart-religion’ and as such this is based on individual sensations or perceptions that may not easily be communicated to others. However, this experience is not purely subjective; it is an objective encounter with something beyond ourselves. Outler (1985, 15) describes this as an inward assurance of an objective reality, the experience of a given, divine action that can only be reacted to in trusting faith or in prideful resistance. Outler believes that if Wesley had known of Kant, he would have agreed with at least the first two paragraphs of his first *Critique of Practical Reason* published in 1788 - that all our knowledge begins with experience; and though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it arises out of experience (Kant, 1908, xvii).

Wesley was concerned that due to the individual nature of experience, it was open to misinterpretation or miscommunication and therefore he insisted that experience must be tested for reliability. Obviously, scripture was Wesley’s first test, but along

with this he used reason and tradition to provide safeguards to interpret personal experiences.

### **Reason**

“Wesley believed that all human knowledge comes from some kind of sense perception or from reflection on our sense perception. He defined logic as a proper use of inductive and deductive reasoning and accurate evidence. Reason, which is ultimately a gift from God, serves as a guide, especially in understanding scripture. With the proper use of reasoning capabilities, which primarily involve logic, we may rationally assess the claims of religious belief.” (Thorsen, 2005, 125).

We are assured that God gives us the ability to see things beyond human limitations and to understand things which require spiritual intuition. If we come across a dilemma whereby scripture and experience are in opposition, we are encouraged to allow reason to serve as a mediating force, with the understanding that reason has limits. Wesley lived in a time of transition between an earlier theocentric rationalism that sought to reconcile religion and science, and the Enlightenment’s outright rejection of supernaturalism and was therefore forced to struggle with deism and secularism. His understanding of reason involved his belief that God designed humans with a capacity to understand Him through the input of the Holy Spirit (Outler, 1985, 14).

### **Tradition**

Although I have discussed Wesley as relying heavily on the authority of scripture, he was by no means a man of one book and is known to have read widely and in all genres (Outler, 1985, 14). It was vital that his theology be seen in the context of the Christian tradition and as Outler states “For Wesley, the Christian tradition was more than a curiosity or a source for illustrative material. It was a living spring of Christian insight. Reading Wesley against his sources amounts to an eccentric excursion through the length and breadth of the history of Christian thought.” (1985, 14). Wesley saw church history as useful in understanding how the early Christian fathers had read and understood scripture in the light of their experiences and subsequent reflections.

Although Wesley would never have used tradition as a substitute for scripture, as he neither considered it inspired or infallible, he often appealed to the early church and Christian tradition to complement his reading of and to assist in his interpretation of scripture.

According to Outler (1985, 17) “the quadrilateral requires of a theologian no more than what he or she might reasonably be held accountable for: a familiarity with scripture that is both critical and faithful; an acquaintance with the wisdom of the Christian past; a taste for logical analysis as something more than a debater’s weapon; and a vital, inward faith that is upheld by the assurance of grace and its prospective triumphs, in this life.”

To Wesley, a systematic theology was not as important as a practical theology which allowed people to coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and which was concerned with the whole person – spiritually, socially, physically and mentally – and his theology has been described as eclectic and pluralistic.

Although the Wesleyan quadrilateral was birthed amid the Enlightenment era, I believe it is still relevant to contemporary theology in this post modernity era. Wesley’s view of Christianity may need to be reconceived in the light of today’s culture but I see no reason why this cannot be done using the same tools of scripture, experience, reason and tradition. Not everyone is in agreement with my thoughts on this matter. Abraham, while looking at how the United Methodist Church in North America was to identify their canonical standards of doctrine, described the quadrilateral as “riddled with problems...intrinsically inadequate as a proposal in itself...a hastily contrived shotgun wedding between scripture and tradition, the bride provided by the church, and reason and experience, the bridegroom, provided by the European Enlightenment” (1995, 60). Abraham feels that scripture and tradition do not belong in the same conversation as reason and experience. The former are solid, visible realities with deep meaning and purpose, while the latter are more subjective concepts and prone to interpretation. I can relate to Abraham’s comments but I maintain my belief that all four elements are useful and indeed necessary in our theology today.

Cobb (1995, 159) supports the use of the quadrilateral today although with the premise that we must draw from Wesley only that which makes sense in terms of current understanding of the Bible and our personal experience. He encourages theologians to critically reflect on knowledge gleaned from each of the four elements of the quadrilateral and to specifically understand scripture in the light of continuing Biblical scholarship.

As I embark on this journey of discovery into homosexuality as viewed through the lens of the Wesleyan quadrilateral, I am concerned that my reading of scripture may be influenced by personal experience and reason. It is difficult to perceive what Wesley would have done if he had experienced conflict between scripture and any of the other elements, although Thorsen (2005, 44) states that “In areas of disagreement Wesley chose to remain tolerant of the diverse theological opinions that inevitably arise from people’s religious experience.” Therefore, given this quadrilateral of religious authority, how should I as a Methodist—or indeed any Christian interested in considering a breadth of relevant data—view homosexuality? Although Wesley did not specifically deal with the issue of homosexuality, I believe his theological legacy provides a comprehensive and integrative way of evaluating it. We cannot always determine how liberal Wesley allowed Christians’ opinions to be, but we can be sure that he allowed a degree of theological pluralism as a consequence of religious toleration and universal love. This is evidenced by Wesley allowing his Methodists “to think and let think” (Thorsen, 2005, 44) and by the words of one of his last sermons ‘Prophets and Priests’ (Wesley, 1789, sermon 121) where he wrote that Methodists should “accept into their fellowship all who love God and live righteous lives in accordance with that love.”

Hewlett (2008, 113) believes that the quadrilateral is a tool which helps theologians to examine matters with openness and the willingness to change. It reminds us of our incompleteness and partial perspectives and teaches us to value what others bring to the discussion. I hope as I research homosexuality using the four elements of the quadrilateral, that I will mirror Wesley’s theological pluralism and his willingness to consider issues from widely different sources, and that I will come to my own conclusions as to how to view this issue within the Christian context.

In the following chapters as I study the debate surrounding homosexuality<sup>3</sup> within the parameters of the quadrilateral, I am aware that I am writing for a readership of Northern Irish evangelicals and my presumption is that their perspective will be a traditional, conservative one. Therefore assuming that those reading will be coming to this debate with knowledge of the conservative view, I will attempt to challenge this perspective and am aware that in the process this paper will present a more liberal view and will use literature from a more liberal standpoint.

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this dissertation I have chosen to use the term 'homosexual' to refer to gay and lesbian individuals. Marin (2009, 60) states that the word 'homosexual' holds a negative connotation for those of same-sex orientation, and he suggests the use of the terms - gay, lesbian or GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender). However, Marin's opinion is not expressed by any other sources used throughout this study and the majority use the term 'homosexual' in their text, therefore I have chosen to do likewise.

## **Scripture**

For most Christians the Bible is the foundation and supreme authority of their life and faith, therefore it is important that scripture is consulted as the question of homosexuality is considered within a Christian context. Issues of exegetical meaning, theological method and interpretive choice are pivotal in this debate and Christian leaders and churches continue to be challenged by questions regarding the voice and role of scripture on same-sex relations. Those struggling with this controversial issue will find provocative material supporting both sides of the debate that requires critical reflection before conclusions can be reached.

Scripture has been described by Dormor and Morris (2007, 9) as multi-layered, complex and full of stories and insights that sometimes sit uneasily with each other, while Mein (2007, 24) states that to understand any particular biblical injunction about sexuality or family life, we need to see it in the broader historical, cultural and religious context to which it belongs. The term “hermeneutic distance” is used by O’Donovan (2009, 78) to refer to the gap between the reader and the text, that is, the gap which understanding has to bridge.

Webb (2001, 23) believes that the biblical text lacks clarity at times and that this may partly be “due to the fact that scripture itself adopts what we might call ‘kingdom values’ (those which transcend any culture and time) as well as ‘cultural values’ (those which are locked into a particular place and time).” Webb challenges those reading scripture to listen to the text within its literary context as well as hearing that same text within its immediate and broader social and cultural context. The words of the biblical text were not spoken in a vacuum, they were relative to the ancient community as it interfaced with the world around them as well as being relative to developments in later biblical tradition. The text therefore needs to be read with one foot in the world of the original writers and one foot in the modern world, and this process of moving from the ancient text into our modern times is not a simple matter.

Webb describes portions of scripture as transcultural (e.g. love for one’s neighbour) and portions that contain significant cultural components (e.g. slavery texts). The question which this raises is therefore: With regards the biblical texts on

homosexuality, which components within scripture are transcultural and which are cultural? How can the biblical evidence regarding homosexuality be dealt with?

According to Rogers (2009, 57) there is not an exact equivalent for 'homosexual' in either Greek or Hebrew and the Bible in its original Hebrew and Greek has no concept like our present understanding of a person with a homosexual orientation. Historically scripture has been interpreted as prohibiting the practice of homosexuality, but Thorsen (1996, 1) states that some biblical scholars have now challenged interpretations of key texts. For centuries people assumed that scripture advocated slavery and the subordination of women to men, however in the 21<sup>st</sup> century many have changed their views on these matters. Rogers (2009, 58) believes that this change is due to the Holy Spirit providing us with a new understanding of scripture and he suggests that the Holy Spirit may once again be working to change Christians' views on homosexuality.

The debate about homosexuality in the church seems to focus on a small number of texts, none of which include any of Jesus' words. Whilst studying these passages with regards to homosexuality, various themes appeared and this chapter will therefore discuss the issue of homosexuality within these themes.

### **Holiness Code**

Leviticus includes a collection of laws known as the Holiness Code (chaps. 17-26) which describe how holiness was to be embodied in Israel. Those opposing homosexuality believe that the Holiness Code of Lev. incontrovertibly affirms, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Lev. 18:22). Homosexuality is one act within a list of sexual taboos in Lev. which are seen as breaking the boundaries of biological design and sexual order. Bestiality for example can be described as breaking the boundaries between human and animal; while homosexuality breaks the boundaries between male and female. Matthews (2008, 601) believes that Lev. 18:22 can be read to suggest it is wrong for heterosexuals to engage in homosexual acts. These ritual purity laws were considered necessary to distinguish the Israelites from their pagan neighbours.

Although the NT has repealed the cultic impurity laws, Webb (2001, 170) states that the early church did not interpret these OT prohibitions against homosexual activity as part of ceremonial law to be left to a previous era. Furthermore he comments that the placement of homosexuality on the death penalty list (Lev. 20:13) argues strongly for the ongoing applicability of divine displeasure against this act in any culture and at any time. Therefore although the modern church has rejected most of the ways Lev. symbolizes holiness, e.g. the dietary regulations, the menstrual-intercourse law; many still claim that this part of the Bible is authoritative for the church, and especially with regards the issue of homosexuality (Davis, 2008, 516). To account for this seeming inconsistency, Christians have distinguished between the moral law and the ceremonial law, claiming that they are bound by the former and not the latter, and that the issue of homosexuality is part of the moral law. However, the problem with this defence is that it makes a distinction that Lev. itself does not seem to recognize. For example, one verse describes loving your neighbour while the next talks about not mixing two kinds of seeds in the same field (Davis, 2008, 516). Therefore, can Christians take the parts of Lev. which they choose to support their arguments and describe them as relevant to the church today, whilst at the same time discarding other parts of the text by describing them as limited to those inhabitants of ancient Israel?

On the other side of the argument, many advocates of homosexuality contend that the Holiness Code does not apply to the modern homosexual argument because as Campolo (2003, 182) states, these prohibitions are part of the purity code of ancient Israel, rather than the moral code; and what had been declared unclean is no longer viewed as such (Acts 10:9-16; Rom. 14:14). Atkinson & Field (1995, 451) support this belief by their translation of the words 'detestable' in Lev. and 'unnatural' in Rom. as 'not according to Jewish law and custom,' and Willimon (2002, 124) states that the Hebrew 'toevah' (abomination) in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 is used to refer to acts that make one ritually unclean – such as eating pork, or engaging in sexual intercourse during menstruation. He does not believe that this can be applied to two consenting Christian adults today and any simple correlation, without regard to differences of time and culture, he describes as an abuse, rather than an honouring of scripture.

