

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. Introductory 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

53 this is one of the reasons why Christians, who understand themselves as homosexuals,
54 often withdraw from the church.

55
56 Our opinion is also – and the review of the biblical texts will show – that homosexuality is
57 not a ‘special’ kind of sin. Homosexuality usually is mentioned in the same breath with e.g.
58 greed, slander, injustice, lies, haughtiness, suppression of the poor, etc. The church, right
59 in the midst of our congregations, has often had a tendency to highlight the area of sexu-
60 ality as ‘the worst’; while we have looked through our fingers with things such as greed,
61 lies, injustice and much else.

62
63 Thus said, the question remains on how the church and the individual handle all of this. It
64 is not, hereby, concluded that the church, without further consideration, can approve of
65 homosexuals living together. Here is an array of view-points – reaching from the view that
66 the homosexual must live in abstinence; to a complete acceptance that homosexuals may
67 marry on equal terms with heterosexuals.

68
69 The presupposition for the following considerations is that we engage in the question of
70 whether it is in synch with Christian ethics that homosexuals can practice their sexuality in
71 a monogamous relationship, which – when it comes to security and faithfulness – is com-
72 patible to a marriage between a man and a woman. Since a married couple, in connection
73 with their wedding, receive God’s blessing, we also include the question here- whether
74 God’s blessing should be applied in connection with the constitution of a homophile, mo-
75 nogamous relationship.

76
77 *The Theological Forum* cannot answer these questions on behalf of the congregations.
78 Our task is to clarify some presuppositions and biblically enlighten the historical and theo-
79 logical questions in an attempt to qualify our present conversation in the local congrega-
80 tions and together in the Baptist Union.

81 82 **1.1. Biblical ethics and present day ethics.**

83
84 *Ethics* is about the way we live. *Christian ethics* is about the ways of living that stems from
85 peoples’ faith in the Gospel – the patterns of living that come into play when people con-
86 fess their faith in the Triune God as Creator, Savior and Renewer. But Christian ethics is
87 not only solely bound to this faith. It is always brought to bear in cultures that are tied to
88 time and space. When we talk about *biblical ethics* we need to specify whether we speak
89 of the ethics of Israel in the time of Moses, or the ethics of the disciples in the time of Je-
90 sus, or the ethics of the early Christian churches in the time of Paul. We shall return to this
91 in the section dealing with the relevant biblical texts.

92
93 *Present day* Christian ethics is not founded only on the biblical texts. Christian ethics *in*
94 *our time* is also tinted by the church’s tradition to which we belong. It makes a difference
95 whether we, today, speak of Christian ethics in the state church (‘Folkekirken’) or in the
96 Pentecostal Church, in the Methodist Church, or in the Catholic Church – or upon the
97 background which is ours as Baptists. In a qualified conversation among Christians, we
98 must listen to others who have become Christians with a history that differs from ours. A
99 *present day* Christian ethics has several historical roots – in both the different biblical texts
100 and in the church’s multiple traditions. Therefore we also listen to the insights which have
101 shaped other Christians.

102
103 *Present day* Christian ethics is also under influence of other factors. As Christians, we live
104 in an interrelation with the society which we wish to serve. Our ethics is always tinted by
105 the cultural context in which we live. That is not always easy to detect – and often we do
106 not presume that is so. However, in these years it is made clear to us. Baptists who come
107 to us from e.g. Burma, Vietnam, or Rwanda have different ethical patterns of life which we

108 must respect as their Baptist tradition – just as they must be open to the conversation
109 about present-day Christian ethics that is shaped by our way of being Baptists with roots in
110 a Danish context. We must listen to one another and try to understand why we have dif-
111 fering forms of *present-day* Baptist ethics in a global world.

112
113 Ethics is about ‘the good life’. We, as Christians, do not have the patent on that. In our day
114 and age many are proprietors of great knowledge which we must include in our attempt to
115 formulate an up-to-date Christian ethics on e.g. homosexuality. Believing in God as Crea-
116 tor has the consequence that we are open to the insights which science today sets forth.
117 Therefore, we listen to science if it discloses knowledge which Christians in earlier genera-
118 tions did not have.

