To Danish Baptist Churches
On the Place of Homosexuals in the Church

A starter for conversation in the local churches
about a present-day ethical problem

Theological Forum 2012
- a taskforce within the Baptist Union in Denmark

1. Introductive perspectives

There has in the last few years been an increasing focus on the question of the church’s position regarding homosexuality. In `Folkekirken´ (the Danish Lutheran state church) a majority of the bishops a few years ago introduced a ritual for blessing of homosexual couples, who have entered a `registered partnership´ (- an official, public registration). With the shift of government in 2011, the question again was brought forth as the Minister of Equality and Church, Mr. Manu Sareen, wishes to give members of the state church – regardless of their sexual orientation – the possibility to be married in the (state) church. The proposed law was set forth in January 2012 and sent to hearing.

Theological Forum, which is a taskforce within the Baptist Union in Denmark, hereby offers to the congregations a starter for conversation on the phenomenon of homophilia and of homosexuality. One reason for this is that the (governmental) ministry has also asked us – as a state recognized community of faith with the authority to perform legally-binding weddings – about our opinion on the proposed law. Another reason concerns pastoral counseling; namely, how we as churches handle the fact that there are members or future members who understand themselves as homosexuals. A third reason is that Christian churches, of course, ought to consider the ethical questions that are up in their time.

The conversation on homosexuality is difficult and arouses strong feelings: partly among those who see the question as entirely simple, because homosexuality must be rejected as a sinful form of sexuality from which people must turn away; and maybe to a higher degree among fellow Christians, who for years have fought with their personal identity and who have experienced great loneliness because of their sexual orientation.

Here, already, we are at the core of the matter. As we shall see in the following, there are no biblical texts which legitimize homosexuality. Both The Old and The New Testament unanimously speak of homosexuality as an expression of sin. At the same time it is clear that none of the scripture verses refer to what we, today, would speak of as having a homosexual identity, i.e. that a person is homosexual – with the same strong attraction to his/her own sex, as heterosexuals have to the opposite sex.

Decisive for how we approach this question, including how we interpret the biblical texts, is whether we work out from the presupposition that there are people who are homosexuals, which therefore is a life-condition; or, whether we work from the presupposition that homosexuality is a sin, which people must repent of to be helped out of. It is for both vantage points subsequently decisive how we ought to act in relation to the homosexual.

The opinion of the Theological Forum is that the church’s first response to homosexuals must be that of support and closeness. God loves all people, also the homosexual. All too often the church has met people with condemnation rather than help and support. Maybe
this is one of the reasons why Christians, who understand themselves as homosexuals, often withdraw from the church.

Our opinion is also – and the review of the biblical texts will show – that homosexuality is not a `special’ kind of sin. Homosexuality usually is mentioned in the same breath with e.g. greed, slander, injustice, lies, haughtiness, suppression of the poor, etc. The church, right in the midst of our congregations, has often had a tendency to highlight the area of sexuality as “the worst”; while we have looked through our fingers with things such as greed, lies, injustice and much else.

Thus said, the question remains on how the church and the individual handle all of this. It is not, hereby, concluded that the church, without further consideration, can approve of homosexuals living together. Here is an array of view-points – reaching from the view that the homosexual must live in abstinence; to a complete acceptance that homosexuals may marry on equal terms with heterosexuals.

The presupposition for the following considerations is that we engage in the question of whether it is in synch with Christian ethics that homosexuals can practice their sexuality in a monogamous relationship, which – when it comes to security and faithfulness – is compatible to a marriage between a man and a woman. Since a married couple, in connection with their wedding, receive God’s blessing, we also include the question here- whether God’s blessing should be applied in connection with the constitution of a homophile, monogamous relationship.

The Theological Forum cannot answer these questions on behalf of the congregations. Our task is to clarify some presuppositions and biblically enlighten the historical and theological questions in an attempt to qualify our present conversation in the local congregations and together in the Baptist Union.

1.1. Biblical ethics and present day ethics.

Ethics is about the way we live. Christian ethics is about the ways of living that stems from peoples’ faith in the Gospel – the patterns of living that come into play when people confess their faith in the Triune God as Creator, Savior and Renewer. But Christian ethics is not only solely bound to this faith. It is always brought to bear in cultures that are tied to time and space. When we talk about biblical ethics we need to specify whether we speak of the ethics of Israel in the time of Moses, or the ethics of the disciples in the time of Jesus, or the ethics of the early Christian churches in the time of Paul. We shall return to this in the section dealing with the relevant biblical texts.

Present day Christian ethics is not founded only on the biblical texts. Christian ethics in our time is also tinted by the church’s tradition to which we belong. It makes a difference whether we, today, speak of Christian ethics in the state church (‘Folkekirken’) or in the Pentecostal Church, in the Methodist Church, or in the Catholic Church – or upon the background which is ours as Baptists. In a qualified conversation among Christians, we must listen to others who have become Christians with a history that differs from ours. A present day Christian ethics has several historical roots – in both the different biblical texts and in the church’s multiple traditions. Therefore we also listen to the insights which have shaped other Christians.

Present day Christian ethics is also under influence of other factors. As Christians, we live in an interrelation with the society which we wish to serve. Our ethics is always tinted by the cultural context in which we live. That is not always easy to detect – and often we do not presume that is so. However, in these years it is made clear to us. Baptists who come to us from e.g. Burma, Vietnam, or Rwanda have different ethical patterns of life which we
must respect as their Baptist tradition – just as they must be open to the conversation about present-day Christian ethics that is shaped by our way of being Baptists with roots in a Danish context. We must listen to one another and try to understand why we have differing forms of present-day Baptist ethics in a global world.

Ethics is about `the good life`. We, as Christians, do not have the patent on that. In our day and age many are proprietors of great knowledge which we must include in our attempt to formulate an up-to-date Christian ethics on e.g. homosexuality. Believing in God as Creator has the consequence that we are open to the insights which science today sets forth. Therefore, we listen to science if it discloses knowledge which Christians in earlier generations did not have.

All of this must be included every time we as Christians attempt to position ourselves in matters of present-day ethical issues. At the same time, we must be open to the possibility that we may not be in agreement among ourselves – and that also goes for the ethical question we have before us here. We will also look at how we should handle such a situation.

1.2. Language definitions

We start with some linguistic definitions, which are important for a conversation on the question of homophilia. `Homophilia` means `love between two of the same sex`. Homosexuality, then, means `sexuality between two of the same sex`. `Hetero` means `other`. Heterosexual, then, is defined as `sexuality between the one and the other sex, i.e. between man and woman`.

1.3. What is homophilia – a life-condition or sin?

Homophilia has in later years proved to be one of the most discussed issues within Christian ethics. This is partly caused by the fact that no agreement exists on what causes a person to be a homosexual.

Is homophilia part of our nature – i.e. a life-condition, a genetic predisposition – or is it a phenomenon caused by environment and upbringing? The professionals disagree. What causes homosexuality remains a mystery. The causes may be genetic and hormonal or psychological and family related. But among researchers there is a high degree of agreement that the homosexual disposition is founded in a child’s first months of living, if, indeed, it is not born with it.

Homosexuality in the Christian realm is seen from two different theological viewpoints – as human sin or as a life-condition.

Behind the viewpoint that homosexuality is a sin stands a massive Christian tradition. Right from the post-biblical era until the 1900’s, a quite unanimous church-theological tradition has interpreted homosexuality as sin or disease (mentally), a handicap or invalidity (in the reproductive glands), from which people can be saved or healed as a sign that the powers of God’s kingdom are at work.

If the vantage point is that homosexuality is a sin from which we can be saved, then it is a joyous occasion when this deliverance takes place. But in the case that this does not happen, then we must still maintain that, even though homosexual lifestyle is a kind of expression that falls outside the will of God, then the homosexuals are – as people – created in God’s image, and therefore of precisely the same value as all other people.
This carries the ethical consequence that, we, as Christian churches must always show love and openness toward homosexuals; but it does not, as such, imply any accept of homosexual practice.

Others choose, as vantage point, the opinion that *homophilia is a life-condition*. It is then a ‘disposition’ – biologically and sociologically – which means that it is natural to love people of the same sex as oneself and to integrate sexuality and love in that way. We here talk of a biological drive which in itself is ethically neutral. None of us can without impunity ignore or suppress this drive, but we can give shape to the sexual drive in many ways. This is true for both hetero- and homosexuals.

If being homosexual is a *(given)* life-condition, then the question becomes how homophiles should live with this condition. Is it possible to live out the homosexuality in actual life – in an (officially) registered partnership, i.e. in a love relationship with only one partner – or should the homosexual live in sexual abstinence?

If we respond affirmatively to this last question, then some are of the opinion that we betray the homosexual in his/her struggle for identity. Condemning the sexual drive toward people of the same sex makes us accomplices (co-guilty) in psychological destruction and, in a worst case scenario, suicide, unless we manage to give room for the homosexual in our relationships. But if we answer affirmatively that it is possible to live out homosexuality in practice in a love relationship with one partner, then we must consider the possibility of giving a church blessing to this relationship.

1. **Conclusion**

The above states that, today, there is no agreement on which vantage point we as Christians should take when we are to understand what homophilia is – and, on that basis, give shape to a contemporary Christian ethics on homophiles who live out their homosexuality in a monogamous relationship, characterized by faithfulness and security.

2. **Marriage and partnership in the Danish society today**

In this section we shall look at the attitudes that exist today toward homophilia and homosexuality in the culture in which we live – and what that means for the laws that are being passed by the Folketinget (the parliament) as valid Danish law.

2. **1. Married, blessed or registered**

Today, homosexuals must contact the local mayor’s office if they wish to be officially registered as partners. They can neither marry in the state church (Folkekirken) nor in other communities of faith in this country. The possibility for them to do so is drawn up as the law-proposal which was sent into hearing in January 2012.

The law on *registered partnerships* came into effect in 1989. In 2015, the bishops of the state church introduced guidelines for a ritual of blessing of homophile couples. This means that homosexual couples can be blessed in a church service-like occasion, but this act has no legal binding.