## **Male Dominance**

“The assumption of male gender superiority is a significant aspect of the historical and cultural context of the biblical passages that seem to discuss homosexuality. Generally in the ancient Near East, sexual contact between two men was condemned as a confusion of gender roles and the same attitude is present in the NT, reflecting its Greek and Roman patriarchal context.” (Rogers, 2009, 63). Homosexual actions were seen as undermining male gender superiority, because men took on a passive role and were penetrated, taking on the role of a woman. Mein (2007, 23) believes that the OT passages discussing homosexuality sought to establish a hierarchical relationship which would protect the rights of fathers and heads of households and would maintain women’s subordination to their men folk. If this is the case and the passages in Lev. and Rom. relate solely to men and women’s designated places and roles in the society of ancient Israel, surely these texts cannot be used to condemn homosexual acts in contemporary society where male dominance and a patriarchal society are no longer the norm.

## **Creation**

Creation is another heading under which the subject of homosexuality is discussed, especially with reference to Genesis 1-2, and as with all parts of scripture these chapters are used by opponents and supporters of homosexuality.

Let us first look at supporters of homosexuality and their views on how creation impacts this topic. On the one hand Rogers (2009, 82) believes that Gen. 1-2 contains no reference to homosexuality and he maintains that these chapters were not written to answer the questions that are now being put to them. Whilst the story of the Garden of Eden appears to present monogamous heterosexuality as normative, no one uses this pattern today to condemn sexual abstinence. Besides abstinence cases, advocates of homosexuality appeal to deviation from creation patterns in the sexual practices of masturbation, oral sex and anal sex within heterosexual marriages. The question must therefore be asked, if the church is not willing to openly condemn these practices, then why should homosexuality be condemned? (Webb, 2001, 132).

On the other hand, if we turn our attention to those who believe scripture opposes homosexual behaviour, they agree that the above practices of masturbation, oral and

anal sex depart from creation order; however they claim that this departure is not to the degree of homosexuality and that the latter is more serious. Also, the former practices are never censored in the biblical text in the way that homosexuality is censored. Their belief is that Gen. 1-2 portrays the male and female as the pattern for sexual relationships which must be adhered to. These thoughts on creation bring us on to the themes of marriage and procreation.

## **Marriage**

McNeill (1993, 60) describes two accounts in Gen. of the creation of human sexuality. The first account, dated around 550-500 BC, is from the priestly tradition “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them,” (Gen. 1:27) and he states that this account clearly indicates that the divine purpose in creating sexual differentiation was procreation. This view therefore counters homosexuality.

However McNeill asserts that according to scholars the second account, attributed to the Yahwist author, is much more ancient, dated 950BC. In this account God’s purpose in creating sexual differentiation is not associated with procreation; rather, the purpose was companionship and a cure for loneliness: “Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner” (Gen. 2:18). In this account the divine purpose in creating sexual differentiation was mutual love and fulfilment and Hare (2007, 111) makes the point that God offered the man every animal and bird, and when he rejected them, God then offered him the woman, whom he accepted. The choice was man’s, not God’s; human not divine, should this be the case today?

Let us look in more detail at the arguments opposing and advocating homosexuality within the context of marriage and procreation.

Busenitz (2008, 203) sees within Genesis, five purposes of marriage – “reproduction, the union of one woman and one man, woman functioning as a complement to man, picturing the relationship between Christ and His church, and a fulfilling of distinctive roles by husband and by wife.” He believes that a same-sex union cannot possibly fulfil any of such perspectives and strongly states that the agenda of homosexuals and their advocates is to destroy marriage, reverse the sodomy laws,

and to force acceptance of homosexuality on society. Goddard (2004, 24) also opposes homosexuality on the grounds that the biblical imagery of marital union is a form of re-union in which the two become 'one flesh.' He sees the coming together of one man and one woman in marriage as witnessing to God's creation purpose in making us male and female whilst also symbolising the Creator's covenant with his creation that is other than him.

Moving into the NT, Pannenberg (1996, 1) claims that Jesus' perspective, by and large, corresponds to Jewish tradition and that the intention of creation was reaffirmed by Jesus himself (Matt. 19: 4-6). Does this therefore mean that departures from this biblical norm, whether homosexual or heterosexual (pre- and extra-marital sex), are sinful and to be condemned?

Although it seems that Gen. unequivocally advocates the marriage of man to woman, Davis (2008, 515) asks the hermeneutical question "Can we readily convert that positive statement into a prohibition of lifelong committed sexual relationship between members of the same sex?" Is it justifiable to make a valid prohibition from a positive biblical statement? She uses the example of those who might read "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28) as supporting a prohibition on artificial birth control, and states that many others would not concur that this interpretation is valid or binding. This leads to the next theme of procreation.

### **Procreation**

The majority of Christians today advocate the use of contraceptives within marriage which allow couples to decide if and when they are ready to open themselves to the possibility of new life. Despite this acceptance that not every sexual act must be open to procreation, it is a huge leap to redefine marriage so that its intrinsic relationship to the gift of children is removed and for rivals of homosexuality this is a step too far.

Those who support same-sex relationships again appeal to the cultural context of the biblical text. McNeill (1993, 58) describes the profertility bent of the OT authors as due to under population, with the result that any wilful destruction of viable human seed was regarded as a serious crime. He also states that another factor influencing

the OT attitude on homosexual activity was the strong Hebrew stress on preserving the family name through progeny.

### **Hospitality**

We move now to another theme regarding the biblical texts quoted in relation to the homosexuality debate, that of hospitality, which is studied in Gen. 19:1-11 – Sodom; and Judges 19:1-30 - The Rape of the Levite’s Concubine. Rogers (2009, 67) claims that the main theme in these passages is the sacred obligation of hospitality for travellers, rather than homosexuality which is an aspect of the Gen. 19 story which comes only later in nonbiblical literature. Although Sodom is referred to in negative terms throughout the OT, the sins of Sodom are not identified explicitly with homosexuality. The letter of Jude is the only book of the Bible that relates the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah (v7-8) to ‘sexual immorality.’ There is a lot of discussion about sex between humans and angels that is labelled as ‘sexual immorality’ and ‘unnatural lust’ but Rogers (2009, 72) believes that it is too big a leap to use this text to condemn present day Christians who are homosexual.

In the ancient Near East homosexual rape was a traditional way for victors to accentuate the subjection of captive enemies and it was the most humiliating experience for a man as he would be treated like a woman. Rogers does not believe that the attackers in these passages were primarily homosexual otherwise the hosts would not have offered them women to abuse.

Not everyone agrees with this interpretation of these passages and Mein (2007, 22) believes that Gen. 19 condemns the homosexual urges of the men of Sodom and visits upon them a terrible punishment for their immorality, thus proving that homosexuality is a grave sin.

### **Idolatry**

In the ancient Near East homosexuality was openly practiced in the surrounding cultures. Canaanite deities were involved in incest and bestiality and homosexual sacred prostitution seems to have been practiced in connection with Baal worship as part of the fertility rites of that religion (Webb, 2001, 81). The Israelite and Christian communities did not accept these sexual practices in their theology, in their temple worship or in their everyday community living and homosexual activity was

connected in Jewish consciousness with idolatry (Deut. 23:17). Cowdell (2006, 262) advises that the teachings in the OT must be contextualised in terms of Israel's need to protect its divine covenant identity against dilution by the surrounding pagan cultures.

When one comes to the NT, there is no softening of scripture's negative assessment of homosexuality found in the OT. Paul's Jewish background would account for his attitude of shock and dismay at the rampant homosexuality he observed in Greece and he obviously believed that homosexual activity, as far as he understood it, was the result of idolatry. Campolo (2003, 184) believes that one interpretation of Rom. 1:26-27 is that Paul does not condemn those born with homosexual orientations, but rather heterosexuals who, by giving unrestrained vent to their lusts, become perverted.

Rogers (2009, 57) study of the text of Rom. 1:26-27 showed that in the original Greek, the words used are *physis* (nature) and *para physin* (against nature) and that for Paul, 'unnatural' is a synonym for 'unconventional.' He uses Rom. 11:13-24 to support his findings. This passage describes God acting contrary to nature, doing something unusual by pruning the Gentiles from a wild olive tree, where they grew in their natural state, and grafting them into the cultivated olive tree of God's people. God did not sin; therefore the term 'against nature' means that God did something unconventional. Therefore Rogers believes that Paul's vocabulary here is merely accepting the conventional view of people and how they ought to behave in first-century Hellenistic-Jewish culture. He also suggests we do not rush to hasty conclusions condemning all aspects of homosexuality as he asks whether biblical statements that condemn idolatrous and immoral sexual activity can appropriately be applied to the sexual relationships of contemporary Christian gay and lesbian people who are neither idolatrous nor immoral.

Moving on from Rom. to the texts of 1 Cor. 6:9-17 and 1 Tim. 1:3-13, these two passages in their original Greek contain 2 words, *arsenokoites* and *malakos*, which some scholars argue refer to male homosexual activity. "Some say *Arsen* (male) and *koites* (bed) refers to men who have sex with men, while others say this refers to economic exploitation, probably by sexual means: rape or sex by economic coercion, prostitution, pimping, etc. *Malakos* (soft) – often connotes effeminacy, which in that

culture was treated as a moral failing.” (Rogers, 2009, 70). Popular scholarly opinion is that Paul was not condemning homosexuality in these texts, but pederasty, where a male teacher would personally tutor a young boy and it was common for him to exploit his position of authority by either seducing the boy or coercing him into sexual relations (Campolo, 2003, 183). According to Thorsen (1996, 1) this activity was common in Graeco-Roman culture and Paul could be understood to be addressing this aspect of homosexual practice and his condemnation would therefore be confined to the lust and exploitation involved, rather than homosexual acts in general. Hare (2007, 262) also suggests that NT prohibitions refer to culturally licensed Greek pederasty and that contemporary, faithful, covenant homosexual unions avoid this prohibition. However, because the controversial words in these texts occur in lists with no context, it is difficult to know exactly what they mean and McNeill (1993, 51) believes that translations appear at times to be based on preconceptions rather than serious scholarship.

Gagnon (2003, 77-81) would disagree with the views expressed above and he states that five arguments can be cited as examples that Paul in Rom. 1 was speaking in opposition to all forms of same-sex intercourse:

- Intertextual echoes to the creation stories of Gen. 1 where idolatry and same-sex intercourse both constitute an assault on the work of the Creator in nature.
- The argument from nature – in nature Paul recognised that God designed the male-female union alone to be a complementary sexual fit.
- The mention of lesbian intercourse in Rom. 1 weakens the belief that Paul was only concerned with certain exploitative forms of same-sex relations such as pederasty.
- Paul speaks of mutual gratification in Rom. 1, therefore coercion was not an issue, and these acts were consensual homosexual acts.
- Every kind of homosexual union existed in Paul’s day, including exploitative relations and caring ones, therefore Paul could have distinguished between the two if he thought this was necessary, instead he condemns all homosexual unions.

## Christ

Thus far we have studied the subject of homosexuality within the scope of the OT and the letters of Paul; this is largely due to the fact that the gospels lack any explicit reference to homosexuality. Where Jesus does teach on sexual conduct, he is generally stricter than the OT and his Jewish contemporaries, as reflected in his teaching on adultery in the heart and on divorce. Goddard (2004, 14) therefore warns that we must take the silence of the gospels on the subject of homosexuality as confirmation that Christ was opposed to it, and he supports this theory by claiming that in Jesus' day the Law was understood to prohibit all homosexual conduct, therefore homosexual acts would automatically have been included in Jesus' rejection of sexual immorality (*porneia*, Mk. 7:21).

Browne (2007, 35) takes a slightly more temperate view than Goddard and suggests that reading scripture in the light of Christ leads to a diversity of interpretation. He notes that Jesus interprets the sin of Sodom (Gen. 19:4-11) as a failure to welcome the alien and stranger, and is silent about the sexual content of the story (Lk. 10:10-12; Mt. 10:14-15) and yet he does not assume from this that Jesus was advocating homosexuality. Rather than guessing Jesus' stance on the subject, Browne believes we should instead take note of the focus of Christ's ministry, i.e. calling people into the kingdom of God through words and actions.