119
120 All of this must be included every time we as Christians attempt to position ourselves in
121 matters of present-day ethical issues. At the same time, we must be open to the possibility
122 that we may not be in agreement among ourselves – and that also goes for the ethical
123 question we have before us here. We will also look at how we should handle such a situa-
124 tion.

125 126 **1. 2. Language definitions**

127
128 We start with some linguistic definitions, which are important for a conversation on the
129 question of homophilia. ‘Homophilia’ means ‘love between two of the same sex’. Homo-
130 sexuality, then, means ‘sexuality between two of the same sex’. ‘Hetero’ means ‘other’.
131 Heterosexual, then, is defined as ‘sexuality between the one and the other sex, i.e. be-
132 tween man and woman’.

133 134 **1. 3. What is homophilia – a life-condition or sin?**

135
136 Homophilia has in later years proved to be one of the most discussed issues within Chris-
137 tian ethics. This is partly caused by the fact that no agreement exists on what causes a
138 person to be a homosexual.

139
140 Is homophilia part of our nature – i.e. a life-condition, a genetic predisposition – or is it a
141 phenomenon caused by environment and upbringing? The professionals disagree. What
142 causes homosexuality remains a mystery. The causes may be genetic and hormonal or
143 psychological and family related. But among researchers there is a high degree of agree-
144 ment that the homosexual disposition is founded in a child’s first months of living, if, in-
145 deed, it is not born with it.

146
147 Homosexuality in the Christian realm is seen from two different theological viewpoints – as
148 human sin or as a life-condition.

149
150 Behind the viewpoint that *homosexuality is a sin* stands a massive Christian tradition.
151 Right from the post-biblical era until the 1900’s, a quite unanimous church-theological tra-
152 dition has interpreted homosexuality as sin or disease (mentally), a handicap or invalidity
153 (in the reproductive glands), from which people can be saved or healed as a sign that the
154 powers of God’s kingdom are at work.

155
156 If the vantage point is that *homosexuality is a sin from which we can be saved*, then it is a
157 joyous occasion when this deliverance takes place. But in the case that this does not hap-
158 pen, then we must still maintain that, even though homosexual lifestyle is a kind of expres-
159 sion that falls outside the will of God, then the homosexuals are – as people – created in
160 God’s image, and therefore of precisely the same value as all other people.

161

162 This carries the ethical consequence that, we, as Christian churches must always show
163 love and openness toward homosexuals; but it does not, as such, imply any accept of ho-
164 mosexual practice.

165
166 Others choose, as vantage point, the opinion that *homophilia is a life-condition*. It is then a
167 'disposition' – biologically and sociologically – which means that it is natural to love people
168 of the same sex as oneself and to integrate sexuality and love in that way. We here talk of
169 a biological drive which in itself is ethically neutral. None of us can without impunity ignore
170 or suppress this drive, but we can give shape to the sexual drive in many ways. This is
171 true for both hetero- and homosexuals.

172
173 If being homosexual is a (*given*) *life-condition*, then the question becomes how homophiles
174 should live with this condition. Is it possible to live out the homosexuality in actual life – in
175 an (officially) registered partnership, i.e. in a love relationship with only one partner – or
176 should the homosexual live in sexual abstinence?

177
178 If we respond affirmatively to this last question, then some are of the opinion that we be-
179 tray the homosexual in his/her struggle for identity. Condemning the sexual drive toward
180 people of the same sex makes us accomplices (co-guilty) in psychological destruction and,
181 in a worst case scenario, suicide, unless we manage to give room for the homosexual in
182 our relationships. But if we answer affirmatively that it is possible to live out homosexuality
183 in practice in a love relationship with one partner, then we must consider the possibility of
184 giving a church blessing to this relationship.