Registered partnership is not a marriage. It differs, e.g. as far as parental rights go, but also the legal definition of marriage and registered partnership differ. Marriage is assumed by two persons of different sexes. Registered partnership is assumed by two persons of the same sex. It is, for the moment, discussed what a proposed new practice may come to
mean language-wise – can registered partners be called spouses in the same way as is the case in the actual marriage ritual for man and woman?

2.2. Marriage

In the early Christian church, marriage was not tied to any churchly rite, but was – as in the cultures surrounding the churches – an agreement between two spouses; and in effect, between their respective families. Marriage was founded on the biblical tales thereof. The content of the marriage should reflect the faithfulness and security which found its ideal in God’s covenant with the church. In this context, marriage was about the continuation of the family (reproduction). This remained the constant content, while the framework thereof – the initiation of the covenant in marriage – has varied throughout the times.

In the bible we find no text which confirms the involvement of clergy at the wedding. And yet, the church father Ignatius in the 2nd Century writes that it would be right that a bishop takes part. But the usual practice in the ancient church and up through the Middle Ages has been that the vow of faithfulness between the two parties was legally binding. Then the bride was given over to the groom, and the marriage was instituted without a clergyman’s involvement.

Gradually the custom was introduced to have a so-called bridal mass after the wedding ceremony, in which the couple received a blessing. At this mass, the married couple now professed publicly their vows of faithfulness. When the Roman Catholic Church defined marriages as `a sacrament´ (in 1274), it came to mean that it is a bride and a groom who institute the sacrament through their “yes” (“I do” / “I will”) to each other. Thus, it is not the church’s blessing – mediated e.g. by a priest – which sanctifies the marriage.

At the time of the Revolution, Martin Luther still wanted to distinguish between the worldly and the sacred (the ‘churchly’). He suggested that the wedding itself with the couple’s public “yes” to one another should take place outside the church door. Hereby is stated that marriage is an order, which belongs to that which God has created; just as God also – according to Luther – is behind all other arrangements of society. After the public wedding, the couple then enters the church where they receive prayer for their marriage and receive the blessing.

After the Reformation, it was the public wedding that validated the marriage, and the clergyman became – after King Frederik II’s ordinance of 1562 – the public servant with legal authority, who should guarantee the validity of the marriage. It was, however, still common in Denmark that the wedding took place in the home – with the clergyman’s involvement. Not until a new ritual emerged in 1651 was the marriage moved into the church.

Throughout the 1700’s the legal conditions of the marriage were clarified. Marriage became a legal institution. Gradually, the thought arose to introduce a civic (i.e. not-church-related) marriage with the same legality as the church wedding. In 1851, a law was passed on civic marriages, which was intended for people who were not members of the state church (Folkekirken).

Another problem, which arose in the 1800’s, was the question of marriage between divorcees. The church, through its ritual, declared marriage to be life-long. Attempts were made with special wedding rituals. Today, the same ritual is used, whether the spouses are married for the first time or re-married. The pastors in “Folkekirken” (the state church), as well as in other communities of faith, are at liberty to choose if they will marry divorcees.

After the break down of the ethics of matrimonial living, there arose, in the 1970’s, among young and older people alike, the ‘paperless marriage’, which also made its way into
some congregations. This did not happen without discussion. Where we accepted this
form of living together was under the condition that the content of a marriage – faithfulness
and security – remained unchanged, while it was, once again in the history of the church,
only the framework surrounding the living together which changed form.

2. 3. Registered partnership

According to the law concerning registered partnership (revised in 2007) it is possible for
two persons of the same sex can register their partnership. This takes place in the office of
the mayor in their municipality. The partners of the couple each fill out a partnership declar-
ation, and the preconditions for registration of partnership is scrutinized, just as the proba-
bation before a marriage. The conditions are by and large the same as for a wedding. Inher-
tance rules for registered partners are also the same as for married spouses. However,
according to current law, a registered partnership cannot be established with legal binding
in churches or communities of faith.

Meanwhile, Folketinget (the parliament), which is the highest authority of Folkekirken (the
state church) may pass a law stating that registration of partnerships can take place in the
state church. Such a law proposal has just been sent to a hearing. That means that we are
talking about full equality between the assumption of marriage and registration of partner-
ship accompanied with the appropriate wedding rites in the state church. The Minister for
Equality and Church, Mr. Manu Sareen, makes the suggestion in the proposed law (which
is sent to hearing) that a registered partnership in the future shall be called a marriage.

Many within the state church are, therefore, engaged in discussions about marriage of
homophiles in the church. There is disagreement about how to ethically view homosexuality
and the life condition of homophiles; and discussion about just what a marriage ritual
implies. If parliament decides that marriage between two of the same sex can take place
in the state church, then the bishops of that church have promised the minister (Sareen) to
create a compatible marriage ritual.

2. 4. Homosexuality and Danish law

In 1866, Danish law declared that `homosexuality is illegal and punitive´. In 1930, homos-
sexuality was granted impunity for people above the sexual minor-age of 18 years. In 1973
it was deemed legal to dance with a partner of the same sex. Three years later, the sexual
minor-age for homosexuals was lowered to 15 years of age and they were put on equal
foot with heterosexuals. In 1981, the Department of Health removed homosexuality from
its list over diseases.

2. 5. Conclusion

Legally, marriage is about being faithful and secure in a relationship in which the next gen-
eration also is reared. The laws surrounding the social phenomenon, which a marriage is,
has varied throughout the times. So, it has also been in the Danish case. Not least, after
the 1960’s, have Christians had to make ethical decisions to new models for marriage –
including divorce and re-marriage, `paperless´ marriages – and now lately, marriage of
homophiles. If Christians find that the ethics which best guards `the good life´ is not coined
out in the laws which parliament decides, then we must argue against the trends of time.

3. Marriage and partnership in other churches and communities of
faith today

The divide between the opinion that homosexuality is a sin or that it is a given life-condition
goes vertically down through many church denominations. Here is an overview which
mostly looks at the Danish situation, but we will also look at Baptist churches in other countries. Finally, we shall look at two non-Christian communities of faith which we have within the Danish society.

3. 1. Danish free churches

*The Apostolic Church:* Though people who have chosen to live as homosexuals in a married state may wish to have a regulated order, and though they have the right to live under decent conditions, then in our church it cannot be in a marriage. The view of the church is clear: Homophile marriage cannot be reconciled with God’s word in the bible; and we will partake neither in the blessing of nor marriage of people of the same sex.

*The Methodist Church* – both in Denmark and internationally, discusses this issue. The church wants to be in service for all people, but find homosexual practice incompatible with the church’s present teaching. A change in attitude may be detected in the future.

*Missionsforbundet – The Covenant Church* belongs to the conservative wing of the Church and does not find that a marriage rite founded upon the Scriptures is possible for homosexuals. However, it is fine that society gives room for a partner-registration, and we do not denounce homosexuals from the possibility of living under God’s blessing.

*The Pentecostal Church,* on the basis of the Scriptures, sees homosexuality as a sin; and cannot agree to the blessing of a same-sex union, but wants to surround homophiles, with whom the church may come into contact, with the same respect as all other people.

3. 2. ‘Folkekirken´ (the state church) and the Roman Catholic Church

*Folkekirken* stands divided on the question of homosexuality, but is under pressure (according the law on registered partnerships (1989), by homosexual organizations in society, and from politicians; all aiming at equalization between the registered partnership and the traditional marriage – including a sex-neutral wedding rite.

The conservative wing of Folkekirken with its mission societies see homosexuality as sin and exclude the possibility of ecclesial blessing as well as weddings for people of the same sex. The charismatic wing of Folkekirken (‘Dansk Oase’) sees homosexuality as a sin, from which people may be freed. If this does not happen, the homophile must live in sexual abstinence – and the church must support them as millions of heterosexuals who also live in celibacy.

The vast, mostly inactive majority of the state church’s membership expresses the wish for a full church marriage of homosexuals – as an expression of ‘neighborly love’. In 2005, seven of the bishops issued ‘guidelines for celebration of a worship-setting for the blessing of registered partners’.

In 2010 a governmental committee on ‘the state church and registered partnerships’ recommends continued distinction between the traditional wedding and registered partnerships; and a majority of the committee recommends that a church ritual be authorized, by which registered partnerships can be blessed in the state church.

*The Roman Catholic Church* in Denmark: ‘Homosexuals have never and will never in the future have the possibility of marrying in the Catholic Church, or in any other way have their relationship approved’. The creation story and Jesus’ words on marriage is brought to bear – the church has elevated marriage to a sacrament. The words of Jesus exclude the possibility for divorce, and marriage is always between one man and one woman.
3. 3. Baptists internationally

**European Baptist Federation, EBF,** in its counsel meeting in September 2010, (after a conversation about blessing or marriage of two persons of the same sex), voted for a resolution that contains European Baptists' understanding of marriage, and our duty to act responsibly toward everyone, regardless of their choice of lifestyle. Here we read:

- We rejoice in the mutually loving and selfless relationship of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the demonstration of this through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God for creating man and woman in his image and seeks to follow the witness and teaching of scripture for any expression of human sexuality.

- We urge Baptists to model, value and teach that marriage is the creational and biblical setting of any sexual relationship between a man and a woman, as expressed in Genesis 2:24: 'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh'.

- We share in the brokenness of human relationships and acknowledge the pain and difficulties this brokenness causes for people in our churches and society. We affirm our responsibility to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed with all people irrespective of their way of life or convictions.

- We recognize the need to encourage, support and pray for married people, offering pastoral and spiritual care for the strengthening of healthy and vibrant Christian communities in relationship with Jesus Christ and each other.

**The Swedish Baptist Union** is divided on the question. Since the Swedish parliament passed a law permitting same sex marriages (2009), the Swedish Baptist mission board – after a consultation with the churches – has decided not to recommend any specific practice. This means that the churches are free to decide whether they will or will not marry homosexuals, or if they wish to remain neutral. They are encouraged to discuss the subject. This proposal won support at the annual conference in 2010.