Christ valued purity of heart and supporters of homosexuality believe that we must love God and our neighbour, rather than become shackled to ancient culturally conditioned codes. Rogers (2009, 128) describes God's radically inclusive grace that welcomes all who have faith and notes that Christ welcomes everyone, especially the outcast, alien, marginalized, forgotten and the foreigner. Borg (1994, 59) also takes this stance when he applies this inclusive ethos of compassion to Gal. 3:28 and he rewrites it to include "In Christ, there is neither straight nor gay." However Webb (2001, 182) claims that this inclusiveness means that we must love others, including homosexuals, but this does not mean that we must support their sinful lifestyle. Rather we must remain confident that the presence and power of God's Spirit working in and through us will transform all of life, including our sexuality, into the likeness and image of God and that the loving thing to do is to

rescue individuals involved in homosexuality from destruction and banishment from the kingdom.

Having studied the various texts of scripture and scholarly opinions relating to these passages, what can be concluded about the teaching of the Bible on homosexuality? The first conclusion is that scripture is used by both opponents and advocates supporting their beliefs and the second conclusion is that scripture must not be seen as a textual foundation for knowledge. Martin (2008, 525) challenges readers to think of scripture in new and more creative ways, as a space which communicates the truths of the gospel, but not in any simplistic or linear manner. The arguments for and against homosexuality are now summarised as this study of scripture is concluded.

As has already been seen, there is very little in the Bible about homosexuality and Forrester (2006, 289) warns that any biblical understanding of homosexuality must be rooted in “the general tenor” of scripture and should pay attention not only to specific passages but also to the plentiful things that the Bible has to say about love and relationships and the place of sexuality in loving relationships. The crux of the matter, according to Wink (1999, 44) is “that the Bible has no sexual ethic.” Instead, it exhibits a variety of sexual mores, relevant to the culture of the day but some of which changed over the thousand-year span of biblical history, never mind the years following. In contemporary society, many of the practices that the Bible prohibits, society allows, and many that it allows, society prohibits. Therefore the modern reader, rather than lingering on the sexual ethics and their meaning is encouraged by Wink to concentrate on the Bible’s love ethic, which can be contextualised to any given country, culture, or period.

Ward (2008, 110) believes that the homosexual acts referred to in the biblical text are set within the context of personal desire, ignoring the rights and human dignity of others and undermining social relationships and responsibilities; and therefore should not be seen as condemning same-sex relationships that are responsible, and which express and help to reinforce and build up a long-term relationship of love. Those same-sex couples who demonstrate mutual loving commitment within the

Christian community surely challenge the church to re-evaluate how they view homosexuality and Rogers (2009, 87) suggests that we should compare the acceptance of Gentiles into the church in Acts 10 with the contemporary debate on homosexuality.

Those opposing homosexual practice, such as Webb (2001, 156) believe that covenant homosexuality is included within the biblical prohibitions in the passages studied, and that even if it was not, the addition of 'covenant' would not have altered the ancient debate anyway. The deepest issue for the biblical authors was the breaking of sexual boundaries between male and female and as the physical and sexual make up of males and females has not changed between biblical times and now, this boundary must be viewed as transcultural and should continue to influence our contemporary thought on issues of sexuality. In this regard Pannenberg (1996, 3) challenges the church to examine all sexual activities which do not intend the goal of marriage between male and female, activities including homosexuality but also more seemingly 'acceptable' practices such as adultery or common law relationships.

Holland (2008, 223) speaks out vehemently against homosexuality and warns that the homosexual agenda is to deceive people into believing that homosexuality is under the blessing of God, and His divinely designed sexual orientation for some; he uses Paul's exhortation in 1 Cor. 6:9 "Do not be deceived" to support his beliefs. MacArthur (2008, 156) believes that Christians who accept homosexuality in the name of love are in fact exhibiting anything but true, biblical love, as homosexuality in his eyes is a distortion of God's created order, a violation of his will and utterly sinful.

There seems to be no chance in the near future of finding a common ground between those advocating and those opposing homosexuality as both continue to use scripture to argue their side of the debate, and yet for people on both sides of the argument there seems to be acceptance that Christians must love homosexuals and treat them with grace, respect, care and compassion. Everyone brings experiences and presuppositions to the text and it is only right that we approach our study of the biblical text as though we were personally affected.

It is feasible to have different views and still to journey together, but this is only possible, writes Dawn (2007, 20), if we “allow ourselves a hermeneutic of difference – one that is both passionately committed to finding the answers we seek, yet prepared to admit that we see only in part; and which remains willing to respect the views – and the motives – of others, even when we find their views unpalatable.” She goes on to suggest that the current debate on homosexuality will be resolved eventually and will appear one day in the future as a curiosity of history, much as the debate on slavery appears to Christians today. She also challenges Christians to listen for God’s voice rather than searching for biblical texts to support their opinions, and she warns that if the Church does divide over the debate on homosexuality, it will not be due to scripture, but through the misuse of methods of interpretation to endorse one opinion above another. As Goddard (2004, 15) reminds us, “Until Christ’s return, all our understanding is provisional.”

## Experience

Thorsen (1996, 2) believes that many people today resist the integration of experience into their theology due to the fact that experience is so subjective and easily distorted; however Wesley considered experience to be inextricably bound up with all theological reflection and he frequently mentioned experience as a source of religious authority which he felt should be recognised along with tradition and reason to illuminate the truths of scripture. Thorsen (1996, 2) gives the example of Wesley's longest monograph which includes experience in the title – *The Doctrine of Original Sin, according to Scripture, Reason, and Experience* - to prove Wesley's belief in the importance of experience. Thorsen contends that experience represents a vital dimension of Christian life and therefore needs to be taken into account in our theological reflection.

Christians throughout the world today are facing questions about their stance on homosexuality and both members of churches and members of the homosexual community seem to talk *at* the other rather than *with* them and a 'them and us' mentality has arisen. The result is that Christians know homosexuals only in a narrow focused way, and homosexuals are left to search for God without the church to assist, encourage and validate them (Marin, 2009, 21). Thorsen (1996, 3) warns however that the testimonies of some homosexual Christians are considered self-authenticating, and the acceptance of their behaviour is validated because it is what they are experiencing, i.e. 'what is' gets confused with 'what ought to be.'

Looking at the question of homosexuality, if a Christian discussion is desired, those for whom the issues are not directly personal, must take time to listen to the experiences of homosexual Christians, both those who agree and those who disagree with them (Goddard, 2004, 6). The experiences of homosexual people can give a greater understanding and insight into their lifestyle, and can aid in viewing homosexuals as individuals deserving of identity and dignity. O'Donovan (2009, 88) upholds this opinion and states that no one can speak for homosexual Christians about doctrine except homosexual Christians, and until an intellectual homosexual voice is as widely heard in the Christian community as it has long been outside it, there is no point in guessing what homosexuals think or believe.

Homosexual people are a minority in a heterosexual world and have been subject to prejudice and abuse in different cultures and periods of history. The devastating reality is that much of this prejudice and abuse came from and continues to come from people of faith traditions (Changing Attitude, 2003). To be homosexual is to feel alienated within a dominant hetero-patriarchal system which dictates the thoughts and practises of the prevailing socio-political and economical order. Maybe the most shocking example of this is the prejudice and hostility against lesbian and gay people which occurred in Hitler's Germany where orders were given that all homosexuals had to wear pink triangles in public and Himmler gave orders that all homosexuals were to be sent to death camps. The Austrian Lutheran Church places the number of homosexuals who died at no less than 220,000, the second largest group after the Jews (McNeill, 1993, 83). In society today there are many homosexual people who adopt the heterosexual camouflage in order to prove their value and capability as human beings and many homosexuals respond by hiding themselves and being secretive about their lives and relationships (Ribas, 2006, 222).

In his BBC blog, William Crawley (2009) looked at the theological debate about same-sex relationships which has divided many Christian denominations in recent times. He talked of anti-gay attacks and homophobic incidents prevalent in UK society today and claimed that for homosexual people of faith, the theological debate goes much deeper than a hermeneutical argument as it can sometimes mean losing family and friends, facing isolation, abuse, and, in some cases, physical danger. As part of Sunday Sequence, October 2009, Crawley interviewed Lloyd Newson from DV8 Physical Theatre about their production 'To Be Straight With You.' This production is described by Newson as an exploration of tolerance and intolerance, culture, religion and homosexuality and it came to fruition because Newson wanted to make people aware that in our 21<sup>st</sup> century, democratic society, people are frightened to be open about their homosexuality because of possible reprisals within their own religious communities. Despite the progress made in the law to protect homosexuals in our country, the reality is that they continue to face intimidation and abuse under the semblance of a liberal and tolerant society. As Johnson (2006, 313) states, when messages are so strong and constant from those dominant in society who claim to represent the sacred, holy and true, religion can at times be misused and the Spirit compromised, violated and oppressed. He pleads instead for a debate

centred on love, truth and accommodation where differences strengthen and unite, rather than define and destroy.

To understand the experiences of homosexuals, let us take a look at some testimonies of homosexual Christians.

“In the West, where society is increasingly open and accepting of lesbian and gay people, we have begun to create relationships in exactly the same way as adult heterosexuals. We flirt and date, fall in love, commit ourselves to partners in faithful, loving, monogamous relationships. We also fail in exactly the same way as heterosexuals. Partners are sometimes unfaithful, and relationships can break down. Partnered lesbian and gay people who are practising Christians have heartfelt, strongly held, theologically grounded beliefs about our calling to live in a loving, faithful relationship. Such a relationship of commitment between two men or two women, no less than a heterosexual Christian marriage, is a reflection of Christ’s covenanted love for his Church. It is no less a vehicle of grace, and is no less worthy of the Church’s support and blessing.” (Changing Attitude, 2003).

John’s story – a Christian who grew up in a Christian family and realised at the age of fifteen that he was gay. He socially shut himself off from everyone he knew, his secret trapped him and he didn’t see any way out. “Daily he wondered why God would let him have these problems. He decided at age fifteen, when the attractions first began, that he would earnestly pray one prayer every night: ‘Lord, when I wake up in the morning please just let me be straight like everyone else.’ John prayed that prayer every night until he was thirty years old and then determined that one of two conclusions must be true. The first possibility is that there is no God. The second possibility is that God is not answering their one prayer because they are already condemned to hell for their same-sex feelings and therefore they might as well fully immerse themselves in the gay life because it doesn’t matter one way or the other.” (Marin, 2009, 26).

A man sent this suicide note to Marin (2009, 58) even though he had never met him. “Had someone had the courage to tell me that promiscuity of any type is wrong, that it is OK to not marry or being gay is not the end of the world then I might have been spared a great deal of trauma and pain in my life. For me, it isn’t about making it,

but is about survival and *truly knowing peace*...it is painful to think that people find it easy to shun us – some of us actually do have good hearts that can be worth salvaging... The stigma attached to being gay is as prevalent today as ever. I can't find a church that is really eager to allow me to be honest with what I face on a daily basis. It has always been as though I was supposed to already be "fixed" just because I showed up at services. Anyway I have reached a point of hopelessness because there really is no one with a true heart to help."

Tim's story – a gay man who was working at a church and when he was "outed" the church ostracised him and threw him out. He returned to his home town and experienced acceptance and love from his local pastor and church and was offered a job at the church. "Silence kills – secrets aren't kept forever. There are some things you can say and there are other things you can't, especially inside the church. You can mention pornography, masturbation, drug addiction and everything in between and find some sort of hope of forgiveness and acceptance from the church (not acceptance as if it's OK, but acceptance that there is hope). But there's one word that turns people red in the face and shuts their mouths. I'm talking about being gay." (Marin, 2009, 70).

Sarah's story – in her 40s, living in Greater London. "I no longer apologise for who I am. I am who I am because God made me so. I am not an abomination, as the Church says, you know. I have read loads and debated all those issues about being gay and Christian. The problem is, they are only interested in saying that homosexuality is wrong with their eyes closed. I wish they would look at me and realise that I am not interested in their preoccupation, because I am too busy living my life as a happy and fulfilled lesbian and Christian. (Yip, 2007, 84).