185 186 **1. 4. Conclusion**

187
188 The above states that, today, there is no agreement on which vantage point we as Chris-
189 tians should take when we are to understand what homophilia is – and, on that basis, give
190 shape to a contemporary Christian ethics on homophiles who live out their homosexuality
191 in a monogamous relationship, characterized by faithfulness and security.

192 193 194 **2. Marriage and partnership in the Danish society today**

195
196 In this section we shall look at the attitudes that exist today toward homophilia and homo-
197 sexuality in the culture in which we live – and what that means for the laws that are being
198 passed by the Folketinget (the parliament) as valid Danish law.

199 200 **2. 1. Married, blessed or registered**

201
202 Today, homosexuals must contact the local mayor's office if they wish to be officially regis-
203 tered as partners. They can neither marry in the state church (Folkekirken) nor in other
204 communities of faith in this country. The possibility for them to do so is drawn up as the
205 law-proposal which was sent into hearing in January 2012.

206
207 The law on *registered partnerships* came into effect in 1989. In 2015, the bishops of the
208 state church introduced guidelines for a ritual of blessing of homophile couples. This
209 means that homosexual couples can be blessed in a church service-like occasion, but this
210 act has no legal binding.

211
212 Registered partnership is not a marriage. It differs, e.g. as far as parental rights go, but
213 also the legal definition of marriage and registered partnership differ. Marriage is assumed
214 by two persons of different sexes. Registered partnership is assumed by two persons of
215 the same sex. It is, for the moment, discussed what a proposed new practice may come to

216 mean language-wise – can registered partners be called spouses in the same way as is
217 the case in the actual marriage ritual for man and woman?

218 219 **2.2. Marriage**

220
221 In the early Christian church, marriage was not tied to any churchly rite, but was – as in the
222 cultures surrounding the churches – an agreement between two spouses; and in effect,
223 between their respective families. Marriage was founded on the biblical tales thereof. The
224 content of the marriage should reflect the faithfulness and security which found its ideal in
225 God's covenant with the church. In this context, marriage was about the continuation of the
226 family (reproduction). This remained the constant content, while the framework thereof –
227 the initiation of the covenant in marriage – has varied throughout the times.

228
229 In the bible we find no text which confirms the involvement of clergy at the wedding. And
230 yet, the church father Ignatius in the 2nd Century writes that it would be right that a bishop
231 takes part. But the usual practice in the ancient church and up through the Middle Ages
232 has been that the vow of faithfulness between the two parties was legally binding. Then
233 the bride was given over to the groom, and the marriage was instituted without a clergy-
234 man's involvement.

235
236 Gradually the custom was introduced to have a so-called bridal mass after the wedding
237 ceremony, in which the couple received a blessing. At this mass, the married couple now
238 professed publicly their vows of faithfulness. When the Roman Catholic Church defined
239 marriages as 'a sacrament' (in 1274), it came to mean that it is a bride and a groom who
240 institute the sacrament through their "yes" ("I do" / "I will") to each other. Thus, it is not the
241 church's blessing – mediated e.g. by a priest – which sanctifies the marriage.

242
243 At the time of the Revolution, Martin Luther still wanted to distinguish between the worldly
244 and the sacred (the 'churchly'). He suggested that the wedding itself with the couple's
245 public "yes" to one another should take place outside the church door. Hereby is stated
246 that marriage is an order, which belongs to that which God has created; just as God also –
247 according to Luther – is behind all other arrangements of society. After the public wedding,
248 the couple then enters the church where they receive prayer for their marriage and receive
249 the blessing.

250
251 After the Reformation, it was the public wedding that validated the marriage, and the cler-
252 gyman became – after King Frederik II's ordinance of 1562 – the public servant with legal
253 authority, who should guarantee the validity of the marriage. It was, however, still common
254 in Denmark that the wedding took place in the home – with the clergyman's involvement.
255 Not until a new ritual emerged in 1651 was the marriage moved into the church.