One - on a Scandinavian scale - relatively large congregation in Stockholm, Normalmskyrkan, has decided (2009) to marry homosexuals. Two other congregations have later followed the same decision, but as far as we know no wedding of homosexuals has as yet taken place in a Swedish Baptist church. At the same time, the **Baptist Union of Sweden** along with **The Christian Council of Sweden** have proposed to the law givers, that future weddings be a purely civic-legal matter – i.e. that no church in the future should have the authority to perform marriages. Svenska Kyrkan (the former state church), however, is not for giving up the right to marry, and as long as it does not do so, neither will the Baptist Union. At the same time, the Swedish Baptist Union maintains that they are not bound nor do not have the duty to marry homosexuals, but may have the right to do so.

In 2009, **The Swedish Church Council** pronounced that the word “wedding” should not be used for the relationship between two of the same sex. The new denomination **Gemensam Framtid (‘Joint Future’)** consisting of the Methodist Church, the Covenant Church, and the Baptist Union) grant their churches freedom in the question of homosexuality, and here the leadership will, according to Gen. sec. Karin Wibom, quite certainly pronounce that marriage is a union between man and woman.

In **Evangeliska Frikyrkan (EFK)** – the Evangelical Free Church), which is the other Swedish Baptist convention, a decision has been made on how marriages are to be handled after January 1, 2012. EFK has decided that the churches after this date perform no weddings. All must first have a civic wedding, and then the married couple can receive the
EFK’s attitude is clear: Homosexual practice lived out is not compatible with the teachings of the Bible. The question as to whether persons who live in homophile relationships can become members of the church is being discussed. Mr. Øjvind Tholvsen, program director for EFK, says: ‘The challenge is that we do not want just to expose (prove) our pure teaching when it comes to same sex couples, but also find a way to mediate the kingdom of God and the power of God to people who struggle with their sexuality and to people who live in homophile relationships. How do we create churches, where people can come just as they are, and at the same time be transformed by God’s presence to a life in Jesus’ footsteps?

The Baptist Union of Norway has had rather long conversations on homophilia. Already in 1995, the leadership decided on a statement on homosexual practice. It follows here in its entirety:

- We do recognize that this question is difficult for some. That said, then we also wish to emphasize that the Bible, through all times, has been the highest authority among the Baptists.

- We cannot see that the Bible condemns people who have a homophile disposition. To the contrary, the Bible deals with homosexual practice. The bible texts that speak to such practice always do so in a repudiating way.

- According to the words of the Bible on homosexual relationships, we do not find it right that persons who practice their homosexuality can hold leadership positions in the congregations nor in The Norwegian Baptist Union.

- It is important that we in our churches uphold the ethical and moral standards which are found in the word of God. It is also important that central standards such as love and respect abound in the congregations.

- People with homophile dispositions need a church that shows care and warmth.

This decision was upheld after a debate at the annual meeting in 2000. In 2004, a member who had lived in a homophile relationship was elected to a leadership task in The Third Baptist Church of Oslo. This resulted in the exclusion of this congregation at the annual meeting 2006 with the votes 180 out of 245. The exclusion caused a debate on whether the decision of the convention was adverse to the Baptists’ special focus on each congregation’s freedom and independence.

3. 4. A couple of other communities of faith

Concerning the attitude in Mosaisk Trossamfund (the Jewish community of faith), Head Rabbi Bent Lexner tells: ‘In our context, the new possibility is of no interest. Marriage among Jews is a relationship between one man and one woman. It is but one of many duties in the Jewish religion that you marry, and that cannot be changed into anything else. You do it as man and woman and not as two of the same sex’.

On behalf of Islamisk Trossamfund (the Islamic community of faith), spokesperson Imran Shah says: ‘We have no plans of marrying homosexuals. It is contrary to our values, since marriage in Islam is the union of man and woman. If the possibility arises that homosexuals are allowed to be married in recognized (authorized) communities of faith, then I have difficulty believing that couples of the same sex would wish to use that possibility’.
3. 5. Conclusion

The overview shows that opinions differ, but if we look at the churches with which we normally compare ourselves, then there is a clear tendency to refuse marriage of homosexuals. At the same time, a will is expressed to give room for the homosexuals in the Christian fellowship. This is not only true for the Danish denominations, but also in Scandinavian Baptist context. As Christians who wish to formulate an up-to-date Christian ethics for this area, it is not enough for us to look around us in our present time. We are referred to the biblical texts – to study the sources from whence faith springs and life must take shape.

4. What do the relevant Biblical texts say?

Homosexuality is not treated as a separate theme in the Bible, but is mentioned seven times in different contexts, four times in The Old Testament and three times in The New Testament by Paul.

If our task could be solved by just quoting scripture verses then our task would, for that matter, be solved before we got started, because all seven places condemn homosexual conduct. In the following we will review them one by one and put them in perspective in their textual and cultural-religious context. Finally, we must also deliberate on to what degree e.g. the ordinances of the law of Moses are instructional for us today, and to which degree we can draw conclusions directly from a New Testament ethics to a modern day Christian ethics. It is evident that it is the New Testament texts which are central for us when it comes to Christian ethics. Still, we will first work with the Old Testament, since the New Testament texts are best understood upon the background of the older texts.

4. 1. The Old Testament

Genesis 19

This is the story about two angels who come to Lot while he lived in Sodom. The men of the town surround Lot's house and demand that the two men/angels be delivered to them so they could `lay with them´, in other words rape them. In accordance with the tradition of the sacredness of hospitality, Lot wants to protect his guests, and offers in their place to the assaulters his two unmarried daughters, with whom they may do what they wish. But the two guests end up saving both Lot and his daughters. The Lord has already earlier decided to punish Sodom and Gomorrah, and the judgment – which Abraham attempted to make the Lord to change (Gen. 18: 22-23) – now was carried out.

Comment

While in most biblical references homosexual conduct is tied to idolatry as it was exercised among Israel's neighbors, then here we most likely see an example of homosexual behavior as an attempt to humiliate the strangers through rape, just as sexual abuse is used in connection with modern day warfare.

To consider

When the prophets speak of Sodom’s sin, the point of gravity is not the homosexual conduct/rape, but on the evil of Sodom, injustice, lies, challenge to commit felony, living in abundance, haughtiness, and the lack of care for the suppressed and poor (See Isaiah 1, 10-17; Jer. 23, 14; Ezek. 16, 49-51; Amos 4, 1 f wd.). Ezekiel several times refers that Sodom acted `detestably’ and the possibility cannot be excluded that this also can be a reference to the homosexual conduct/violence in Sodom. But `detestable’ or `abominable’ (Hebr.: tab, toebah) is usually used about idolatry in general (e.g. the eating of pork) and not specifically about sexual sins (Psalm 14, 1; 53, 2; Is. 41, 24; Jer. 6, 15; 32, 35; Ezek. 16, 50 forward, and others). – In Matt. 10, 14-15, Jesus refers to Sodom and Gomorrah in
connection with the situation where the apostles are not welcomed in the towns they arrive at. Jesus follows the prophetic tradition and refers to Sodom’s lack of righteousness and faithfulness towards God. The Letter of Jude v. 7 refers to Sodom’s sin as ‘immorality’ and ‘unnatural lust’.

Judges 19

Often the almost parallel account in the Book of Judges 19 is drawn in, the so-called ‘misdeed in Gibeah’. The Benjaminites living in the city of Gibeah demand a Levite, who is traveling through, delivered by his host so they can have sex with him. Instead he offers them his concubine/2nd wife, and she is raped and tortured to death. Again we have an example of sexual violation in the desire to humiliate one’s opponent.

Comment

This account is not very helpful as we seek to understand homosexuality, because it is never made quite clear what exactly the ‘misdeed’ is. The intended homosexual act is never carried out, and in Judged 20, 5 the intension as it relates to the guest is not here described as rape but as murder. It is therefore most likely that the ‘misdeed’ consists in the Benjaminites violating the unconditional hospitality which must exist among Israel’s twelve tribes. However, the event also leads to war and the dissolving of Israel’s twelve-tribal-unity.

Leviticus 18, 22 and 20, 13

Leviticus 18 and 20 is part of the so-called sanctification ordinances in the Law of Moses (Lev. 17 – 26), which, among other things, contain a long sequence of commandments which are to insure that Israel lives in a way (kosher) differing from its neighboring people.

Here we learn many different things: An Israelite is not allowed to eat shellfish and pork, and cannot wear clothes woven with two different yarns. Chapter 18 states that one cannot approach any one near of kin to oneself ‘to uncover nakedness’. Some interpret this to mean seeing one’s father, mother, sister, brother, aunt etc. naked, but others interpret it as meaning having sexual intercourse with family member, i.e. a prohibition of incest. Further, the same place prohibits intercourse during menstruation, sex with animals, etc. In Lev. 18 v. 22 it is then specifically stated that a man may not have intercourse with a man. The Hebrew text literally reads: ‘A man shall not lie with a male as with a woman: it is an abomination’ (Hebr.: toebah) Lev. 20 v. 13 repeats the ban and orders a death penalty.

Comment

Intercourse with a person of the same sex is characterized as ‘an abomination’, which normally occurs among the Egyptians and Canaanites. It must not take place in Israel and must be punished with death when it occurs.

To consider

The opinion can be held that Lev. 18, 22 and 20, 13 deal with distancing oneself from the homosexuality that was tied to the neighboring peoples’ idolatry and cults; and that the commandment therefore does not shed any light upon how we today look upon the homosexual identity of a person. There is altogether no touching upon this theme, neither in The Old Testament nor in The New. Others will maintain that the commandments are so clear and the punishment so severe that no reconciling-view on homosexual conduct is possible, regardless in which context it is mentioned. Deut. 23, 17-18 seems to confirm that we here speak of homosexuality tied to idolatry, since it here prohibits Israeli men and women to function as ‘cult prostitutes’.