Bob's story – brought up in a Christian home and actively involved in PCI (Presbyterian Church in Ireland). During his teens he realised he was gay and confided in a Christian friend. "Knowing and respecting the churches' teaching I practiced celibacy but felt alone, fearful and overwhelmed. The pressure of keeping it to myself, feelings of shame, the guilt of feeling that I was living a lie and the fear of how the news would affect my parents and my church life eventually took its toll on my mental health. I had to take various medicines for depression and on one occasion came very close to committing suicide. People in the church would crack

jokes about 'Gays' and I just wanted to crawl into a hole. How could I open up to them when my struggles were joked about? I respect my minister and his teaching, but when homosexuality was mentioned in church the Biblical position of calling practising homosexuality sin was outlined without ever a word of compassion or understanding for people like me who were struggling so hard and hadn't chosen to feel the way I did. One of my greatest struggles was that I had always been brought up to respect and to tell the truth. Yet here I was living and telling lies to protect my family and myself." (Presbyterian Church, Northern Ireland Board of Social Witness, 2007, 2).

Rick's story - Three years ago, Rick was consumed with homosexual feelings. His every thought was based on same-sex attraction. Whatever he did to struggle against homosexual desires only seemed to make them come back stronger. At last he discovered reparative therapy and other resources that showed him a way out. He began uncovering and healing the underlying wounds and emotional pain, and as he did, his sexual desire for men began to dissipate, then disappear (People can Change, 2005).

Scott's story - Scott's life reached a turning point when, at the age of 22, he heard ex-gay Jeff Konrad (author of "You Don't Have to be Gay") speak at a conference. Finally, Scott understood his homosexual feelings and saw a path to freedom. He entered reparative therapy, focusing not on his sexuality but on meeting his suppressed emotional needs, especially for male affirmation and brotherly love. He found his erotic feelings lessen and then start to disappear as he healed inner pain and took care of his deep inner needs for meaningful connection. Today, Scott is a married father of three and a professional counsellor who specializes in reparative therapy (People can Change, 2005).

Bob's story highlights the reality of homosexuality for both the individual and their family and friends. Although families and friends are not discussed within this paper, it is worth noting that for them, the knowledge that their loved one is gay can be devastating and can lead to feelings of grief, isolation, embarrassment, and the

fear of a loss of place and respect within the church as well as the shattering of hopes and dreams.

In Bob's testimony, he discusses how he decided to practice celibacy in order to respect the churches' teaching. For many Christians celibacy is the compromise which homosexuals are expected to make in their lifestyle, they are asked to deny their need for intimacy and live lives devoid of sexual contact. Ribas (2006, 221) believes that the imposition of celibacy as a way of demanding sexual abstinence of same-sex couples, leads to the reduction of homosexuality into same-sex intercourse only, and does not recognise the whole complexity of humanity that determines one's sexuality. This enforcement of celibacy is very different to a call to celibacy which should be something freely chosen, rather than imposed from outside. Forrester (2006, 295) warns that it is a destructive state of life unless it is chosen and embraced and for those who have celibacy imposed upon them, it is an impossible burden leading to loneliness. Those who decide to lead a life of celibacy never receive any personal sexual fulfilment for themselves or those they love, and they spend their energy suppressing sexual responses (Martin, 2007, 93).

Bouman (2008, 622) believes this way of life is traumatically difficult if not impossible and claims that the better option is to enter into a committed union that is intended to be lifelong. Forrester (2006, 296) supports this belief and confirms that homosexual acts can be regarded as legitimate and good when they are described as expressions of love, care and self-giving, and when homosexual relationships are permanent, honest and exclusive. Hallett (2009a, 19) takes a different view and supports celibacy in individuals with same-sex attractions. He believes it is wrong to be involved sexually in homosexual relationships and personally found celibacy came easily to him when he became a Christian. It seems the views of Christians on celibacy in homosexual individuals are divided. Rogers (2009, 89) asks the question - Can we as a church speak out against promiscuity among homosexuals whilst at the same time deny those who want to form stable family units, the right to marry?

For many people, the homosexual lifestyle conjures up images of promiscuity, gay rights, gay pride parades, paedophilia and HIV/AIDS. This stereotype must not be applied to all homosexual people, and certainly not to the devout, Christian homosexual people who want to be faithful members of churches and receive the full

rights of membership (Rogers, 2009, 88). The Presbyterian Church, Northern Ireland Board of Social Witness (2007, 5) warns that when we condemn homosexual practice in isolation or single it out as somehow worse than other sexual practices outside of heterosexual marriage then we demonstrate homophobic attitudes. Many churches today have experienced sexual misconduct by pastors or congregation members, the most common being extra-marital affairs, and the churches are willing to treat these people with dignity and respect, affording them the possibility of restoration. How then can churches make the blanket decision that no homosexual individuals can be ordained as ministers of Word and Sacrament? (Rogers, 2009, 89). It seems there is a discrepancy in the values held.

With regard to homosexuality, the church has a role in advocating truth and dispelling myths such as the fact that children are no more at risk and possibly less so from a homo- than from a hetero- sexual individual; and people with same sex attractions are no more likely to be sexual predators than people with heterosexual desires. There is also a common misconception that HIV/AIDS is a homosexual illness whereas statistics show that the heterosexual population has a higher number of people with this illness than the homosexual population. Marin (2009, 54) points out that the gay pride parades which are viewed by heterosexuals as blatant in-your-face acts were originally intended to peacefully remember those in the Stonewall Riots of 1969 in New York who stood up and fought for the first time against social and cultural oppression of homosexuals. What we see in the gay pride parades on our streets today is a minority group of the homosexual community and cannot be viewed as representative of homosexual people. It is vital that Christians realise that in society today there are all kinds of abuses, both hetero- and homo- sexual, of the gift of sexual intimacy which God gave to people as part of their human identity.

Although many view homosexual people as a group condemned in scripture, it is the responsibility of the church to love its neighbour and this is not possible if its neighbour feels unwanted, unloved and condemned. Often homosexuality is discussed as if real people were not involved, and churches should consider the pastoral question – what does accepting homosexual orientation mean? According to Morgan (2008, 608), for some, pastoral care extends to orientation and not practice, therefore forcing a life of celibacy upon homosexual people. This can lead to guilt in homosexuals who continue in relationships which they hide, or it leads to

fear which prevents them entering stable and faithful relationships and makes them more likely to partake in secret, transient sexual acts which risk their physical and mental health. Yarhouse (2005, 208) describes this as subjective distress related to an individual's desire to live by traditional Christian sexual ethics and the theological view that God calls all to chastity and some to fidelity in marriage between one man and one woman.

How does the church reconcile its attitudes to homosexuals with the acceptance of homosexual people and civil partnerships in the wider society? Some denominations appear to have double standards - one rule for laity and another for clergy. Morgan (2008, 612) describes some Anglican churches which permit laity to have monogamous, faithful same-sex relationships, whilst denying the same rights to clergy on the grounds that they are public figures with a representative role and are expected to uphold the traditions of the church. In a traditional interpretation of scripture, homosexual practices are seen as sinful, and due to this many Christians have ostracised an entire group of people. What does that mean to a homosexual person who is trying to discover or rediscover church and God? Marin (2009, 30) states that at a baseline level, all the homosexual community wants is to have the same intimate relationship with God as heterosexuals claim to have, and to begin a journey of reconciliation of who they are sexually, spiritually and socially. Surely these desires are the same for heterosexuals.

Some homosexual Christians feel shunned by the faith community and decide to give up on church and faith entirely as can be seen in some of the stories above. Others choose to live in Christian homosexual communities which offer support and commitment and are viewed as safe places where homosexuals can live honest lives which glorify Christ (Campolo, 2003, 187). Still others find this support and compassion within their local church and integrate into life in the faith community among people of homo- and hetero- sexual orientation. Finally there are those homosexuals who experience a change in their orientation and begin to lead healthy, fulfilling, heterosexual lives.

Listening to the experiences of homosexual people heightens awareness of the issues involved in the debate whilst acting as a reminder that theology has an effect on individual's lives; this is not a purely paper exercise. Although this chapter has

focused on the testimonies of homosexual people, it is important to remember that those opposed to homosexuality within the church have a voice which also needs to be heard. As Thorsen (1996, 2) states, personal experiences can be ambiguous and open to interpretation and although the revelatory experiences of individuals must be listened to, this information should be looked at under the scrutiny of scripture, as well as that of reason and tradition. The church should also consider taking into consideration the world around it and engaging with what is happening in contemporary culture (Dormor, 2007, 156). Ward (2008, 108) believes that society is already transforming its thinking regarding gender and sexuality and he challenges individuals to rethink their sexual morality in the light of love for neighbour, compassion and the realisation of the talents God has given them. Even if Christians don't agree with the homosexual community or what they stand for, believers in Christ are encouraged to empathise with those who are going through things they can never understand. The reality of their experiences should be listened to and validated even if their stories aren't affirmed (Marin, 2009, 35).

Morgan (2008, 613) believes that peoples' experiences can ultimately change their attitudes and he gives the example of those who may have taken the hard-line on divorce and remarriage in the past, but who began to change their minds after experiencing divorce in their families. His suggestion is that the same may prove true with regards the homosexuality debate. Although it may appear that the importance of experience is placed above the authority of scripture, it seems that the aim is to integrate theology with practice, rather than ignoring either aspect.

Those who encounter homosexuals on a personal level suddenly find the debate on homosexuality within the church far more relevant and important to their everyday lives. Listening to the experiences of homosexual Christians it is also important to see each person as an individual and not paint all homosexuals with the same broad brush stroke. This in turn leads to differences in attitude depending on the lifestyle of the homosexual individual, just as it would if the lifestyle of a heterosexual individual was being considered. There may be one attitude to homosexuals who have different sexual partners each night and show no interest in faith or church. However, surely there must be another attitude to homosexual Christians who are

living in faithful, stable, exclusive, loving relationships and whose lives show signs of blessing and the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Atkinson, 2006, 303).

Marin (2009, 37) states that the Christian community has only ever handled same-sex behaviour by taking a stand and keeping a distance and he challenges Christians with the statement “Productive dialogue comes from cognitive insight and can only be accomplished through an incarnational posture of humility and living as a learner.” Morgan (2008, 613) asks the question – does theology alone inform pastoral reaction, or does pastoral insight and the need for understanding have the capacity to change our theology and give us fresh, new perspectives?

## **Reason**

“Wesley saw reason as representing our power of thinking, comprehending, and inferring” (Thorsen, 1996, 2). Reason leads individuals to consider new evidence with open minds, such as the causes of homosexuality, thus a reasoned approach to this subject would keep in check all extreme reactions such as homophobia or homomania, i.e. those totally opposed to all things homosexual or those supporting all things homosexual. A reasonable spirit also respects the beliefs of others even when there is disagreement. Thus far we have studied the topic of homosexuality with regards to scripture and experience. Martin (2007, 95) states that when things are not obvious from scripture, reason should be used to discern which parts of scripture must always be followed and which parts the Church has the power to change, when experience seems to prove that times have changed.

To study homosexuality within the context of reason, we will look at broad themes to help to organise our thinking – natural law, orientation, biology/psychology and environment.

## **Natural Law**

Borgman (2008, 78) states that in matters regarding human morality, the ‘natural law’ is the law of practical reason and the law of human virtue and homosexuality is seen as natural by some and unnatural by others. Quinn (2008, 10) claims that those opposing homosexuality see it as a disturbance of a hierarchical order viewed as natural and those opposed identify homosexuals with sexual excesses and uncontrollable lust.

In the traditional interpretation of natural law, inherited from Aristotle, the Stoics, and Thomas Aquinas, humans are said to have natural inclinations or tendencies (Ward, 2008, 80). In Stoic philosophy, God was understood as reason and the law of nature was identified with the biological laws governing the physical universe. To conform to the physical laws of nature was simultaneously to achieve union with the divine (McNeill, 1993, 90). Practically Stoic ethics was a fight against the passions or affections which were considered unnatural and in the case of sexuality, the purpose of sexual practice was seen as the procreation of offspring. Therefore any sexual activity that did not make procreation possible was viewed as unnatural and

objectively disordered, for it frustrated the purposes of nature. As a result of this philosophy, homosexual physical acts are seen by many as - use of the sexual organs which contradicts their natural purposes - and so they are objectively disordered and unnatural (Ward, 2008, 81).