256
257 Throughout the 1700's the legal conditions of the marriage were clarified. Marriage be-
258 came a legal institution. Gradually, the thought arose to introduce a civic (i.e. not-church -
259 related) marriage with the same legality as the church wedding. In 1851, a law was passed
260 on civic marriages, which was intended for people who were not members of the state
261 church (Folkekirken).

262
263 Another problem, which arose in the 1800's, was the question of marriage between di-
264 vorcees. The church, through its ritual, declared marriage to be life-long. Attempts were
265 made with special wedding rituals. Today, the same ritual is used, whether the spouses
266 are married for the first time or re-married. The pastors in "Folkekirken" (the state church),
267 as well as in other communities of faith, are at liberty to choose if they will marry divorcees.

268
269 After the break down of the ethics of matrimonial living, there arose, in the 1970's, among
270 young and older people alike, the 'paperless marriage', which also made its way into

271 some congregations. This did not happen without discussion. Where we accepted this
272 form of living together was under the condition that the content of a marriage – faithfulness
273 and security – remained unchanged, while it was, once again in the history of the church,
274 only the framework surrounding the living together which changed form.

275

276 **2. 3. Registered partnership**

277

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

286

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

294

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

301

302 **2. 4. Homosexuality and Danish law**

303

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

310

311 **2. 5. Conclusion**

312

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

320

321 **3. Marriage and partnership in other churches and communities of** 322 **faith today**

323

324 The divide between the opinion that homosexuality is a sin or that it is a given life-condition
325 goes vertically down through many church denominations. Here is an overview which

326 mostly looks at the Danish situation, but we will also look at Baptist churches in other
327 countries. Finally, we shall look at two non-Christian communities of faith which we have
328 within the Danish society.

329 330 **3. 1. Danish free churches**

331
332 **The Apostolic Church:** Though people who have chosen to live as homosexuals in a
333 married state may wish to have a regulated order, and though they have the right to live
334 under decent conditions, then in our church it cannot be in a marriage. The view of the
335 church is clear: Homophile marriage cannot be reconciled with God's word in the bible;
336 and we will partake neither in the blessing of nor marriage of people of the same sex.

337
338 **The Methodist Church** – both in Denmark and internationally, discusses this issue. The
339 church wants to be in service for *all* people, but find homosexual practice incompatible with
340 the church's present teaching. A change in attitude may be detected in the future.

341
342 **Missionsforbundet – The Covenant Church** belongs to the conservative wing of the
343 Church and does not find that a marriage rite founded upon the Scriptures is possible for
344 homosexuals. However, it is fine that society gives room for a partner-registration, and we
345 do not denounce homosexuals from the possibility of living under God's blessing.

346
347 **The Pentecostal Church,** on the basis of the Scriptures, sees homosexuality as a sin;
348 and cannot agree to the blessing of a same-sex union, but wants to surround homophiles,
349 with whom the church may come into contact, with the same respect as all other people.

350 351 **3. 2. `Folkekirken` (the state church) and the Roman Catholic Church**

352
353 **Folkekirken** stands divided on the question of homosexuality, but is under pressure (ac-
354 cording the law on registered partnerships (1989), by homosexual organizations in society,
355 and from politicians; all aiming at equalization between the registered partnership and the
356 traditional marriage – including a sex-neutral wedding rite.

357
358 The conservative wing of Folkekirken with its mission societies see homosexuality as sin
359 and exclude the possibility of ecclesial blessing as well as weddings for people of the
360 same sex. The charismatic wing of Folkekirken (`Dansk Oase`) sees homosexuality as a
361 sin, from which people may be freed. If this does not happen, the homophile must live in
362 sexual abstinence – and the church must support them as millions of heterosexuals who
363 also live in celibacy.

364
365 The vast, mostly inactive majority of the state church's membership expresses the wish for
366 a full church marriage of homosexuals – as an expression of `neighborly love`. In 2005,
367 seven of the bishops issued `guidelines for celebration of a worship-setting for the blessing
368 of registered partners`.

369
370 In 2010 a governmental committee on `the state church and registered partnerships` rec-
371 ommends continued distinction between the traditional wedding and registered partner-
372 ships; and a majority of the committee recommends that a church ritual be authorized, by
373 which registered partnerships can be blessed in the state church.