4. 2. The New Testament texts

Romans 1, 26 – 27 (1, 18 – 2, 5)
Romans 1, 26-27 is probably – together with Lev. 18, 22 – the scripture passage that most often is quoted in connection with the Bible’s view on homosexuality. The words about pagans, both men and women, who ‘exchanged natural relations for unnatural’ are spoken in a long argument, which starts in chapter 1, 18 and goes on to chapter 2, 5. Paul here describes, to the readers, sin caused by the pagans’ idolatry. A big part of the argument is known to Paul – and his Jewish readers in Rome – from another writing i.e. The Book of Wisdom. Here, the idolatry of the pagans is characterized as the cause for a long array of sins, hereunder homosexual inputs in the idolatry. This was, as said, known material, and Paul’s Jewish readers have probably been gloating over this flogging of the heathens. They ‘exchanged truth for a lie’ and ‘served the creature rather than the Creator. Women ‘exchanged natural (Greek: ‘in accordance with nature’) relations with unnatural (Greek: ‘against nature’), and ‘men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another’. This speaking about what is ‘in accordance with nature’ and ‘against nature’ surely refers to propagation, which in the biblical texts and in Judaism as such was viewed as the” by nature given cause for sexuality”. Paul continues with further examples on what the heathen’s lack of knowledge of the living God leads to: Injustice, evil, greed, wickedness, envy, blood-thirst, strife-fullness, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, violence, haughtiness, boasting, disobedience toward parents etc. While Paul describes the result of the heathen’s sins, it might be that the Jewish-Christians in Rome – as the list gets longer and longer – start getting sweaty hands, because Paul’s examples surely comes close to something which they themselves recognize from their own lives. At the end of the argument (chapter 2, 1-5) Paul turns directly to the Jewish-Christians in Rome and reminds them that they do the same for which they condemn the heathens, and thus they pass judgment upon themselves. Instead of trusting in the grace of God, they are preoccupied with their own righteousness.

Comment

The homosexual conduct, as well as the other examples of sin, is not just viewed as sin, but also as an expression for punishment: ‘Therefore God gave them up to dishonorable passions’ (1, 26) and ‘Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct’ (Rom 1, 28). – Even though Paul speaks in past tense about the sins which the heathens committed, there is no doubt that the same also happened in the time of Paul, not least in Corinth – from where Paul writes the Letter to the Romans – but also in Rome, where some of the heathen religions branched out and where there were permanent elements of homosexual character in the worship of e.g. Cybele and Aphrodite, where men acted as women and visa versa.

It is discussed whether Paul, with his mention of women who ‘exchanged natural relations for unnatural’, refers to lesbian relationships or not. In such case, this is the only place in the Bible where that is mentioned. And so it is often interpreted today, but in the light of the Church Fathers’ interpretation of this place, it might rather be about women who submitted to intercourse in connection with idolatry (e.g. Clement of Alexandria, year 150 – 215).

To consider

Whereas Judaism condemned homosexual conduct, then it was generally known and accepted in the Greek-Roman culture, where pederasty – an older man having a young man as lover – was considered a higher form of sexuality. While young girls today are often made into sex-objects, in the Greek-Roman culture it was young boys. Most of the comments from the Church Fathers on homosexuality are, thus, precisely on pederasty.

Some emphasize that Paul sets forth a long array of expressions of sin to which we are enslaved, and that his point, precisely, is that only Christ can free us from the sins, including homosexuality. Others are of the opinion that Paul here talks about heterosexuals who willingly exchange their normal sexuality for one which is in conflict with their nature, but that he does not discuss people who have a homosexual identity, and that Romans 1, 26-
1 Corinthians 6, 9 and 1. Timothy 1, 10

Paul writes to the church in Corinth and rebukes them for, among other things, a series of sexual sins. It may seem that the Christians in Corinth have interpreted ‘freedom in Christ’ to mean a permission to do with their bodies whatever they might wish. Therefore, Paul criticizes that the men go to prostitutes and perform other fornications (1 Cor. 6, 12-10).

There is also an example of a case of incestuous conduct in the church (1 Cor. 5). Corinth was known for the sexuality which was practiced in public temples and within many sects. The goddess of the city, Aphrodite, was a hermaphroditic deity, and part of the worship of this deity implied that men and women switched their sexuality as a way to experience the full nature of the deity. In this environment, Paul reminds the Christians of Corinth that ‘you were washed, you were sanctified, and you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God’ (1 Cor. 6, 11). That is a reference to the baptism in water and spirit, which is the beginning of the new life. To the old life, which they ought to have laid behind, belong fornication, idolatry, adultery, and ‘men lying with men’. Those who commit such can – as is also the case for thieves, greedy people, drunkards, scorners, and robbers – not ‘inherit the kingdom of God’. Paul uses two Greek words, (which does not show clearly in the authorized Danish translation), i.e. malakoi, which means ‘soft’ and most likely refers to young boys, maybe boys soliciting sex. The other word, arsenokoitai, is a Greek re-wording of the formulation in Lev. 18 and 20 and means ‘to lie with men’.

In 1 Tim. 1, 10 we find yet another ‘catalogue of depravity’ - list of sinful acts. As we have seen multiple times, it also contains homosexual conduct, this time, among other things, together with murderers, kidnappers, and liars. Again, Paul uses the word arsenokoitai, ‘to lie with men’, taken from Lev. 18 and 20.

Comment

Here Paul quite clearly is conscious of the ordinances in Lev. 18 and 20, and counts homosexuality among the sins which the Christian, already with his baptism, ought to have laid behind himself along with the other deeds which do not belong to the kingdom of God – theft, greed, drunkenness, scorn, etc. Both here as well as in Romans, Paul seems to presume that homosexuality, as well as other sins, can and must be laid behind the Christian when he enters into the new life with Christ. In both places, the main-message of Paul is to affirm, that ‘saved by grace’ does not mean that our life-conduct is of no consequence – on the contrary. To the Christians in Rome Paul says: ‘Do not conform to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God’ (12, 1).

Matthew 19, 11

Finally we will include an 8th scripture. Jesus never mentions homosexuality, even though he mentions and comments on fornication, adultery, and divorce. In Matthew 19 we find one of Jesus’ more cryptic sayings: ‘For there are eunuchs that have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He, who is able to receive this, let him receive it’.

Comment

This normally is interpreted about respectively 1) those who have been born without sexuality e. g. without sex organs, (these were according to rabbinic law ‘not clean’), 2) those who might have been castrated, and 3) those who choose to live in celibacy, which normally was not looked upon kindly by the Jews, for whom propagation within a family was a sacred requirement.
To consider

It is interesting that Jesus seemingly 1) has a view on the question of sexual ability that differs from that of the rabbinic Judaism in his time. Jesus also seems 2) to view men who are castrated differently from the way his contemporaries saw them, classifying these with children of prostitutes and of incestuous relations. They were considered unclean because they were not `whole´ and because they either were not able to have children or to make proof of their own heritage. Finally, it is noteworthy that Jesus seemingly 3) looks favorably upon celibacy. Jesus was, as far as we know, unmarried; which in itself was uncommon for a Jewish man because the propagation of the family was of decisive importance to the Jews – therefore the great importance ascribed genealogical tables in the Bible. But then Jesus opens up to a new view upon these three groups and concludes with the puzzling statement: `He who is able to receive this, let him receive it´ (Matt. 19, 12). – In our connection it is worth considering whether the first group – `eunuchs who have been so from birth´ – can be understood as homophiles with a sexual orientation which is a life-condition?

4. 3. Sexuality in the Old Testament

In the process of putting this into perspective, a word must also be said about sexuality and marriage in The Old Testament. This can only be summarily.

- Man was created as a sexual being; as man and as woman. Part of our being born in the image of God precisely lies in the unification of man and woman. This is the main reason for the high value which Judaism places upon sexuality and marriage; and which must be considered a main-cause for why Judaism rejects homosexuality.

- Propagation is a sacred duty, which is made clear in the so called ‘levirate’, where a man whose brother dies childless bears the duty to impregnate his sister-in-law so that the race can continue. In the tale of Onan, (whose name mistakenly is lent to ‘onanism’), it is precisely the sin of Onan that he does not want to fulfill this duty and cuts short the intercourse before ejaculation (Gen. 38, 6 – 10).

- In spite of this great emphasis laid upon the purpose of sexuality in connection with propagation, the erotic attraction between man and woman is praised, e.g. in the Song of Solomon. It contains many very strong erotic metaphors, which later time Christian interpretation of the song – that it should be about Christ and the church – does not change.

- Marriage is a covenant, established between a man and his wife/wives. The covenant relationship is the decisive and unbreakable element in marriage. If a man and a woman should have sex before marriage, then they must thereafter enter into the covenant.

- Polygamy is the norm rather than the exception in The Old Testament. When Gen. 2, 14 states `Therefore, when a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh´, does not exclude that a man becomes `one flesh´ with more than one wife. This underlines that in marriage it is not much sexuality that binds man and woman together, as the covenant which they have entered into.

- The importance of sexuality and of the matrimonial covenant is also made visual as sexual and matrimonial metaphors are among the most repeated when the relationship of Israel and God is described. It is used positively for `knowing´ God – an expression used for the marriage (intercourse) of a man and a woman. And it is used negatively when the idolatry of Israel is called `adultery´ (Exodus 34, 15; Deut. 31, 16; Judges 2, 17; 8, 27; I Chron. 5, 25 and other places). Both aspects are basic for the book of Hosea, where the prophet
is ordered by God to marry a prostitute to make it clearly intelligible that Israel has performed adultery with other gods.

- Most of us will be in agreement with the Law of Moses in rejecting incest, rape, adultery, and sex with animals, but we will disagree with quite a few other things. We do, for example, reject prostitution, which the O.T. does not. We reject slavery and abuse of slaves for sex, which O.T. does not. We do not consider it punitive unto death to see one's parents without clothes on. We do not consider a woman who has menstruation or a man who at night has ejection as unclean and excluded from worship. We do not see the woman as the property of the man, and we do not consider girls 11-13 years of age ready for marriage.