Talking to the person on the street about homosexuality, the comment often heard is 'God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.' Their objections will be based on a common-sense form of the natural law argument which sees two sexes whose genital equipment exists primarily for procreation as well as the fact that two same sex bodies simply do not fit together in the same way as a male and a female (John, 1993, 20). Webb (2001, 216) discusses this latter argument under the heading 'sexual design' and he describes the creative architecture of male and female sexuality with its part-and-counterpart configuration supporting male-female sexual relations. Although same-sex couples can function sexually, Webb argues that this is not in a way which uses the natural, complementary design of body parts and it will not result in the survival of the human race. To advocates of homosexuality this seems hypocritical, when in other matters we do not regulate our behaviour simply from observation of what nature does or does not do, e.g. we have no qualms in managing nature when it comes to adapting, altering or reversing natural bodily processes in order to prolong or enhance life.

Supporters of same-sex relationships ask the following questions in response to natural law. How does this argument regarding natural law and procreation respond to infertile heterosexual couples, those who through physical reasons, disability, or age cannot fulfil the procreation expectations in their sexual encounters? Is their full humanity denied on grounds of body capacity, as well as by an age limit? (Ribas, 2006, 223). Surely the absence of the possibility of procreation does not mean that marriages are null and void. What about the other purposes of marriage, such as love, pleasure, comfort and compassion, are they no longer valid; and if they are valid, are they not possible within any permanent, stable, faithful relationship, whether that is heterosexual or homosexual? Ward (2008, 82) states that when most biologists consider sexual reproduction, they do not think that intercourse came into existence in order that there should be procreation, rather it is the way it naturally takes place in humans, and we are not frustrating any divine designs if we decide to bring the process under rational and responsible control. Advocates of homosexual

practices also use the overpopulation problem to validate the nonprocreative benefit of same-sex relationships; however opponents of homosexuality do not believe that our population predicament is a viable argument.

### **Orientation**

Doe (2000, 70) believes that due to new scientific evidence on homosexuality, the application of what we call 'reason' has focused on the distinction between orientation and expression and a common phrase heard within discussions is 'loving the sinner, hating the sin.' However, this leads to the vital question in the debate, is orientation part of creation or a result of the fall? Do homosexuals have a choice in their orientation or is it predetermined? Cooke & Sheard (2007, 8) state that modern psychiatrists, behavioural psychologists and neuroscientists believe that sexual orientation is substantially fixed by the time of birth.

According to Goddard (2004, 20) "Most, though not all, 'revisionists' are essentialists who believe sexual orientation identifies a basic natural sub-section of humanity that the church must now recognise and so revise its teaching on sexual ethics. If grace perfects nature then we need to ask what it means to perfect a homosexual nature. In contrast many 'traditionalists' are social constructionists. Their strong theological grounds are that the only created distinction within humanity of relevance to sexual ethics is that between male and female."

Freud considered homosexual libido to be present in all persons and he classed it not as a neurosis but rather as an unfortunate fixation at an early stage of sexual organisation (Hunter, 1990, 530). He believed that every person is born with bisexual potential, but for unknown reasons becomes either homo- or hetero- sexual. He described three types of homosexuals – the 'biological' who were exclusively homosexual; those who were bisexual, the 'amphigenic;' and the 'contingent', whose condition owed more to environmental factors, and who therefore might be able to change (Doe, 2000, 67).

Today, unlike 30 yrs ago, homosexuality is no longer seen as a mental illness and no attempt is made to cure someone or force them to change their orientation by drugs or electro-convulsive treatment. Counselling may still be used; although according to Bouman, to change is traumatically difficult, if not impossible for most persons

who experience their homosexual orientation as not self-chosen (2008, 622). Carr states that few changes in orientation are reported unless a person is in the middle of the sexual spectrum (2002, 156) but Hallett (2009b, 5) disagrees with this statement and states that many people do experience changes in their sexual orientation, sometimes due to modification of their self image. He describes a change to heterosexual feelings which some homosexual individuals experience. However Hallett makes the point that although many Christians believe that seeking a change of orientation is the desire of God's heart, he is not convinced by this view and does not see conversion to heterosexuality as more acceptable to God.

New Direction Ministries of Canada (2010) believe that the word 'change' can elicit tremendous defensiveness and state that people have been wounded deeply by well-meaning people who've said, "If you pray hard enough - you will change." This is not to say that change is impossible and over the years, ex-gay ministry has celebrated dramatic testimonies of change where men and women who were same-gender-attracted moved to experience God's grace in the gift of heterosexual marriage. New Direction Ministries of Canada ask the question – "Have we celebrated with as much joy and confidence people whose attractions have not changed but who live sexually chaste lives as fully devoted followers of Jesus?" At New Direction they claim that they are focused on encouraging people in their walk with Christ and their growth in trusting and obeying God and they see any change that may occur as a by-product of the discipleship process.

Many professionals now believe that the mental and emotional disturbances often seen in homosexuals are primarily the result of cultural intolerance rather than individual maladjustment and are similar to behaviours seen in any individuals who perceive themselves as part of a persecuted minority (Campbell, 1990, 114). Homosexual practices continue to be viewed by many as psychologically destructive due to the transitory nature of most homosexual liaisons. However, there is a belief that the primary reason for this may be the guilt and self-hatred which so many homosexuals tend to interject as a result of the judgement passed on them by society. This criticism cannot be used to support condemnation of all homosexuals, rather it supports the denunciation of promiscuity, whether homo- or hetero- sexual, and says nothing to those homosexuals in committed, faithful, monogamous relationships (McNeill, 1993, 112).

## **Biological/Psychological**

Biological and psychological studies have established that people do not ‘choose’ to be homosexual (Triana, 2006, 210), rather their orientation is due to either nature, some kind of biological antecedent; or nurture, the effect of environmental factors. We look first at the biological factors, which advocates of homosexuality believe indicate that homosexuality is part of God’s created order (Rogers, 2009, 81). Those who favour the biological explanation tend to rely on evidence from the fields of genetics, hormonal imbalances and brain structure and we now take a brief look at these biological factors as recorded by Hare (2007, 109-110):

- “Twin and adoption studies. Monozygotic twins (those developing from a single fertilised ovum) are more likely to have identical sexual orientation than are dizygotic twins (those developing from two separate ova).
- Chromosome studies. Some studies suggest that a predisposition to male homosexuality may be linked to a gene located on part of the X chromosome (Xq28).
- Prenatal hormonal exposure. Homosexuality has been linked with male hormone exposure in female foetuses, and in excessive female hormone exposure in male foetuses.
- Neuroanatomical differences. It has been claimed there are anatomical differences in two separate parts of the brain (the hypothalamus and the suprachiasmatic nucleus) in homosexual and in heterosexual men, the findings in male homosexuals being closer to the female pattern.”

All of the above studies have not proven the existence of a gay gene however the research itself has significantly influenced public perceptions and Grisanti (2008, 185) states that the more evidence to support a biological cause for homosexuality, the more likely people are to support issues relating to the gay community such as gay rights legislation, blessing of same-sex marriages and ordination of gay clergy. Due to the fact that Christians' views are likely to be shaped to a greater or lesser degree by the beliefs of the society in which they live, this has a knock on effect on the perception of homosexuality within the church (Cooke & Sheard, 2007, 7).

Doe (2000, 68) agrees that there is no conclusive evidence of a biological reason for homosexuality and he warns that the possibility of finding the ‘gay gene’ raises both

hopes and fears; it may establish that homosexual people are 'normal' after all, or it could lead to prenatal testing and abortions to eliminate gay people or could lead to attempts to correct genetic patterns. Despite the uncertainty of the evidence, however, many professionals are confident that a medical explanation for same-sex attraction will eventually be found through the growing body of research derived from cultural anthropology, sociology and psychology (McNeill, 1993, 107).

Grisanti (2008, 181) notes that various scholars have firmly rejected the notion that biological or psychological factors serve as the primary or fundamental basis for sexual orientation. The studies carried out on twins have been accused of using preferential recruiting, as advertising was carried out through homosexual media and therefore the sample studied cannot be described as representative. Queries have also arisen regarding the research into neuroanatomical differences, and the question has been asked – are changes in the hypothalamus at times the result of sexual orientation and behaviour, rather than the cause of it? Grisanti (2008, 180) further points out that other studies on life characteristics have been carried out showing similar heritability rates as those studying homosexual orientation, and he gives the examples - extroversion, depression, criminality, alcoholism, religiosity, divorce and fundamentalism. These life characteristics are not seen by society or indeed science as deriving from genetic factors primarily and are rather regarded as having a strong connection to external factors. Grisanti therefore asks that we consider the possibility that homosexual orientation is a choice made by individuals due to their circumstances, rather than biological or psychological factors over which they have no control.

### **Environment**

The other category of suggested causes for homosexuality, nurture, focuses on environmental factors which may operate before birth in the uterine environment, or after birth, in the community. Grisanti (2008, 185) describes theories under this heading which focus on

- prenatal development

the influence of early erotic and other learning experiences, like

- abuse in childhood
- life at school

and also the influence of some disturbance in the

- parent-child relationship
- psychodynamic theory, i.e., the activity and interplay of the unconscious and conscious mental and emotional forces that determine personality and motivation

Let us look at each of these in turn.

- Cooke & Sheard (2007, 11) have studied the influence of intra-uterine factors on the development of the brain towards homosexuality before birth and have used the phrase, 'The Big Brother Effect,' to describe this phenomenon. They have found that male children who have two or more older brothers are more likely to become homosexual although the increased probability is small, and it is not the case with high birth order females.
- Early learning experiences have been shown to help children define their sexual identity and Webb (2001, 232) gives several examples of how these experiences can play a role in shaping sexual behaviour. He talks of children abused by same-sex adults developing a lasting disposition toward homoerotic behaviour; how two females having experienced abuse by their fathers may seek out lesbian relationships as an alternative to same-sex partnerships; and how estrangement between the same-sex parent and child may produce a longing for same-sex closeness which may lead to these individuals seeking fulfilment through homosexual relationships in the future. Although it is common to blame parents for making their children homosexuals by faulty or inadequate upbringing, research has shown this to be false and indeed Wilson & Rahman (2005, 147) state that social factors play no appreciable role in the development of sexual orientation.
- Cooke and Sheard (2007, 10) record the results of a survey which has shown that people who attend same sex boarding schools are, by experimenting with their peers, three times more likely to have homosexual experiences, than people at mixed schools. However, five years or more after leaving the boarding school, the proportion still having homosexual activities was found to be significantly reduced, therefore the conclusion has been made that attendance of a same sex boarding school has no effect on the long term likelihood of becoming homosexual.

If parent-child relationships are disturbed at the time of individuation, Louw (2008, 118) believes that separation and anxiety can play a role. The compulsive or obligatory homosexual tries to protect his/her ego identity and gender identity by a sexual fusion with another person of the same sex. Louw does not see the main motive as sexual gratification, but to assuage the anxiety arising from a deep-seated threat of isolation, helplessness, and even disintegration. According to The Evangelical Alliance's Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals (ACUTE 1998, 22), the parent-child relationship idea has been discarded due to lack of evidence.

- Doe (2000, 74) suggests that sexuality is socially constructed, a learned behaviour, produced and interpreted in different ways by different societies at different times and he describes the phrase 'queer theology' which relates closely to this belief that there is no 'essential' sexuality or gender. Threats of capital punishment in force in some countries no doubt have an effect on homosexual practices, however as Wilson & Rahman (2005, 148) state, these extreme measures do not actually alter sexual orientation, rather they merely suppress its manifestation. Therefore, consideration must be given to the culture or society in which we live and what it means to be a man or woman, a hetero- or homo- sexual, within this context, McNeill (1993, 105) describes this as a 'free human cultural creation.' As with the biological and psychological factors, although much research into an environmental cause for homosexuality has been carried out, the results are by no means conclusive and this area continues to be studied.