374
375 **The Roman Catholic Church** in Denmark: `Homosexuals have never and will never in the
376 future have the possibility of marrying in the Catholic Church, or in any other way have
377 their relationship approved`. The creation story and Jesus' words on marriage is brought to
378 bear – the church has elevated marriage to a sacrament. The words of Jesus exclude the
379 possibility for divorce, and marriage is always between one man and one woman.

380

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

436 church blessing. It is clear from the document that only a couple consisting of man and
437 woman may be blessed.

438
439 EFKs attitude is clear: Homosexual practice lived out is not compatible with the teachings
440 of the Bible. The question as to whether persons who live in homophile relationships can
441 become members of the church is being discussed. Mr. Øjvind Tholvsen, program director
442 for EFK, says: `The challenge is that we do not want just to expose (prove) our pure teach-
443 ing when it comes to same sex couples, but also find a way to mediate the kingdom of
444 God and the power of God to people who struggle with their sexuality and to people who
445 live in homophile relationships. How do we create churches, where people can come just
446 as they are, and at the same time be transformed by God's presence to a life in Jesus'
447 footsteps?

448
449 **The Baptist Union of Norway** has had rather long conversations on homophilia. Already
450 in 1995, the leadership decided on a statement on homosexual practice. It follows here in
451 its entirety:

452
453 - We do recognize that this question is difficult for some. That said, then we also wish to
454 emphasize that the Bible, through all times, has been the highest authority among the
455 Baptists.

456
457 - We cannot see that the Bible condemns people who have a homophile disposition. To
458 the contrary, the Bible deals with homosexual practice. The bible texts that speak to such
459 practice always do so in a repudiating way.

460
461 - According to the words of the Bible on homosexual relationships, we do not find it right
462 that persons who practice their homosexuality can hold leadership positions in the congregations
463 nor in The Norwegian Baptist Union.

464
465 - It is important that we in our churches uphold the ethical and moral standards which are
466 found in the word of God. It is also important that central standards such as love and respect
467 abound in the congregations.

468
469 - People with homophile dispositions need a church that shows care and warmth.

470
471 This decision was upheld after a debate at the annual meeting in 2000. In 2004, a member
472 who had lived in a homophile relationship was elected to a leadership task in The Third
473 Baptist Church of Oslo. This resulted in the exclusion of this congregation at the annual
474 meeting 2006 with the votes 180 out of 245. The exclusion caused a debate on whether
475 the decision of the convention was adverse to the Baptists' special focus on each congrega-
476 tion's freedom and independence.

477 478 **3. 4. A couple of other communities of faith**

479
480 Concerning the attitude in **Mosaisk Trossamfund** (the Jewish community of faith), Head
481 Rabbi Bent Lexner tells: `In our context, the new possibility is of no interest. Marriage
482 among Jews is a relationship between one man and one woman. It is but one of many duties
483 in the Jewish religion that you marry, and that cannot be changed into anything else.
484 You do it as man and woman and not as two of the same sex´.

485
486 On behalf of **Islamisk Trossamfund** (the Islamic community of faith), spokesperson Imran
487 Shah says: `We have no plans of marrying homosexuals. It is contrary to our values, since
488 marriage in Islam is the union of man and woman. If the possibility arises that homosexu-
489 als are allowed to be married in recognized (authorized) communities of faith, then I have
490 difficulty believing that couples of the same sex would wish to use that possibility´.

491
492
493
494
495
496
497
498
499
500
501
502
503
504
505
506
507
508
509
510
511
512
513
514
515
516
517
518
519
520
521
522
523
524
525
526
527
528
529
530
531
532
533
534
535
536
537
538
539
540
541
542
543
544
545

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 Gomorra, 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 fwd.). 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 Gomorra in

546 connection with the situation where the apostles are not welcomed in the towns they arrive
547 at. Jesus follows the prophetic tradition and refers to Sodom's lack of righteousness and
548 faithfulness towards God. The Letter of Jude v. 7 refers to Sodom's sin as 'immorality' and
549 'unnatural lust'.