These examples are exposed not for the purpose of suggesting a reinstatement of e.g. levirate of polygamy. Both existed at the time of Jesus, and Jesus denounces neither. But we must understand that the rules and pretensions that concern the body and sexuality in The Old Testament are very different from ours.

Neither is it to say that when we `skip´ some commandments, then we can also do so in other cases. But we wish to make us aware that it is integral to a decent argumentation to clarify accordingly which criteria we choose to follow some of the laws of The Old Testament, while we reject others.

4. 4. Biblical ethics and present day ethics

This raises the decisive question of how we apply biblical texts to ethical questions. Which authority has for example the Law of Moses? According to which criteria do we consider some laws valid or mandatory, while not others?

Generally, Christians have held the opinion that The Ten Commandments are valid for all people; which on the other hand is not true for the Jewish laws of cleanliness, laws on offerings, etc. Though we consider The Old Testament the word of God, we do not consider ourselves bound by the Law of Moses in moral questions (as stated in examples above). Actually, we do – along with Jesus – clearly distance ourselves from parts of the Law (e.g. some of the cleanliness laws etc.), while we see other laws confirmed in the life of Jesus (to do justice, be merciful, forgive, and reach out to the weak). At this point most Baptists share Luther’s view upon the Law and the Old Testament: Christ is the prism through which we must look. The laws of the Old Testament are mandatory, in so far as they `drive on Christ´, which means if they `magnify Christ´.

This leads us on to the New Testament. To what degree are, e.g. the admonitions of Paul in ethical questions mandatory for us today? Some will emphasize Bible fundamentalism (being faithful to the word of the Scriptures) in the sense that we seek to do precisely what Paul says, and we hold the opinions that Paul held. This means, in such cases, that the word of Paul, which we have treated above, is brought to bear directly today. Thus, homosexuality is a sin from which one must repent and from which one can be set free in Christ. Every attempt to put the words into perspective in relation to time and culture is then seen as attempts to get around the question. The strength in this view is its simple principle and the wish to be faithful to the word of God. The weakness of it is that there will be a long array of words by Paul which in such case, should also count, such as women having to keep quiet in congregations, that it is `against nature´ for a man to have long hair, and for a woman to have short hair, etc. Often it will be said precisely about these words, that they are bound to their time, and that they are not mandatory for us today, and it is hard, if not impossible, consequently to carry this view through. Here, we can also point out that Jesus declares that divorce can only take place in the case of adultery, and that the remarriage
of divorcees is equal to adultery (Matt. 19: 9) – a word which many Christians today choose to discard.

Others consider faithfulness to the Bible to be a question of being faithful to the spirit of the writings. Rules and norms are not seen as timeless but must be interpreted in the light of the Scriptures, of the life of Jesus, and of our insight into a given ethical problem, an insight which the biblical writers did not have. The decisive question is: Can we find a common thread or an objective center in the plurality of the biblical texts? The strength in this approach is (1) that it takes serious the plurality of the Bible itself, (there are laws and guidelines which are mutually contradictory), (2) that it attempts to shield us against reading our own time and problem-complexes into the Bible, and (3) that it also takes our own knowledge and insight seriously. The weakness is that it may give room for a certain subjective arbitration.

Shortly, the question is: Do we see the relationship between the Scriptures and our present time as in a `1 to 1´ ratio – or do we think that the words of the Bible must be interpreted; and what it says must be seen in the light of the insights which we have today?

Concerning the presented question on homosexuality, it is clear that the view on homosexuality in biblical times and today differ. Today, most people (yet not all) will recognize that there are people who have a homosexual identity. Whether it is conditioned genetically, physiologically, biologically, or socio-economically – that, science is not in agreement about. The Bible speaks of different kinds of homosexual conduct which took place in Old Testament and New Testament times, but it does not speak to that which most today recognize as an existential dilemma – also for some Christians – that they have to live with the painful realization that their sexuality is directed toward their own sex. It is not a sexuality which one chooses, but which one has. Anyone who has homosexuals in their family or among their friends can sign to that. You cannot on the basis of the biblical texts claim that it is a sin to be homosexual. The texts of the Bible immediately condemn the homosexual conduct. The imagination of a monogamous homosexual twosome relationship based on a mutual covenant – characterized by faithfulness and security – thus lies beyond the biblical texts. If such a relationship can be counted within the possibilities of a present-day Christian ethics, it must be decided on the grounds of the weight we ascribe respectfully to the biblical texts, the pastoral counseling aspect, and the insight we get about this from science. It is a qualified conversation about this that we owe one another in the churches.

Finally, we wish in this section to point out that, while the church has condemned homosexuality which only scantly is spoken of in the Bible, we have often been completely quiet when it comes to condemning other things which the Bible consequentially and repetitively speaks against; such as suppression, violence, hypocrisy, exploitation of the weak, greed, quick-temperedness, etc. This does not repeal the ethical questions about homosexuality, but it must for the sake of decency be mentioned. We lose our credibility if we `thunder´ against homosexuals while at the same time we look through fingers with other kinds of sin which are mentioned in the same breath. Homosexuality apparently does not belong to Jesus´ `top ten´ list of sins. In any case, he never mentions it. On the top of this list, however, we hear of the sin of looking for the sins of others, while we just happen to overlook our own (Matt. 23).

4. 5. Conclusion

The church’s attitude toward homophilia has traditionally been based upon a sequence of texts which clearly condemn the homosexual conduct. As we have seen, homosexual acts are spoken of relatively few times in the Bible, and these places do, at the best of judgments, not speak to homophilia as many understand it today. We have also seen that the
Bible exposes homosexual conduct as a `special´ sin, but usually mentions it in the same breath with other sins which we today have gotten used to looking milder upon, e.g. lies, boasting, strife, envy etc. The overview raises the question of how honest and consequent we are in our use of the Bible.

5. The church’s traditional view of homosexuality

The text from Romans (1: 26 f.wd.) – which speaks of women and men who exchanged `natural relations with unnatural´ – was from about the year 100, applied in support of a view on nature which declares everything which is `unnatural´ for immoral. This influence came from theologians who were tinted by the Greek culture, in which the growth of the church began to escalate. Homosexuality was `against nature´ because the purpose of human nature is propagation, to have children. `Nature´ has built-in a purpose which homosexual love violates.

After Christianity became state religion in the Roman Empire (throughout the 4th Century), the ethics of the church and the Greek-Roman culture melted into one entity. Emperor Justinian, in the 6th century, interpreted homosexuality as God’s punishment over the people. The Emperor saw in the `devilish tendencies´ – when `certain men´ lend them to shameful lust which is `against nature´ – a danger to the public, since God might choose to take revenge for this by sending `famine, earthquakes, and plague´ upon the entire empire.

The complex of laws of Justinian (from 529 A.D.), therefore, introduced prohibition against all forms of homosexual proliferation- which was now to be punished with death at the stakes. The passing of his laws was influential on both ecclesial and civic laws. The opinion of the Emperor shaped the pattern for later laws passed in Europe – right up to Hitler’s decree in 1936 which condemned homosexuality as `a symptom of degeneration that potentially could destroy our race´.

The judgment upon homosexuality was thus given an array of different expressions throughout the centuries. At first, homosexuality was condemned as idolatry (already in the biblical writings), then as unnatural (when Christianity comes under the influence of Greek thinking), and later as heresy (according to Emperor Justinian’s law-complex) – and up through the centuries homosexuality has been seen as a greater or lesser danger to the state.

5. 1. The Roman Catholic tradition

This kind of `natural thinking´ has been the foundation for the official understanding of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality. Thus, the Catholic tradition has – from its interpretation of Paul by way of Thomas Aquinas (the greatest middle-age theologian within the Roman Catholic tradition) up to Vatican Council II (1962-62) with its Declaration on sexual morality – deemed all homosexual acts at the same time as unnatural and sinful.

The Vatican-document distinguishes between 1) homosexuals whose disposition is caused by faulty up-bringing, lack of sexual development, habit, bad examples, or the like, causes that are temporary or at least not incurable; and 2) homosexuals who definitively are so because of a hereditary sort of instinct or an abnormal peculiarity which is deemed incurable. The latter category `must be handled with understanding and support in the hope of overcoming their personal difficulties and their lack of ability to fit into society´. There is no base for justifying their acts: `Homosexual acts are in accordance with their nature a disorder and can in no case be accepted´. The reason given is that sexuality between people of the same sex does not serve to the propagation of the race.

5. 2. The Protestant tradition
At the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther chose another way than that of the Roman Catholic Church when it comes to marriage. To Luther, this was not a sacrament, but on the contrary, an ordinance that belonged to creation. This meant, for Luther, that the wedding should take place without the church’s participation – today we would call Luther’s view on marriage ‘a civic matter’. When it comes to the view on homosexuality, Luther and the other reformers think in the same way as the Roman Catholic Church.

Today, most protestant theologians think differently about the nature-concept than do most of the Catholics. What is ‘natural’ cannot, per se, be understood as ‘good moral’. The ‘natural’ is not unconditionally ‘the ethical good’. For if that is so, things such as rape, theft, and mendaciousness would be morally defensible. Such is as much embedded ‘in the nature’ as does love and consideration. Moral, must to the contrary, be grounded in what in human vision ‘the good life’ consists of. In the Christian faith, this has to do with what Jesus proclaimed about the kingdom of God. Protestant ethics, thus, goes back behind the era in which the Greek influence with its ‘nature-ethics’ played its role, when the foundation of the Christian ethics is to be found. Most of the protestant theologians who work with biblical ethics start in the New Testament where the message and practice of Jesus is the center.