As we have seen, medical and psychological opinion remain divided about the causes of homosexuality, is it nature or nurture? (Carr, 2002, 156). Advocates for the acceptance of gay relationships have tended to insist on a genetic origin, on the grounds that it would seem to confirm that homosexuality is a 'given' of creation, and therefore 'natural' and willed by God. However, thinking along the same lines of a false natural law argument, opponents have tended to see it as a psychological disorder, due to parental or other 'mistakes,' and therefore caused by human failure and not the will of God (John, 1993, 22). ACUTE (1998, 22) agree with the latter and state that the actual expression of one's sexual orientation is a question of personal choice and although it may be influenced or conditioned by external

experiences, it remains the choice of the homosexual individual and they must take responsibility for their actions. ACUTE notes interestingly that this point is accepted by certain gay and lesbian activists who believe that homosexual people who do not claim personal responsibility for the construction of sexual desires are cowardly.

Even if, in the future, factors were proven to cause homosexual orientation, this does not necessarily mean that homosexuals would be treated any better. To support this belief, Wilson & Rahman (2005, 149) use the example of ethnic minorities who can claim an obvious biological basis for their difference, and yet continue to encounter racial discrimination. Therefore, whether homosexuality is proven in the future to be due to nature or nurture or neither, there are no guarantees that it will receive social acceptance or rejection on these grounds.

The questions therefore remain - even if the origin of homosexuality could be shown to be genetic or psychological, would that tell us whether homosexuality is “good” or “bad”, willed by God or not? Where does that leave us as Christians trying to use a reasoned approach to discern the truth about homosexuality? If a person’s orientation is God-given, the issue becomes how the gift can be used in a moral way; however if orientation is due to external factors related to the sinfulness of the world, the issue becomes how these factors can be overcome to enable the individual to live a life in line with God’s will. One way in which Christians have sought to respond to scientific and environmental evidence is with the concept of ‘less than ideal.’ Heterosexuality is therefore still seen as the God-given norm, but allowances are made for homosexuality because we live in a sinful world and we must do the best we can, and those individuals involved in homosexual practices believe that they are living as God intended them to (Doe, 2000, 73).

ACUTE (1998, 24) states that “the main point for the Church is not to decide whether someone’s orientation towards the same gender is ‘inborn’ or ‘learned’, nor is it to assess whether that orientation is stable or fluid. Rather, it is to deal with how people of whatever orientation in fact behave and frame its discipline on the basis of right behaviour, as much as on the basis of right attitudes and beliefs.”

## **Tradition**

“The Church’s history is not theologically ‘neutral’. It is the book of the acts of the faithful, and it is in the light of that text that we discern, in the long run, the strands of continuity that hold Christians today together with those who have gone before them.” (Morris, 2007, 59). According to O’Donovan (2009, 35) the principles of behaviour pleasing to God are perfectly well known to all people through scripture, creeds and statements of faith left by the Early Church, but the circumstances of each age required fresh applications of them not to be hampered by decisions of past ages.

Tradition is not something static and fixed, but the experience of the Church in each age and every culture (Doe, 2000, 46). Christians searching for answers are called to listen to the wisdom of the saints who have gone before them, as well as the understandings of Christians in other denominations and countries today. Wesley saw tradition as useful in representing the ways in which Christians have understood and applied scriptural teachings throughout the history of the church and tradition is viewed as significant within the quadrilateral due to the fact that it is dynamic and open to change (Thorsen, 1996, 2). The view of the Church throughout history regarding homosexuality is therefore relevant to discussions today.

The predominant view throughout church history seems to have been condemnation of homosexuality as can be seen from the opinions of the Early Church Fathers in the following paragraphs. Thorsen (1996, 2) states that the weight of history contributes significantly to the belief that homosexuality is prohibited by God and that this opinion based on church tradition affects the thinking of many Christians today. However, although it appears that the consensus of the church has been against homosexual people and their behaviour, this fact needs to be held alongside the fact that until recently it was the norm in the Western church to deny full rights to people of colour and to women, therefore past practice is not necessarily a suggestion for future faithfulness (Rogers, 2009, 60). The issue of homosexuality affects many areas of church tradition including what the church should teach regarding the subject, whether or not homosexuals can be included among the community of faith, can be ordained, can receive communion and can be married (Morris, 2007, 56).

This chapter will give an overview of church history in chronological order from biblical times to modern day with the aim of assessing and incorporating the voice of tradition in this discussion.

McNeill (1993, 72) states that the first writings to identify the sin of Sodom with homosexual practices in general, and therefore the writings which probably had the most decisive influence on early Western Christian tradition, were those of Philo, dating from the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and those of Josephus, from around the year 96.

In the ancient world, the male citizen was expected to be active rather than passive in intercourse and in Athens the most despised of men was the *kinaidos*, an effeminate adult male who allowed his body to be penetrated for pleasure by another man. In the Roman world too, people could be categorised by their sexual preferences. Again a male citizen was categorised by his taking the active part whatever the gender of the passive partner (Browne, 2007, 117).

According to Doe (2000, 53) the Greeks had a dualistic understanding of human nature, distinguishing between the body and the soul, whereas in the Jewish tradition the human being was seen as a whole person, body and soul together. Although at first the Christians rejected this dualism, with time they began to accept the Greek idea of the soul being the place where holiness and godliness were to be found. This led to a belief that the human body and emotions were contrary to a life of the spirit and this was taken to the extreme by Origen who castrated himself in order to become more holy.

Turning to the Early Fathers of the Christian Church, there is no doubt that they accepted without question that the sin of the Sodomites was their homosexual practices and that these were punished by God. Clement of Alexandria writes that the Sodomites had burnt with insane love for boys (Logos Virtual Library) and is quoted as saying ‘to be entirely free from passion is to be most like God who is impassable’ and ‘to have sex for any other purpose than to have children is to violate nature.’ (Doe, 2000, 54).

John Chrysostom (Christian Classics Ethereal Library), in a homily to the people of Antioch, condemned the Sodomites for indulging in sexual acts devoid of the

possibility of procreation and wrote “For truly, the very nature of the punishment was a pattern of the nature of the sin! Even as they devised a barren intercourse, not having for its end the procreation of children, so did God bring on them such a punishment, as made the womb of the land ever barren and destitute of all fruits”. McNeill (1993, 75) describes the Stoic concept of sexual nature whose emphasis was also on procreation, leading to the belief that homosexuality was ‘contrary to nature.’

Augustine is another of the Early Fathers whose strong opinions on sexuality were influential. He viewed sexual desire as a rebellion against the divine love and part of the ‘inward lust for domination’ which had caused the fall and he went so far as to identify all sexual attraction and pleasure with sin. For Augustine the only reason for sexual acts was the need for procreation (Doe, 2000, 55).

The first enactment of a Church council concerning homosexual practices occurred at the Council of Elvira in 305-6 and it was related to forbidding admission of *stupratores puerorum* (corruptors of boys) to communion even at death. The decree of the Council of Ancyra in Asia Minor in 314 was also extremely influential on the Church in the West, since it was frequently cited as authoritative in subsequent conciliar enactments against homosexual practices and Basil of Nyssa in 375 and Gregory of Nyssa in 390 both called for 15 years of penitence and exclusion from the sacraments (McNeill, 1993, 80).

Soon after the Church became ‘established’ by the Emperor Constantine, laws were passed against homosexual acts, and by the 6<sup>th</sup> century the punishment was burning at the stake (Doe, 2000, 58). Justinian published the first of his *Novellae* against homosexual acts in 538, as he believed, probably influenced by the story of Sodom, that homosexual practices would endanger the state by provoking God’s vengeance in the form of earthquakes, famine, and pestilence (McNeill, 1993, 78).

According to McNeill (1993, 81), the most extensive set of enactments against homosexual practices during medieval times were the canons issued by the Council of Nablouse in 1120 when a sermon was preached in which all the ills that had befallen the kingdom of Jerusalem were attributed to evil living. Consequently, the council endorsed twenty-five canons against the sins of the flesh, four of which dealt with homosexual practices, and burning was prescribed for the impenitent. McNeill

however notes that the Church itself never imposed capital punishment for this sin; rather, its emphasis was on repentance and rehabilitation.

Thomas Aquinas is described by McNeill (1993, 95) as the only great scholastic theologian to discuss the subject of homosexual practices in any detail. Aquinas declared any sexual act which did not result in procreation to be ‘unnatural,’ and pertaining to the vice of lust. Therefore he condemned all homosexual practices because they represented an unreasonable selfish seeking of venereal pleasure which is the result of sin. Dante also saw homosexuality as a perversion of love for the same reason.

In medieval and early modern England there are examples of same-sex friendships and Dormor (2007, 78) describes very clear evidence of relationships between men, and less often between women, which are described in quasi-marital terms and involved profound mutual commitment, sacrifice and affection. However, there is rarely any evidence that these relationships involved sexual intercourse.

The Reformation and the social, economic and political changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries broke the Roman Catholic Church’s monopoly of ecclesiastical power in much of Western Europe, however this simply replaced one form of social control with another and regarding the subject of homosexuality, neither the Reformation nor the Counter Reformation caused the official teaching to be changed (House of Bishops’ Group, 2003, 4). When the Puritans arrived in the New World they proclaimed the death penalty for both sodomy and adultery (Doe, 2000, 58).

Moving to the sixteenth century, Dormor (2007, 79) states that ‘sodomy’ was considered the sin above all sins and was a criminal offence in England and Wales from 1562 onwards, punishable by hanging. In practice the majority of those few who were successfully prosecuted were guilty of some sort of sexual assault and more lenient punishments were given to those few convicted of consensual sexual acts. Indeed Dormor suggests that tolerance of consensual deviant sexual behaviour was much higher than its status as a capital offence would suggest, and that when it occurred it wasn’t treated as sodomy.

By the late 17<sup>th</sup> century ‘molly’ houses emerged, which were usually taverns where men met to socialise, gossip, flirt, drink and have sex with each other in private. Dormor (2007, 82) believes that it is to such institutions that modern gay culture owes its early origins.

In the nineteenth century there developed the concept of two different sexual orientations and the term ‘homosexual’ was coined in 1869 (Browne, 2007, 118). Another significant change within this century was the fall in infant and child mortality, resulting in a substantial population increase in much of Europe. Dormor (2007, 83) believes that this situation led to a change in the justification for sex from purely procreation to pleasure. As a result family limitation gradually gained acceptance, initially through *coitus interruptus* and abstinence, but during the early decades of the twentieth century artificial contraceptives were increasingly used. Dormor notes that although medical and ecclesiastical authorities vehemently opposed such methods at first, as awareness dawned of the change brought about by the fall in death rates, there was a clear need for ethical reassessment, which constituted a radical development within the Christian tradition. While such a shift stands in stark contrast with the weight of Christian tradition, Dormor believes it receives strong scriptural support from a number of key texts including the early chapters of Genesis, the Song of Songs and Hosea, where the theological emphasis in marriage is placed on the relationship between the man and the woman rather than upon the fruits of their activities. McNeill (1993, 100) believes that this shift in the emphasis of sexual practices has led to the need to reconsider the traditional position that all homosexual activities are necessarily wrong on the ground that they cannot lead to procreation.

The next significant event in the timeline of homosexuality in GB comes in 1967 when the Sexual Offences Act legalised sexual acts between males over 21 in private, the age was reduced to 18 in 1994. Christians drawing a distinction between sin and crime supported this, though they were less happy with the reduction to 16 in 1998 (Carr, 2002, 157).

In 1969 the Stonewall riot in New York saw the birth of a new gay cultural movement that quickly affected England: the Gay Rights lobbies, the GaySoc in the universities and the flood of pro-gay literature. The 1990’s saw a substantial

increase in Christian gay groups and the work of Christian ‘ex-gay’ organisations was widely promoted (Atkinson, 2006, 300).

In 2005 the Civil Partnership Act was published providing equality and legal recognition to homosexuals (Kingston, 2008, 135). NI was the last part of the UK to decriminalise homosexuality in Dec 2005, and the first place to hold a civil partnership ceremony. The Council on Social Responsibility for the Methodist Church in Ireland (2005) published a statement at that time: “The northern executive of the council on social responsibility states that while it supports the civil partnership that recognises committed relationships it does not support calls for same-sex blessings in church or gay marriage.”