550 551 **Judges 19**

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

557 558 **Comment**

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

566 567 **Leviticus 18, 22 and 20, 13**

568 Leviticus 18 and 20 is part of the so-called sanctification ordinances in the Law of Moses
569 (Lev. 17 – 26), which, among other things, contain a long sequence of commandments
570 which are to insure that Israel lives in a way (kosher) differing from its neighboring people.
571 Here we learn many different things: An Israelite is not allowed to eat shellfish and pork,
572 and cannot wear clothes woven with two different yarns. Chapter 18 states that one cannot
573 approach any one near of kin to oneself 'to uncover nakedness'. Some interpret this to
574 mean seeing one's father, mother, sister, brother, aunt etc. naked, but others interpret it as
575 meaning having sexual intercourse with family member, i.e. a prohibition of incest. Further,
576 the same place prohibits intercourse during menstruation, sex with animals, etc. In Lev. 18
577 v. 22 it is then specifically stated that a man may not have intercourse with a man. The
578 Hebrew text literally reads: 'A man shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an
579 abomination' (Hebr.: *toebah*) Lev. 20 v. 13 repeats the ban and orders a death penalty.

580 581 **Comment**

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

585 586 **To consider**

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

596 597 **4. 2. The New Testament texts**

598 599 **Romans 1, 26 – 27 (1, 18 – 2, 5)**

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

625 626 **Comment**

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

636
637 It is discussed whether Paul, with his mention of women who `exchanged natural relations
638 for unnatural´, refers to lesbian relationships or not. In such case, this is the only place in
639 the Bible where that is mentioned. And so it is often interpreted today, but in the light of the
640 Church Fathers' interpretation of this place, it might rather be about women who submitted
641 to intercourse in connection with idolatry (e.g. Clement of Alexandria, year 150 – 215).

642 643 **To consider**

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

649
650 Some emphasize that Paul sets forth a long array of expressions of sin to which we are
651 enslaved, and that his point, precisely, is that only Christ can free us from the sins, includ-
652 ing homosexuality. Others are of the opinion that Paul here talks about heterosexuals who
653 willingly exchange their normal sexuality for one which is in conflict with their nature, but
654 that he does not discuss people who have a homosexual *identity*, and that Romans 1, 26-

655 27, therefore, does not help to clarify what stand the church must take to this problem to-
656 day.

657

658 **1. Corinthians 6, 9 and 1. Timothy 1, 10**

659 Paul writes to the church in Corinth and rebukes them for, among other things, a series of
660 sexual sins. It may seem that the Christians in Corinth have interpreted `freedom in Christ`
661 to mean a permission to do with their bodies whatever they might wish. Therefore, Paul
662 criticizes that the men go to prostitutes and perform other fornications (1 Cor. 6, 12-10).
663 There is also an example of a case of incestuous conduct in the church (1 Cor. 5) Corinth
664 was known for the sexuality which was practiced in public temples and within many sects.
665 The goddess of the city, Aphrodite, was a hermaphroditic deity, and part of the worship of
666 this deity implied that men and women switched their sexuality as a way to experience the
667 full nature of the deity. In this environment, Paul reminds the Christians of Corinth that `you
668 were washed, you were sanctified, and you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus
669 Christ and in the Spirit of our God` (1 Cor. 6, 11). That is a reference to the baptism in wa-
670 ter and spirit, which is the beginning of the new life. To the old life, which they ought to
671 have laid behind, belong fornication, idolatry, adultery, and `men lying with men`. Those
672 who commit such can – as is also the case for thieves, greedy people, drunkards, scorn-
673 ers, and robbers – not `inherit the kingdom of God`. Paul uses two Greek words, (which
674 does not show clearly in the authorized Danish translation), i.e. *malakoi*, which means
675 `soft` and most likely refers to young boys, maybe boys soliciting sex. The other word, *ar-*
676 *senokoitai*, is a Greek re-wording of the formulation in Lev. 18 and 20 and means `to lie
677 with men`.