5. 3. The Baptist tradition

The reformatory baptizers – the Anabaptists – were neither Catholics nor Protestants when they expressed their view on marriage. Marriage belonged for most of them to the sphere of faith, and, therefore, it was a matter for the congregation but without being a sacrament. Their view of marriage pointed in differing directions as there were differing views on the Bible and uses of the Bible among the Anabaptist groups.. If both spouses were baptized, it posed no problem. But, it could result in divorce if only the one part in the marriage was baptized as ‘Anabaptist’. This would be because the admonition of Paul was literally followed: ‘if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so’ (1 Cor. 7, 15). Obedience to Christ was, thus, above the already given vow of faithfulness to the spouse if he/she should wish to separate from the ‘re-baptized’. Other parts of the baptizer-community ended quite differently – with polygamy, because the texts of the Old Testament were given greater attention. When it comes to homosexuality, nothing indicates that the Anabaptists acted any different from other Christians at the time of the Reformation and in centuries thereafter.

5. 4. Conclusion

The view on homosexuals was, up through the history of the Church, determined by the complex of laws of Justinian. The only possible way of life accepted by the church traditions was marriage between man and woman. After the Reformation, however, several interpretations of how a marriage should be understood existed simultaneously.

6. Registered partnerships – within the church and with civic validity

In this section we will clarify the present possibilities which exist for two of the same sex when it comes to establishment of a registered partnership. We will also draw upon the possibilities which are discussed just now when it comes to the churches – also the Baptist Church’s – possible participation in the constitution of a homophile partnership.

6. 1. Marriage, blessing, and registered partnership

Differences and equalities between marriage and registered partnership can be exposed in this way:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Marriage</strong></th>
<th><strong>Blessing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Registered partnership</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marriage is legally binding. A marriage can take place in the city hall or in the churches that have been given authority to marry. A wedding at city hall is called ‘civic’ and is performed by a public servant, while the pastor performs the ‘church’ wedding, in which at least one of the partners must be member of the church in which it is performed. Two persons of the same sex can today be married at city hall, but not in the church. Traditionally, the church wedding is seen as the constitution of marriage.</td>
<td>The blessing is an ecclesial affirmation for couples who have already been married at city hall. Today, it is possible for registered couples of same sex to be blessed in the Folkekirke (the state church) in 6 out of 10 dioceses and in Greenland. The service almost takes the form of a church wedding with hymns, prayer, speech, and blessing, while the first question of the wedding ritual: ‘Do you take this woman/man to be your lawfully wedded wife/husband?’ is omitted, as the question already has been answered at city hall.</td>
<td>According to the proposed law (of Jan. 2012) the law on registered partnerships is repealed. In its place, the government proposes that the law of marriages must be applied to marriages of two persons of differing sexes as well as between two persons of the same sex. Both kinds of marriages can be performed either in Folkekirken (the state church) or in authorized and recognized communities of faith – if these wish to do so.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6. 2. The three-clover model

As ‘a recognized community of faith’, the Baptist Church has – equal to other churches and communities of faith – since 1952, had the authority to perform ecclesial marriages which were legally binding. The Danish practice in this field is called a ‘three-clover model’ because the citizens can choose one out of three possibilities when it comes to marriage with legal validity. Such a wedding can take place in the mayor’s office as a ‘civic wedding’, in Folkekirken (the state church) as a ‘church wedding’, and likewise as a ‘church wedding’ in a number of other communities of faith – among these, the Baptist church.

With the proposed law, by which the marriage-law is changed as indicated above, the three-clover model is maintained. This is clarified in the comments to the proposed law: ‘The rules in the marriage-law about marriage of two persons of the same sex will be applied equally on marriages in authorized and recognized communities of faith. Beyond this, the access to marriage in these communities of faith is not regulated by law. The law-change will for these communities of faith entail that it will be up the individual faith-community to decide whether two persons of the same sex can be married in that faith-community.’

### 6. 3. The one-way model

As Baptists, we have several times pointed to a ‘one-way model’ for all – that marriage should be a civic act which takes place at the mayor’s office. The latest indication of this view-point was in a resolution at the Baptists’ annual meeting in 1999 – when the Danish nation’s Constitution celebrated its 150th anniversary. After the civic wedding it must, naturally, be up to the newly-weds to decide if they wish an ecclesial blessing of their marriage. In such case, it will only be natural to celebrate this with a festive wedding service. This would mean that all churches – Folkekirken (the state church) inclusive – as well as communities of faith relent on the authority to marry.

Baptists must rejoice when seeing that this view-point is now gaining support. In the course of the conversation on registered partnership, several of Folkekirken (the state church)’s most vocal opinion makers have been spokes persons for such a division of marriage as ‘a civic matter’ and the celebration of it with the blessing as ‘an ecclesial act’. Not until this possibility materializes will there be clarity concerning the relationship between
state and church in this matter. But that does not mean that we, thereby, are exempted from making decisions regarding a possible blessing of two of the same sex, if they are to wish God's blessing upon their life together.

6. 4. Conclusion

The present ethical discussion about marriage of homosexuals would be simplified if Danish law separated the civic act – which has legal binding and which takes place in the mayor's office – from the couple's celebration of their life together in a service in the church to which they belong. This should, of course, count for all, both by the assumption of marriage and by the registering of partnership. Hereafter, we would as churches have to make decisions regarding the ethical question about the blessing of a homophile life together.

7. God's blessing and registered partnership

In this section we will try to narrow in on what a blessing means in biblical context. Then we will discuss whether God's blessing can be imparted upon a registered partnership, where two of the same sex, wish to have the blessing given over their life together.

7. 1. What constitutes God's blessing?

The concept 'to bless' or 'blessing', is a central act throughout the entire biblical story. In Hebrews, the word entails the act itself and the power, joy, delight, and enjoyment which the blessing imparts. The same word is used about God who 'blesses' his work of creation, thus also man, and is used of people when 'we praise' God. In common speech, it was thus God who should be the object of our blessing. This original meaning quickly shifted – from blessing God for the bread, to us praying God to bless the bread. We thus make God the subject when it comes to 'blessing' us and all that is ours!

In the New Testament, the blessing is tied to the kingdom of God which Jesus proclaims and actualizes for us. That is clearly expressed in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus states that everyone who in the one way or the other is marginalized, is `blessed' – 'blest', not because of their troubling life-conditions, but because the kingdom of God from now on is their possibility (Matt. 5, 3 fwd.). All who occupy themselves with the qualities of the kingdom of God (peace, joy, justice) bring the blessing of God to others (Matt. 5, 6 fwd.). Paul, in the same perspective, maintains that the gospel of salvation, which he aims to bring to the ends of the earth, consists in `the blessing of Christ in all its fullness´ (Rom. 25, 34).

The blessing which one person pronounces over another person usually takes its form of a prayer or a wish which points to God as the source from whom the actual blessing flows. Even though it is people who lend their voice to the blessing, then profoundly it is God who blesses. So the blessing is our prayer that the powers of the kingdom of God (peace, joy, happiness) becomes a reality for the one who is being blessed – so the goodness of God thereby is promoted. God's blessing is always attached to the expectation that they who are being blessed themselves become a blessing to others (Gen. 12, 1-3). To receive the blessing of God does, thus, not mean the sanctioning of the life that we choose to live. The blessing is a prayer that the will of God be done in and around us so that the powers of the kingdom of God are put in circulation around us where we go.

7. 2 Blessing and ecclesial acts.

Any worship service normally ends with a benediction, `the blessing is pronounced', i.e. the worship leader quotes the Aaronic (Num. 6, 24-26), the apostolic (2 Cor. 13, 13), or a
similar blessing. The idea is that the people of God are now sent out `to say and do what is good´ subsequent that they, now, themselves have received God's blessing.

At special occasions in the life of people and in their service for God — at child dedication, at baptism, at weddings, at the dedication to different types of service, and at intercession at a sick bed — the mentioned blessings can also be put to use. The perspective is in every case the same: A wish that the reality of the kingdom of God (peace, joy, salvation) will be received so that the one or those who have been blessed will promote `all the good´, which they themselves have just received.

In some cases the blessing is accompanied with a touching — by `the laying on of hands´. `Laying hands upon´ has biblical roots, and Jesus made use of this act in connection with the blessing of the children (Mark 10, 16) and in connection with healings (Mark 5, 23). Here, the act is tied to the coming of the kingdom of God and Jesus’ promise of salvation. In the Acts of the Apostles it expresses the impartation of the power of the Holy Spirit (8, 17; 19, 6). The gifts of God are given to the individual – as blessing, as restoration, and as equipment to service. The one or those who are to be blessed, step forward in person. The laying on of hands signifies that `now it is about you´! The perspective of the blessing does in this way not shift, but the blessing is given an actual `face´, it is personified.

There is no mention in NT that the blessing – with or without the laying on of hands – existed among the first Christians in connection with marriage. But we do know from the scarce information we have about the wedding in the Old Testament, that it was customary for the bridal couple during the celebration of the wedding feast to be greeted with God’s blessing, thus expressing the wish that their marriage might be fruitful (Gen 1, 28; 24, 60; Ruth 4, 11-12). It is likely that this wedding custom has tied both blessing and the laying on of hands to weddings among the early Christians – if it so happened.

7. 3. Blessing and registered partnership

When it comes to the question of ecclesial (church-) blessing of the registered partnership, then it becomes complicated for two reasons. For one, disagreement remains (as described above) as to how homosexuality is to be deemed ethically. Further, there is a lack of theological clarity concerning the content of `ecclesial blessing´. There is hardly any way of getting around the fact that the concept `ecclesial blessing´ is pretty much understood as the church’s ‘acceptance´ of the implied way of living together.

If homosexuality is `an expression of sin´ then it gives no meaning to bless a registered partnership. To this, comes, that theologians with this opinion define the blessing – when it comes to a blessing in connection with a wedding – more narrowly than we did above. In connection with a wedding, the blessing consists in a declaration that alone the marriage between man and woman expresses `the order of God´ for creation.