The question remains, what guidance does the tradition of the church give us today as we grapple with the topic of homosexuality? Rogers (2009, 60) believes that we must continue to distinguish between the culturally conditioned practices of the church and the essential teachings of the church found in its creedal statements, which are the rule of faith and he notes that neither the Reformed confessions nor the Nicene and Apostles’ creeds, say anything about homosexuality.

From an Anglican perspective O’Donovan (2009, 81) claims that it is the responsibility of the church’s priests and bishops to wait on the mind of the church where it is genuinely seeking to understand issues and that where controversy arises, they will exercise caution with regards the traditional judgements being overthrown by new cultural trends.

Having carried out a placement with the United Church of Canada I was interested to understand how they had reached decisions within the church regarding the subject of homosexuality. Lebens (2006, 277) states that in 1976 the debate began on the blessing of same-gender unions in the Anglican Church of Canada and in 1979 the House of Bishops stated that homosexual persons ‘have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, concern, and pastoral care of the church.’ However the statement repudiated the idea of ‘homosexual unions.’ Over the following 20 years, ongoing discussions affirmed the presence of homosexuals in and their contribution to the life of the church and all aspects of homophobia were condemned. Churches were encouraged to discuss and consider committed same-sex unions, but in the meantime homosexual couples were expected to live lives of

chastity. In 2003 the Bishop of the Diocese of New Westminster gave his assent to the blessing of same-gender unions resulting in a great deal of anger and division and in 2004 the provincial legislatures of Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, the Yukon and Nova Scotia recognised ‘gay’ marriages. In late 2004 the Supreme Court of Canada upheld this recognition and in July 2005 the national Parliament legalised same-sex marriage, making Canada the fourth nation to do so and “forcing the church to face up to the changing world around it.” (Lebans, 2006, 278).

Lebans (2006, 278) also records 1973 as the date when the Episcopal Church in the USA began to talk about same-gender unions and in 2003 it went on to elect its first openly gay bishop amid great furore.

Within Anglicanism, there has been much debate over the years regarding the subject of homosexuality and the church endeavoured to use tradition as well as scripture to aid in judgement and discernment. In 1991 the House of Bishops published *Issues in Human Sexuality*, calling for prayerful study and reflection and this became in effect a sort of policy statement. The primary aim of this report was “to promote an educational process as a result of which Christians may both become informed about and understanding of certain human realities, and also enter more deeply into the wisdom of their inheritance of faith in this field.” (House of Bishops, 1991, 4). Following this the Lambeth 1998 resolution on homosexuality, declared it to be incompatible with scripture, and in 2003 the House of Bishops produced a further report, *Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Guide to the Debate*, to help people enter more deeply into the issues and theology of the debate, looking at opinions from both sides (House of Bishops’ Group, 2003, ix).

According to Triana (2006, 208) the planned appointment of Jeffrey John as Bishop of Reading in England, the election and consecration of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire, and, the declarations of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the US and of the 2004 General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, which approved or looked kindly upon the blessing of unions of people of the same sex, have unchained opinions so diverse that they threaten the very integrity of Anglicanism.

Most recently, the opinions on this topic of Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, have caused consternation and division within the Anglican Communion. His views on homosexuality were perceived as quite liberal before he became the Archbishop of Canterbury as evidenced by his paper 'The Body's Grace,' which he originally delivered in 1989 to the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, and which is now part of a series of essays collected in the book "Theology and Sexuality." Williams stated that gay sexual relationships can 'reflect the love of God' in a way that is comparable to marriage and that the key issue for Christians is that they are faithful and lifelong. He described his belief that biblical passages criticising homosexual sex were not aimed at people who were gay by nature and he drew a distinction between his own beliefs as a theologian and his position as a church leader, for which he had to take account of the traditionalist view (Williams, 1989). However, contrary to these comments, as Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Williams recommitted the Anglican Communion to its orthodox position that homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture at the Lambeth Conference in 2008 and the Times article of August 2008 stated that liberals were bitterly disappointed that a man whom they regarded as chosen to advance their agenda had instead abided by the traditionalist consensus of the majority. In response, Lambeth Palace quoted a recent interview in which the Archbishop said: "When I teach as a bishop I teach what the Church teaches. In controverted areas it is my responsibility to teach what the Church has said and why." (Gledhill, 2008).

It is obvious from this chapter that Christian religious tradition provides important moral insights into human existence and sexuality. Ward (2008, 113), however, notes that social conditions have changed considerably in the modern world and the specific moral rules of ancient societies may no longer be applicable. Specific rules must often be changed by consideration of the will of God for human fulfilment in a rapidly changing world whilst upholding the principles of love, loyalty, fidelity and the integrity of the human person.

In the case of homosexuality Thorsen (1996, 2) suggests that the church may need to change in its attitude toward persons with a same-sex orientation as unfortunately, throughout much of history, the church has not only opposed homosexuality but has been violent in its condemnation. Maraschin et al (2008, 156) warns that where

society has accepted gay unions, the Church faces questions as to why it is not prepared to bless such partnerships; whilst in other societies which continue to shun homosexuality, the Church faces criticism for considering acceptance of gay people into the community of faith. If the Church is truly to show the unity to which Christ calls it, it will have to take account of the pastoral realities encountered in contemporary society (Fabian, 2008, 596) as well as grappling with the fact that the question of homosexuality concerns real people who themselves are trying to live the Christian life (Morris, 2007, 60). As recorded in the introduction, the Methodist Church in Ireland has attempted to consider the pastoral implications of caring for homosexual people within their churches and following their report to conference in June 2009, they adopted a statement on homophobia and asked that the pastoral guidelines on homosexuality should be made available to congregations for discussion (Methodist Church in Ireland, 2009, 98).

According to Morris (2007, 59) the Church displays two types of reaction to change in the world, one which he calls the 'confessional Church' which involves a basic appeal to historic, identity-forming practices and beliefs in times of threat. The strength of this church is its loyalty to its roots, but its risk is rigidity. The other church he calls the 'ecumenical Church' which sees its identity as derived from a horizon of the future and from historic roots, and its strength is its adaptability but its risk is a lack of substance, and a vulnerability to flimsy new theories. Morris believes it is unhelpful to use either description in the debate over homosexuality, rather he states the importance of recognising the need for both to be present in a rounded, authentic debate in the Church.

The Church has proved in many areas, including slavery and the role of women, that it can change and adapt to things which earlier generations might have abhorred, therefore there is reason to believe that a change in Church policy over homosexuality may one day occur (Dormor & Morris, 2007, 47).

## Conclusion

At the time of writing the BBC news website leads with the headline ‘Pope criticised for attack on UK Equality Bill.’ Pope Benedict XVI said the equality bill - which could end the right of the Church to ban gay people from senior positions - "violates natural law" and he urged Catholic bishops in England and Wales to fight the bill with "missionary zeal". The Pope was condemned by gay rights group ‘Stonewall’ and human rights campaigners from the British Humanist Association for his comments, but those supporting him, including Robert Micken, Rome correspondent at the Catholic newspaper *The Tablet*, claim that he is trying to encourage church leaders to keep their resolve in the midst of fluctuating morals in cultures and societies today. This debate highlights the fact that this issue is still relevant to our churches today and that within the debate there continue to be deeply held and divergent views with the result that a solution seems a distant prospect.

This paper has sought to study the topic of homosexuality within Wesley’s quadrilateral, and the use of this model of theology has allowed the reader to examine this debate from varied perspectives, allowing voices from both sides of the discussion to be heard. However the question remains - Is a solution to the controversy any clearer? And the personal question remains - What are the outcomes of this study for me personally?

Thorsen (1996, 3) believes that in searching for a resolution to issues on homosexuality, a balance of views drawn from scripture, tradition, reason, and experience is important, however he sees the word ‘balance’ as incorrect as it mistakenly communicates the idea of equilateral authority. He states that Wesley affirmed the primacy of scriptural authority and if scripture were not clear on the subject, then experience, reason and tradition might offer more helpful insight.

With this in mind, what does scripture teach regarding homosexuality? Many scholars, including Webb (2001, 39) believe that scripture is clear with regard to the condemnation of homosexual activity and that as a church the only reasonable response is to reaffirm its stance that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. According to Thorsen, this affirmation not only conforms to

scripture but also conforms to church tradition, logical reasoning, and experience as understood from a Wesleyan perspective. Although this position appears rigid and unyielding, Marin (2009, 109) is quick to note that scripture also teaches love for neighbours, patience, kindness, truth, righteousness, hope, endurance and compassion upon those who are tempted to act contrary to God's will. Jesus called people to repentance, but he also astounded others by the compassion he demonstrated toward those caught in temptation and sin and Thorsen (1996, 3) suggests that whilst condemning homosexual activity, the church should be encouraged to care for the holistic well-being of homosexuals and for their civil rights.

Webb (2001, 39) agrees that the spirit and direction of the biblical text must lead Christians to a negative assessment of homosexual behaviour, however he notes that the differences between the ancient and modern world should add a nuanced dimension to this negative response. He states that the church's sexual ethic and teaching should articulate a variance within a negative assessment of same-sex activity, depending upon the type of homosexuality being addressed, e.g. covenant homosexuality should be viewed differently from pederasty or homosexual rape. On one side of the debate, this difference could be shown by allowing homosexuals involved in covenant same-sex relationships the full rights of membership in the church while forbidding these rights to those homosexuals involved in promiscuous sexual activity. On the other side of the debate the difference may be merely in showing compassion to homosexuals in covenant relationships whilst still condemning their behaviour and forbidding them membership in the church, and showing total condemnation for those involved in promiscuous sexual relationships. Atkinson (2006, 304) also endorses this variance and accepts that although there is no biblical endorsement for the promiscuity which characterises much of our contemporary secular gay subculture, scripture is much less clear regarding the testimony of stable, faithful and loving gay relationships. He states "We need a biblical gospel hermeneutic from which to evaluate the mismatch between the standard interpretation of the relevant texts and the contemporary testimony of gay Christian experience."

I believe that for me, this statement is at the core of the debate on homosexuality. The Bible is the authority on which I base my beliefs and yet throughout my study of scripture and homosexuality I fail to see a scriptural prohibition for faithful, covenant, same-sex relationships. This has resulted in me agreeing with the behaviour of homosexuals who are involved in these types of covenant relationships or those abstaining from sexual activity altogether, whilst I maintain that those involved in casual, promiscuous same-sex relationships should be loved but their behaviour condemned.

There are many testimonies from homosexual Christians who have, by God's grace, lived joyous, fulfilled lives within covenant, faithful, stable relationships of love (Atkinson, 2006, 309). In a gay subculture that is dominantly promiscuous, Atkinson suggests that a covenant relationship which reflects something of the covenant of God's grace could be a demonstration of the Gospel calling gay Christians to be counter-cultural. Often the only words which homosexuals hear from the church are words of condemnation and calls for repentance; however these are not the first words of the Gospel, rather the Gospel talks of grace and love. Atkinson supports those in the church who instead view homosexual relationships as bearing the marks of love, joy, peace, faithfulness, goodness, meekness and self-control. As was obvious from the testimonies of homosexuals in the chapter on experience, homosexual individuals long for people with whom they can be completely open and still be treated with respect and love. Marin (2009, 59) believes that the main issue for Christians must be how they choose to live in relation to, and relationship with, the homosexual community and he asks the question "What have we not done that even from within our own walls there is no room for the broken?"

The church is being challenged to make room in its congregations and in its heart for homosexuals who do not think that sexual expression of their identity is a fundamental betrayal of the gospel, and to offer them the prospect of hope and the chance of leading faithful Christian lives (Dormor & Morris, 2007, 7). To enable the church to reach this conclusion, it may require a change in the church's view of sexual ethics. Forrester (2006, 287) claims that the church has lost its ability to see sexuality as something to be celebrated and enjoyed, a gift from God, and has instead accepted an attitude of 'sex as a dangerous enemy to be feared and mastered.' He

believes that when such attitudes become influential, it is understandable that minority forms of sexuality attract particularly vigorous condemnation. Would the church still support this condemnation of homosexual behaviour if a reason within nature or nurture could be found to support homosexuality? An answer to this question is unlikely to be found in the near future as the chapter on reason has stated that no conclusive evidence seems to be available yet regarding the causes of homosexuality.

