

## **How Shall We View Homosexuality?**

When I was in Grade one, a crippled child died of pneumonia after being snowballed by a group of her Grade one classmates. Memory assured me that I wasn't present, but I still feel guilty after all these years – one of the reasons I feel for the marginalized in our society.

In a book called "I Never Promised You a Rose Garden," the female protagonist, who is a patient in a psychiatric hospital, notices that the patients act more crazy when some staff are on duty than when other staff are, and she concludes that it is out of consideration for the staff. If staff feel secure, the patients can act sanely; if staff feel unsure of their own mental health, the patients act more crazy, as if to reassure those staff that they are not the ones who are crazy. In 1957, I spent the summer as an intern in an old mental hospital. I spent most of that time in one of the female wards, because I knew, instinctively, that I could not become a crazy female.

Some time ago, our prophet/president asked us, as a church, to discuss the issue of homosexuality. It is my impression that, for the most part, we haven't done so because we are afraid to do so. However, "perfect love casteth out fear" [1 John 4:18] and, besides, I am too old to be afraid of becoming homosexual, so I am going to broach the subject.

I happen to be a scientist. That is my background and training (and, to some extent, curse – there are times when I wish that I didn't have to think). I cannot ignore the fact that scripture has been used to justify slavery and the subjugation of women, that Galileo was persecuted for teaching that the earth is not the centre of the universe (in opposition to the official church position), and on and on. I do not accept everything in the Bible as "gospel truth," and one of the Christian church's positions that, as a scientist, I choose not to accept is its censure of homosexuality. In that regard, let me share with you a fictitious letter to Dr. Laura, a well known American religious talk-show opponent of homosexuality:

Dear Dr. Laura,

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's law. I have learned a great deal from you, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can.

When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the other specific laws and how to best follow them.

When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odour for the Lord (Lev. 1:9). The problem is my neighbours. They claim the odour is not pleasing to them. How should I deal with this?

I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as it suggests in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness (Lev. 15:19-24). The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

Lev. 25:44 states that I may buy slaves from the nations that are around us. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify?

I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself or is it all right if I hire someone to do it for me?

A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination (Lev. 10:10), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?

Lev. 20:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Sincerely,

Concerned Individual

This so-called “letter” only touches on a few of the 613 laws given in the Torah, but I expect you get the idea: Most people are selective about what parts of the Bible they hold sacred.

In broaching the subject of homosexuality, I do so, not as a member of the priesthood, which I am not, and I don't speak on behalf of this church to which I have belonged for most of my seventy-four years. On the other hand, I am not homosexual. I don't approve of the behaviour of some homosexual people any more than you do; but then, I don't approve of the behaviour of some heterosexual people either. I have been happily married for more than fifty years, and the only investment that I have in this issue of homosexuality grows out of what I perceive to be pre-scientific prejudice directed against homosexuals by the Christian church.

There is, affiliated with this church, an organization known as GALA, the Gay and Lesbian Acceptance, the church-affiliated association for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender members of the Community of Christ and their friends, supporters, and relatives. To the best of my knowledge, I am one of only two heterosexual church members from Ontario that loves both GALA (of which I am a member) and the Contemporary Christian Ministries group, some of whom are almost violently opposed to homosexuality.

The GALA literature (website) states: GALA envisions communities which witness that persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities have sacred worth; and are fully included, celebrated, and affirmed with their chosen faith traditions. The purpose of GALA is to affirm the dignity and worth of all persons without regard to gender, race, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation. We support and encourage self actualization in an atmosphere of love, understanding, and confidentiality. We are dedicated to the celebration of diversity. We are committed to exploring the issues of spirituality and justice through dialogue, education, and action.

There is another organization, the Welcoming Community Network (WCN), a separate ecumenical organization which I think grew out of GALA. When I was first exposed to the WCN at one of the GALA reunions, it was concerned with promoting the welcoming of GALA church members into congregations: “What Does It Mean to Be a Welcoming Congregation? Congregations who publicly and successfully welcome gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender [LGBT] people have the following qualities:

- Include and address the needs of LGBT persons at every level of congregational life-in worship, in programs, in social occasions, and in leadership-welcoming not only their presence, but their gifts and the hopes of their lives as well.
- Assume the presence of LGBT people and celebrate this diversity by having inclusive language and content in their worship.
- Fully incorporate the experiences of LGBT persons throughout all programs, including religious education.
- Support LGBT affinitive groups such as GALA.
- Offer congregational and ministerial support for union and memorial services for LBGT persons.
- Celebrate the lives of all people and welcome same-sex couples, recognizing their committed relationships, and equally affirms expressions of caring and affection without regard to sexual orientation.
- Seek to nurture ongoing dialogue between bisexual, gay, lesbian, transgender and heterosexual persons and to create deeper trust and sharing.
- Affirm and celebrate LGBT issues and history during the church year.
- Attend to legislative developments and works to promote justice, freedom, and equality in the larger society.
- Speak out when the rights of bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people are at stake.
- As persons of faith, confess their own imperfections in attitude and action and accepts the responsibility to resist fear and hate in all forms and to strive continuously to eliminate expressions of prejudice and discrimination.

- Declare their belief that all are called according to the gifts of God to them. Therefore acknowledging and affirming human diversity by creating a spirit of openness and peace within their congregation.
- Celebrate the rich diversity of human life we have in the Community of Christ.

I questioned some of my friends in GALA whether that might not be too exclusive a mission statement, i.e., not inclusive enough for my liking: “Wouldn’t it be better,” I asked, “to be promoting the inclusion of everyone, without exception?” However, at that time, GALA was mainly concerned about the inclusion of its own members to be worrying about the other marginalized members of our communities. In the intervening years, however, the Welcoming Community Network does seem to have expanded its mandate, as exemplified by the statements issued by some of the various congregations that have opted to become Welcoming Communities. For example, the Clearwater Community of Christ Congregation has published the following statement: “Who is welcome here?”

If you are Asian, Hispanic, Black or White,  
If you are male, female or transgender,  
If you are three days old, 30 years old or 103 years old,  
If you've never stepped foot in a church; or attend church regularly,  
If you are single, married, divorced, separated or partnered,  
If you are straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual,  
If you are affiliated with a political party or not registered to vote,  
If you have, or had, addictions, phobias, abortions or a criminal record,  
If you own your home, rent or are homeless,  
If you are fully-abled, disabled or a person of differing abilities,

You are welcome here!

You are welcome here because you are a child of God. You are worthy of God's love and grace. By the grace of God, made known in Christ Jesus, NO THING that you have done, feel, are, believe or will do, can change that.

We are committed to being a thoroughly loving and welcoming community of faith, centered in the Good News of Jesus Christ. We support the full participation of all persons in every phase of church life. Through education and informal discussion, we will strive to better understand those who are different from us, and to fulfill our mission of fostering peace and reconciliation for all people.

Therefore, in faithfulness to the Gospel and our Community of Christ heritage, and to the best of our ability, we promise to provide programs, ministries and pastoral care to all who seek God in this place.”

I wish all of our congregations could be as non-judgementally welcoming of diversity.