The couple, who is married in the church, is met by the blessing of God in the form of a declaration – stating that the union into which they enter has God’s word and will as prescription and is, thus, his blessed ordinance. Next, the blessing quite clearly consists in an intercessory prayer for the couple. It is noteworthy that the prayer is not for the two spouses as a married couple, nor for their love. It is not the love between the two which is the object of the blessing, but rather the marriage itself as the ordinance of God. In the ritual, this ordinance is blessed while the couple is admonished to love. In the cause of the creation, marriage is appointed to be the way in which man and woman live together, and it is the framework for the family-formation. It is this order, or `function´, which is being blessed, and that cannot be moved over to another way of living together- ways which only at some points resembles a marriage. Thus, goes the argument for a Lutheran understanding that
marriage is an order, instituted by God for man and woman in creation – and homosexuality, subsequently, is understood as a form for co-existence which is not pleasing unto God. If, on the other hand, we see homosexuality as an expression of a life-condition, then God’s blessing may become a possibility for registered couples. In such a case it will be possible to maintain the broad perspective which we unfolded above. The blessing then becomes a wish for the power of God upon the couple’s life together – including their sexuality, and it becomes an intercession that love, faithfulness, joy, and courage for life may signify their monogamous relationship. It is a given, that this also is the point of the blessing for a heterosexual couple. The only difference between the two ways of living together remains that God’s blessing upon a same-sex couple, of course, cannot include the propagation of the race as a possibility. However, the propagation of the race is not the primary function which is in the foreground – where the blessing of God is imparted for the purpose of serving others in love. And so, it is not either with, Jesus with whom the blessing – as we saw above – consisted in putting the powers of the kingdom of God into circulation.

To be `created in the image of God` is not a static `order of creation` for `man and woman`. In the light of the understanding of the New Testament of `the image of God`, we speak of a dynamic process. Christians – also homophile Christians – are called to be shaped into the `image of God` – which is that of Christ (2 Cor. 4, 4 and Rom. 8, 29). In this process, sexuality is not at the center; just as it was not the center of the life of Jesus. Jesus had no sex-fixation. Instead, he makes any kind of sex-fixation relative (see Mark 3, 35 and Luke 11, 28), where people followed him and became his disciples. The conception in the New Testament of Jesus being `God’s image` thus delivers a critical commentary to any attempt to exclusively understand the human as `created in God’s image` according to his/her sex and sexuality. When `God’s blessing` is imparted in this perspective, then what matters for heterosexual as well as for homosexual couples must be being able to further the kingdom of God.

7. 4. For consideration

Does this mean that the church can set the registered partnership on an equal foot with marriage when it comes to the imparting of God’s blessing? That is the question we are to discuss, because homophile couples – on the background of their decision to live in a lifelong and binding relationship – come to us with the question if we will pray for God’s blessing upon their life – `for everything good`.

In Folkekirken (the state church) it is being intensely discussed if the church can use the same ritual for marrying homophiles as is used for marrying a man and a woman. The Bishops have promised the (government) Minister for equality and church, Mr. Manu Særeen, to formulate a suitable ritual if the mentioned proposed law goes through in Folketinget (the parliament). For Baptists, rituals have never been at the center of the Christian life. More important than the question on ritual is, of course, the prayer for God’s blessing – and that is in every case the same, since truly it comes from the one and same God.

7. 5. Conclusion

We saw above that God’s blessing is imparted through prayer; that the powers of the kingdom of God (peace, joy, happiness) may be allotted the one or the ones who are being blessed. Some maintain that this broad perspective is narrowed in when the blessing is used in connection with a wedding. For here the blessing is directed toward God’s order which consists in man and woman being united in view of the propagation of the human race. Therefore, the blessing cannot be used in the establishment of a registered partnership. Others maintain the broad perspective which claims, that if God’s blessing is an intercession that love, faithfulness, and joy may shape people’s life together, then it can also
be used in connection with the initiation of a monogamous relationship in the case that two Christians of the same sex might so wish.

8. How do we as congregations relate to homosexuals?

Till now, we have dealt with homosexuality as an ethical question. We have exposed the topic contemporarily and out from the biblical writings. We have also included the question as to what stand we should take in relation to the marrying of homophiles and the blessing of a monogamous homosexual relationship. Our considerations have been marked by a theoretical approach to the topic. Now we come closer to `real life`. As already mentioned in the introduction, ethics is always about people – about `sisters and brothers in Christ´. We, therefore, now approach homosexuality from a pastoral care perspective. To this, also, belongs the question of how we understand what it means to be a Christian church. Fellowship plays a role for all Christians, regardless of sexual orientation. Therefore, we must also consider how a fellowship of faith- which calls itself a Christian congregation-ought to live. Our church understanding comes into play.

8. 1. Pastoral care aspects

If homosexuality is a sin, how, then, are we to explain to the homophiles- who want to denounce their sexual orientation and therefore at length have attempted to suppress it – that they have this disposition? How do we create space and care for meeting these homophiles with the love of Jesus without first meeting them with condemnation of their homosexual conduct? The church’s view on homosexual conduct will, today, most often be heard and understood as condemnation of the persons themselves. Sexuality, today, has become such a big part of our personality that it, at times, can be difficult to distinguish the person and the sexuality from each other.

If homosexuality is a life-condition with which some people have to live, then that is of consequence for how we as churches ought to act toward the homosexuals. By life-condition, we mean that some people quite simply are homosexual or are homosexually disposed. The scientists are, as already mentioned, at odds about this.

If we presume that homosexuality is a life-condition for some, then that raises several pastoral care questions:

- Is it a life-condition that can be changed by divine intervention, by intercession and/or by therapy?

- How do we explain to homosexuals who declare themselves healed through divine intervention – or, for that matter, through conversation or therapy – that homophilia can also be a life-condition?

- Which help should we recommend to homosexuals who wish to be set free from their homophile disposition?

- Should we interpret such a wish as a ‘giving-in’ to a sociological or religious pressure in order to fit the norm – where the best help, therefore, would be that they accept their homosexual condition? Or should the church offer support and help so that they might be freed of their homosexual orientation?

Pastoral counseling has always been a difficult art. If the counselor or the social environment in which healing might take place – i. e. the church – is in doubt as to whether homophilia should be accepted as an unchangeable life-condition, or if intercession and therapy should be offered with view of healing, then the task becomes even much more difficult for
all parties. Is it in the end, the homophile who determines the cause of events when he asks for accept or help from the counselor or church? Or is it the church’s qualified work with the ethical questions which, in the end, determines how the meeting with the homophile should be embarked upon?

**8. 2. Understanding of church**

Our understanding of what the church is plays a decisive role for how we act as churches toward the homosexuals. And it does so independently of whether we on the grounds of biblical texts deem the homosexual conduct as a sin, which should be healed, or a life-condition with which the homophile must live.

To facilitate the process of putting the different understandings of church into perspective we use three pictures – `the fence’, `the well’, and `the road’.

- We may determine what a Christian church is by focusing on the periphery - `the fence’ - where we set limits which indicate the `inside’ and the `outside’. We could call this understanding of the church `the exclusive church’, in which we work with church-care and church-discipline.

- We can also define the church from its center - `the well´ - which means that Christ embraces all who wish to belong to him and therefore seek the sources of the church through preaching and prayer. We could call this understanding of the church `the inclusive church´ in which we primarily focus on Jesus Christ as the center.

- We can finally choose to focus on the walk with Christ - `the road´ - were we all are on the journey in the conviction that it is not until the end of the road – in the judgment – that we shall see everything clearly. We could call this understanding of the church `the temporary church´, where the weeds and the wheat are allowed to grow side by side.

We have hereby attempted to describe the different understandings of church which we can expect to find among Danish Baptists. There will surely, also, be differences of opinion when it comes to the place of the homosexual in the church – also as this relates to membership and leadership responsibility.

- For some, it will make an important difference if the church gives room for the homosexual to participate in the life of the church; or if he/she should wish to become a member. If a member stands by his/her homosexuality and does not wish to change, this must mean exclusion of the church.

- For others, the homosexual’s partaking in the life of the church – with or without membership – poses no problem, but they may be hesitant in giving him/her leadership responsibility by which the homosexual possibly will be seen as a role-model. This is how Norwegian Baptists have chosen to view the issue.

- Finally, there would be those who are ready to grant both membership and leadership responsibility to the homosexual.

**8. 3. The homosexuals as a challenge to the church**

When these perspectives have been clarified and we have pondered to which picture we ought to compare the church, then the most important challenge remains. As Christian churches we cannot get by with just answering a Yes or a No when we are to make account for our view on homosexuals. Homosexuality challenges us to think about how we ought to live together as Christian churches. All people have a need to belong to others
and to matter to others. We often speak of ‘homecoming’. Home is about a place where others expect precisely me and who will miss me if I do not come. That is what we are created for. And that is a good thing for which Jesus would create space for.

As Baptists we must ask ourselves what kinds of homes we can offer to them who are not able to create traditional families. The traditional core-family with a mother, a father, and children cannot be the only alternative in a society which is filled with lonely people, single mothers, and persons with different sexual dispositions. The answer to this challenge is far more important than to give a theoretical Yes of No to homosexual co-existence. This becomes a front to our very well established way of building a church. The task of the church is to mirror that we want to see homosexuals as well as everyone else be a part of the Christian fellowship.

Homosexuality, thus, raises the question as to how we should be a church. How do we create fellowships that want to help others into the closeness of Jesus and, therefore, bid imperfect and struggling people welcome? Most homosexuals are no greater sinners than others on the grounds of their sexual inclination. In spite of the present day rhetoric about the freedom and right of the individual, we still believe that many of those who struggle with homosexuality do not do so because of a choice. Rather, their bodies have been marked by the fact that we live in a world in which we all, in different ways, experience that this world doesn’t function as creation was intended to – or they live with a life-condition which they cannot just change without their identity being betrayed. The question, therefore, goes: How can we embrace people who in this way are marked by the world in which we live? Where do we find the fellowship that can carry a marginalized person into life’s love-filled center? Does this exist among us?

When it comes to the roominess of the church and its character of a home, we must ask ourselves if we have forgotten the insight from the New Testament – that Jesus never judged the sinner, but the "just"? In this way he showed us our place. Our task is not to judge people in order for God to pardon them. The task is to learn a little from Jesus, to love people and to create fellowship with others – regardless that they are different from the majority.