Beasley (2007, 143) states that the controversy regarding differing attitudes to homosexuality is developing a fault line within the church today. On one side of this line lie those who believe that homosexuality is a lifestyle that is consciously chosen by some in contravention of natural norms, while on the other side of the line are those who believe that homosexual individuals do not have any real choice in the matter; by nature and nurture they are who they are. Each side chooses to argue for their own position, picking moral, ethical and scriptural evidence to back their belief that their own world-view is the correct one. Carr (2002, 156) does not define the controversy in such black and white terms and rather describes the belief that homosexual and heterosexual are not two distinct entities but two conditions which merge, so that all individuals have elements of each and are placed on a sexual spectrum.

For many Christians this question of cause is pivotal in their decision making regarding homosexuality. For some, the belief that all people are made in the image of God means that those with homosexual and heterosexual orientation should be treated in the same way, i.e. as people who have the offer of salvation by faith in Christ. Marin (2009, 93) supports this view by stating that individuals do not choose anything before birth, such as family, nationality, social status or health, rather these things are part of the makeup of individuals at birth, and are therefore not thought of in the category of "sin." He extends this principle to sexual orientation and questions the idea that heterosexuality is a birthright, and homosexuality is not. He claims that God is the only Creator and his will is beyond anything humans could plan for themselves, and sexuality is a part of His creation. Other Christians would not accept this principle and while accepting homosexual people completely, whether within the church or in society generally, and being sympathetic to their

concerns, they regard heterosexuality as the norm and homosexuality as the exception (United Church of Canada, 1984, 68). This point of view implies that homosexuals should be encouraged and helped to choose a heterosexual lifestyle or to abstain from all sexual activity (United Church of Canada, 1984, 68).

I am unsure about my position regarding nature and nurture having read widely on this topic; however I am certain that all homosexuals should be treated as people made in God's image. Although this opinion means that I choose to show compassion and love to all homosexual individuals, I still distinguish between homosexual behaviour choices when I consider acceptance of homosexuals within the church.

Queer theology which is, in many ways, a branch of Liberation theology, addresses the oppression which many queer theologians believe is perpetrated on homosexual people by wider society in general and, in particular, the religious establishment. Althaus-Reid (2008, 91) states "Queer theologies are the complex result of a theological reflection that considers what the different constructions of sexuality and gender have to say of our understanding of God, love, and community. From its reflections, two main elements of theological inquiry need to be considered. First, a suspicion concerning the assumption that heterosexuality is a universal and stable sexual identity and as such part of a natural (sacralised) order. Second, the realisation of the fact that hegemonic constructions of sexual identity have historically contributed to the consolidation of oppressive structures of power relationships in the Christian Church and in theology."

The views of the church throughout history were studied in the chapter on tradition and the perception seems to be that the traditional teaching of the Christian Church comes into conflict with the beliefs, values and even practice of a significant part at least of modern western society. This situation is not purely seen in the debate on homosexuality, indeed at certain points throughout history the Christian church has been confronted with other controversial debates which have required a response. Wilberforce saw the relevance of the New Testament to the slave trade and the result was the abolition of slavery and the rediscovery of the liberating power of the gospel. Martin Luther King Jr. dreamed his famous dream, resulting in the

advancement of civil rights for blacks and the rediscovery that the gospel is blind to racial differences. In more recent days, women have challenged the discrimination shown to them and have claimed that humans were created in God's image as male and female. This has resulted in liberation of women from an inferior position in society and a discovery of the fullness of the nature of God. It is therefore not inconceivable that minorities such as homosexuals will, in the future, be received into the Christian church with the same rights as those of a heterosexual orientation. This may seem very radical for some Christians, however the attitudes and beliefs of many Christians have already moved toward acceptance of homosexuals and belief that all people, regardless of sexual orientation can become Christians by grace through faith (United Church of Canada, 1984, 68).

I am in agreement with this process of acceptance which the church is undergoing, however I do believe that this should not lead to complete approval of homosexuality. As I have already intimated, the acceptance in my opinion must depend upon the behaviours involved, and I must note that my opinion extends not only to the activities of homosexuals but also to those of heterosexuals.

Dormor & Morris (2007, 1) ask the questions "Is this *the* major crisis confronting Christian faith today? Is it acutely symbolic of modernity's challenge to Christian faith?" Christians are often challenged with cultural changes and are required to make the choice of endorsing change or opposing it. Within today's culture, homosexuality is not the only threat to the church's sexual ethics and the church must be seen to be consistent in its teaching. Webb (2001, 252) warns that if the church talks about upholding high ethical standards regarding homosexual activity, and yet is seen to be failing to live out its ethical standards with regard to heterosexual activity, it will undermine anything it has to say to the homosexual community about its sexual ethic.

Selby (2006, 258) warns that the current debate on homosexuality within the church is causing diversion from other pressing matters such as globalisation, war, the injustice of world trading practices and Third World debt and he suggests that the selection of homosexuality as *the* issue on which the future of the church depends

avoids dealing with matters over which the church feels powerless but which in reality threaten it far more seriously.

Goddard (2004, 26) believes that the desire to support homosexuals and to acknowledge the good in same-sex relationships is laudable and necessary, however he warns that for the church to authorise such unions creates major problems. Although it may make sense in postmodern Western society with its emphasis on individual freedom, self-fulfilment and personal choice, he views it as representing a fundamental reconfiguration of Christian moral theology and the understanding of being human. Goddard believes however that the traditional teaching of the church can still be upheld while accepting that God's grace welcomes all who seek to be disciples of Christ, whatever their sexual orientation. Discriminating unjustly against any individuals or communities is not the traditional teaching of the church, and is not the example set by Christ; in fact this behaviour will merely weaken the witness of the church to Christ in the world. Rogers (2009, xviii) believes that the church can only be one holy and whole church when all its members are treated equally and can together evangelise, worship, and serve with the integrity of those who live according to Christ's teachings. Forrester (2006, 296) also asserts that there is a need for churches to provide sensitive and compassionate pastoral care for those in same-sex relationships and to assist these individuals to grow in love through difficult times as well as times of joy. This need is not recognised by all churches, or by all Christians and often the request for recognition by homosexual Christians can result in fear and anger by people who view this as one more way in which the moral fibre of the church is weakened. These Christians therefore condemn the idea of the blessing of same-sex couples and the ordination of homosexuals and yet often are willing to accept homosexuals into their churches under their terms, i.e. abstinence or cure (McNeill, 1993, 176).

Having given a brief overview of the findings of the previous four chapters, what conclusions can be reached from critically examining homosexuality through the lens of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral?

It is obvious that in seeking to study this debate it is important that individuals explore a position that is attentive to the authority of scripture, alert to the unity of

the church, informed with regards reason and sensitive to the integrity and experience of practising homosexual Christians (Dormor & Morris, 2007, 6). Looking at the four elements of the quadrilateral, there appear to be three theological options regarding the current homosexual debate within the church and Louw (2008, 121) summarises them as follows:

**The rejecting-but-non-punitive position:** empathy and the acceptance of homosexuals, but rejection of any physical expression, or mutual sexual actions. The theological point of departure is that homosexuality is unnatural and contrary to the will of God and His design for sexuality, however homosexual individuals should be treated with pastoral sensitivity. They should be directed towards sexual reorientation if possible and celibacy/abstinence if not. In this position nature and creation form the basic background and starting point for theological reflection.

**The qualified acceptance position:** the exception. While holding that homosexual orientation falls short of God's intent, it recognizes that a homosexual orientation is usually irreversible. Thus, homosexuals should be supported in their attempts to live their sexual lives responsibly - celibacy is preferable, but same-sex monogamy of a covenant and lasting kind is acceptable for those who cannot remain celibate. The theological assumption is that the Bible's condemnation of homosexuality is due to the lack of these elements in the ancient world.

**The responsible identity position:** The fundamental issue at stake is not one's sexual orientation, but, in terms of the theological argument, one's ontological status in Christ whereby individuals are new creations. The challenge therefore in human sexuality is to integrate one's belief system into an embodiment that will reflect norms and values that prevent human sexual behaviour from becoming promiscuous and robbing other human beings of their human dignity.

Once Christians have chosen their position, White (2005, 30) recommends that they should not be too rigid. He reminds readers that God, who is unchanging in nature and purpose, also has the capacity to feel moved to different responses and actions by human good or evil. Thus although God's essence may be unchanging, he describes God as 'changeable' in his passionate nature and suggests that this realisation should enable individuals to explore new and creative avenues, both regarding spirituality and ethical decision making. The kingdom of God is not for those who are perfect; rather it is for those who seek God to help them to follow Him

rather than turning their backs on him. Marin (2009, 122) encourages the church to recognise the eternal importance of seeking God above everything else rather than debating orientation, sex or politics and he sees this as the first eternal principle of bridge building with the homosexual community. It is not, nor ever has been, the role of Christians to pass judgement on the words or actions of others, therefore the church should be encouraged to take care in its condemnation of any individual.

Billy Graham's answer to a reporter who asked him why he supported Bill Clinton after his sex scandal was made public was: "It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict, God's job to judge and my job to love." Marin (2009, 108) uses this quote in his recommendations regarding the homosexual debate within the church: "It's not the job of Christians to convict the gay community. That's the Holy Spirit's job. It's not the job of Christians to judge the gay community. That's God's job. It's the job of Christians to love the gay community in a way that is tangible, measurable and unconditional – whether we see our version of 'change' happening or not."

There is no single solution or simple answer to this ongoing debate but as Brown (2006, 4) states "all solutions and answers must be rooted in deep and prayerful faith in Jesus Christ, manifested in scripture, human reason, the tradition of the church and human experience, including the great complexity of human history and cultures." Schmidt (1996, 3) claims that churches are not in need of people who love family values nearly as much as they need families who value love for people. The Church is called to a ministry of witness in the face of evil, pastoral care in the face of pain and confusion, education in the face of conflicting values and ignorance, and love of all people, whatever their sexual orientation (United Church of Canada, 1984, 20).

What should the church's response therefore be to the homosexual Christians in its midst? Campolo (2003, 178) believes that Christ's response would be to reach out in love to homosexuals and demand justice and the end of discrimination, He would create an atmosphere in the church wherein homosexuals could be open about their sexual orientation and expect to be treated with dignity and respect.

Coming from a background of training for ordination as a Methodist minister, my question is 'What should the Methodist response be to this debate?' My personal

interactions with homosexual individuals and the testimonies of those in stable, faithful relationships, prevents me from ruling them out of Christ's kingdom and His gift of grace. In my introduction I stated that I was coming to this dissertation having already put a lot of thought into my beliefs on this subject and bringing my own theology regarding homosexuality to the table as I began my research. As I have examined my experiences critically within the context of the Wesleyan quadrilateral model of theology, my thinking on this topic seems to have developed and I am now more convinced that homosexuals who are engaged in covenant, faithful relationships, or those for whom abstinence is their choice, cannot be excluded from our contemporary church and should be welcomed and given the privileges of full membership.

Wesley in one of his last sermons 'Prophets and Priests' (1789, sermon 121) wrote that Methodists accept into their fellowship all who love God and live righteous lives in accordance with that love. Therefore I believe Methodists must extend this acceptance to homosexuals through both the words and actions of ordained and lay people.

Looking towards ordination, I hope that wherever I am called to minister, I will create an environment of love, understanding, acceptance, patience, forgiveness, openness and grace for all. I hope that if I am given the opportunity in the future to minister to homosexual individuals, I will endeavour in my pastoral care to be sensitive to the struggles involved for individuals and their families and to dispel all fear of rejection and discrimination. I also hope to encourage the church as a community to become informed, compassionate and caring towards homosexual individuals.

Let me finish as I began with some words from Rev Desmond Tutu (2004, 47) "Many, however, say that some kinds of love are better than others, condemning the love of gays and lesbians. But whether a man loves a woman, or another man, or a woman loves a man or another woman, to God it is all love, and God smiles whenever we recognise our need for one another."

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