If we consider homosexuality a sin, then the above argumentation does not necessarily lead to acceptance of homosexual conduct. At this point we will, based e.g. on the words of Jesus to the woman caught in adultery – “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more’ (John 8, 1-11) – be able to point out that Jesus 1) did not condemn the woman. On the contrary, he 2) set her free and 3) admonished her to live another life style.

8.5. Other aspects that should be considered

In the case that a church should consider performing marriage or blessing of homosexual relationships, then more considerations should be drawn in. These considerations are not theological in character but are to the contrary rational.

The first is in view of the relationship to other churches in the Baptist Union – among these the new ethnic (migrant) churches. There is no doubt that we, in this, touch upon an emotionally loaded debate; partly because it touches upon both scripture-understanding and the understanding of the church; partly because we here have to do with the break-down of a 2000 years old tradition. A decision about marrying or blessing a homosexual relationship will most likely create great waves among the congregations of the Baptist Union. This may happen between Danish churches, but the unrest doubtlessly won’t be less in relation to the new migrant churches that only have a short knowledge of Danish culture and church life.
Above, we have seen that there are varying models in the Scandinavian Baptist churches when it comes to deciding whether the churches that wish to perform a wedding or blessing of a homophile couple can remain in the national church. The Norwegian Baptists decided to exclude one of their congregations, while the Swedish Baptist Union gave its churches freedom to choose. In our Danish context, the national conference has never excluded a local church. Strong forces were in play to make this happen in 1984 when the first congregation introduced ‘transferred membership’, but the executive committee (the leadership) refused to bring the union-membership of the Aarhus-congregation to a vote, even though this was possible according to the constitution. It chose the Swedish model and set the congregations free to choose for themselves. At the same time, the union-fellowship created the possibility for local congregations to be able to make qualified decisions which mirrored both biblical and pastoral-care reflections. The time after 1984 proved that this was a wise decision. The union-fellowship endured, and the churches could choose among different models for membership – in a matter which absolutely belong to the central teachings of the Baptists.

Secondly, this also matters in relation to the ecumenical cooperation, not least locally. As we saw above, when it comes to Danish free-church life (i.e. the evangelical not-state-related churches) then we need a thorough discussion before local churches go solo on this. In this matter, congregations that introduce marriage or blessing of homophile couples will also go against significant parts of Folkekirken (the state church). Internationally, we must also reflect on how such a step would affect the relationship to the churches in Burundi and Rwanda, with whom we cooperate.

8.6. Conclusion

Several aspects are decisive for how we as churches should choose to act towards homosexuals. Certainly, there is a pastoral care perspective which goes on embracing homosexuals in the fellowship. But to this comes the different understandings of what a church is – and how we in the churches make decisions when our views differ in ethical questions. Further, the choice of the congregation is made more complicated when it comes to acting toward the homosexual by, whether we consider homophilia a sin or a life-condition. If we see it to be a life-condition, other questions then arise: Is it possible for such a life-condition to be changed? Or can it rightfully be lived out in a monogamous, homosexual practice? – Besides all of this we must also bear in mind that we are part of a long tradition which we, in the given case, will break away from. And at the same time we stand with an inter-denominational consideration which we must also handle – both in relation to other churches of Baptist observance and toward Christian churches with whom we cooperate, both in this country and internationally.

9. Belonging to a fellowship with qualified ethical differences

9.1. Biblical reminders

Paul describes strife in the church in Rome which we – in the light of his admonition to the church – normally consider a ‘first category’, i.e. an adiaforon (see Romans 14, 1 – 15, 7). In Paul’s case, the ethical question was about whether the Christians in Rome were allowed to eat pork and drink wine. Paul’s opinion was that he here dealt with an adiaforon – i.e. an ‘in-between-thing’ which should be left to the assessment of the individual. At the same time he admonishes both parties – ‘the weak’ and ‘the strong’ – to relinquish their mistrust to one another. Instead, they should together seek the kingdom of God. This means righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. He, who thus serves Christ, is acceptable to God and approved by men. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual up-building´ (Rom. 14, 17-19).
One of the questions with which Paul often was faced was how the Christians should look upon the Law of Moses and its possible binding character towards the heathens. Paul denied, as we know, that the heathens should be circumcised or keep the whole of the Law of Moses. It is in that connection that he says, that `in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love´ (Gal. 5, 6). No doubt can exist that, for Paul, the principle under which everything else is subordinated, is that we are `in Christ´ and that faith is `working through love´. What is decisive is not our human status, if we are Jew or gentile, man or woman, slave or free (Gal. 3, 28). Is it possible for us today to view homosexuality in the same way - that what counts is not our human status – including our sexuality – but if we are `in Christ´, if our faith is `working in love´? That the sexuality, in other words, is an adiaforon?

When it comes to homosexuality, the problem is often quite the opposite, namely, that Christians rather view homosexuality as a question with which the faith stands or falls (status confessionis) – which means an issue that easily leads to a split in the church. If that happens, then we act unwisely – and not in accordance with Paul’s guidelines to the church in Rome (see the above); but neither do we act in accordance with his admonition to the zealous in the church in Corinth, where a group was ready for the expulsion of Paul – i. e. expulsion from the Christian faith. It is in that situation he says: `It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time when the Lord comes. He will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his condemnation from God´ (1 Cor. 4, 5). To pass too quick and too drastic judgments upon the faith and lifestyle of others is a trap into which we often fall.

9. 2. Common faith, differing ethical positions

If we are not able to classify homosexuality as an `adiaforon´ and if we at the same time face an ethical question which we deem as not absolutely requiring a church-split, then it must be possible to live with a qualified `ethical disagreement´ in the same congregation and church union. How, then, do we build a faith-community where we for good reasons should live with several ethical positions – yet respecting and loving one another?

The prerequisite for a mutual respect is agreement on a number of basic norms. For one, the church must not contribute to suppression of marginalized groups in society. The way in which Jesus had fellowship with rejected persons shows this very clearly. When it comes to living together sexually, there must be clear agreement among us that this must always be marked by close personal fellowship, life-long faithfulness – i. e. rejection of shifting sexual partners – and responsible living.

Among the common basic norms is also this; that human sexuality primarily expresses itself in the relationship between man and woman in view of the propagation of the human race. Marriage is, thus, the life-form around which Christians generally must stand guard, without disqualifying the fact that sexuality was also created for the purpose of giving joy in a couple’s life and relationship.

The decisive question which comes to its focus here is: Can and should we separate sexuality from love? This ethical question we must answer, before we are able to make decisions about homophile weddings and the blessing of homophile couples. As so many other things, sexuality can be misused. It can be practiced ruthlessly on the expense of others. But it can also serve for the mutual joy. Can this also be true for homophiles, who – along with heterosexual co-Christians – share the wish to live in a monogamous relationship?

9. 3. Conclusion
Some consider the question of homosexuality as an ‘adiaforon’, which means a question which is not decisive for the faith. Others consider it a question of ‘status confessionis’, which means a fundamental question which render all fellowship impossible between those who might accept that homosexuals can materialize their sexuality in a monogamous relationship, and those who cannot accept it. While we in our congregations must make clear to ourselves what stance we take on this, then we should bear in mind the words of Paul about not passing too quick and too drastic judgments upon the faith and lifestyles of others.

10. Questions for group discussion in the churches

Throughout this paper we have raised a number of questions on different places in the text. Our intension is that these questions very well could be discussed in the context where they have been raised – and in the light of the issue raised in the section.

We end up here with raising the principal ethical question on homosexual marital relations – followed by the liturgical question about the possibility of marrying two of the same sex while using the blessing.

In an analysis by the Swedish theologian Göran Bexell on the attitude toward homosexuals among Christians, he draws up four possible stances:

1) It is ethically wrong both to be a homosexual and to practice homosexuality.

2) It is ethically acceptable, and it is being respected that a person is homosexual but it is seen as ethically unacceptable to practice homosexuality.

3) It is ethically acceptable that a person is homosexual and practices his homosexuality – on the condition that the same norms of faithfulness and love are followed as those that count for heterosexual couples.

4) It is ethically acceptable that a person is homosexual and practices his homosexuality – also without the mentioned norms of faithfulness and love being followed.

In the conversation on these positions, we must in the churches circle in on the possibilities that we find compatible with a present day Christian ethics. Is it one or several of the given stances that shall count in your congregation? What does this mean for your own self-understanding as a church?

When we have clarified the ethical question, then it will be plain if it is possible for us to make decisions on the liturgical question – if we as a church can be instrumental at the wedding of homophiles (if that becomes a possibility), or blessing of same sex couples in a worship service. The two answers which we have before us as possibilities are consequences of the two basically different views on homosexuality which are described in this paper:

a. If homosexual practice within a monogamous relationship in itself is interpreted as an expression of ‘sin, which must be denounced’, then an ecclesial blessing of such a relationship is, of course, not possible (see point 1 and 2 above).

b. If homosexual practice in a monogamous relationship is interpreted as an expression of ‘love according to the given conditions’, then an ecclesial blessing of such a relationship may be considered (see point 3 above).

As congregations we will – as already mentioned above – quite surely have differing views on the ethical question. And therefore we will also have differing views on the liturgical
challenge. In this connection, when it comes to the fellowship within the Baptist Union, the
question to us all is: Can we understand our stances as differing expressions that can all
be contained within the frame-work of a present-day Christian ethics – which means to live
with unity within plurality?

We now leave it to the congregations to discuss these present-day ethical questions. Prior
to this discussion it is principally insignificant which viewpoints were held within the task-
force Theological Forum. Were we to be asked, then we will admit that our stances can be
found within Bexell’s 2nd and 3rd standpoints above. But there was no agreement as to
whether marriage of homophiles could take place with the blessing in the midst of the
church.

Theological Forum, Copenhagen, February 2012

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Ole Lundegaard               Bent Hylleberg

11. Literature

(This list contains only a part of the literature used – the English language part).

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