678

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

683

684 **Comment**

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

695

696 **Matthew 19, 11**

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

703

704 **Comment**

705 This normally is interpreted about respectively 1) those who have been born without sexu-
706 ality e. g. without sex organs, (these were according to rabbinic law `not clean`), 2) those
707 who might have been castrated, and 3) those who choose to live in celibacy, which nor-
708 mally was not looked upon kindly by the Jews, for whom propagation within a family was a
709 sacred requirement.

710
711
712
713
714
715
716
717
718
719
720
721
722
723
724
725
726
727
728
729
730
731
732
733
734
735
736
737
738
739
740
741
742
743
744
745
746
747
748
749
750
751
752
753
754
755
756
757
758
759
760
761
762
763

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

764 is ordered by God to marry a prostitute to make it clearly intelligible that Israel has per-
765 formed adultery with other gods.

766
767 - Most of us will be in agreement with the Law of Moses in rejecting incest, rape, adultery,
768 and sex with animals, but we will disagree with quite a few other things. We do, for exam-
769 ple, reject prostitution, which the O.T. does not. We reject slavery and abuse of slaves for
770 sex, which O.T. does not. We do not consider it punitive unto death to see one's parents
771 without clothes on. We do not consider a woman who has menstruation or a man who at
772 night has ejection as unclean and excluded from worship. We do not see the woman as
773 the property of the man, and we do not consider girls 11-13 years of age ready for mar-
774 riage.

775
776 These examples are exposed not for the purpose of suggesting a reinstatement of e.g.
777 levirate or polygamy. Both existed at the time of Jesus, and Jesus denounces neither. But
778 we must understand that the rules and pretensions that concern the body and sexuality in
779 The Old Testament are very different from ours.

780
781 Neither is it to say that when we `skip´ some commandments, then we can also do so in
782 other cases. But we wish to make us aware that it is integral to a decent argumentation to
783 clarify accordingly which criteria we choose to follow some of the laws of The Old Testa-
784 ment, while we reject others.

785 786 **4. 4. Biblical ethics and present day ethics**

787
788 This raises the decisive question of how we apply biblical texts to ethical questions. Which
789 authority has for example the Law of Moses? According to which criteria do we consider
790 some laws valid or mandatory, while not others?

791
792 Generally, Christians have held the opinion that *The Ten Commandments* are valid for all
793 people; which on the other hand is not true for the Jewish laws of cleanliness, laws on of-
794 ferings, etc. Though we consider *The Old Testament* the word of God, we do not consider
795 ourselves bound by the Law of Moses in moral questions (as stated in examples above).
796 Actually, we do – along with Jesus – clearly distance ourselves from parts of the Law (e.g.
797 some of the cleanliness laws etc.), while we see other laws confirmed in the life of Jesus
798 (to do justice, be merciful, forgive, and reach out to the weak). At this point most Baptists
799 share Luther's view upon the Law and the Old Testament: Christ is the prism through
800 which we must look. The laws of the Old Testament are mandatory, in so far as they `drive
801 on Christ´, which means if they `magnify Christ´.

802
803 This leads us on to *the New Testament*. To what degree are, e.g. the admonitions of Paul
804 in ethical questions mandatory for us today? Some will emphasize Bible fundamentalism
805 (being faithful to the word of the Scriptures) in the sense that we seek to do precisely what
806 Paul says, and we hold the opinions that Paul held. This means, in such cases, that the
807 word of Paul, which we have treated above, is brought to bear directly today. Thus, homo-
808 sexuality is a sin from which one must repent and from which one can be set free in Christ.
809 Every attempt to put the words into perspective in relation to time and culture is then seen
810 as attempts to get around the question. The strength in this view is its simple principle and
811 the wish to be faithful to the word of God. The weakness of it is that there will be a long
812 array of words by Paul which in such case, should also count, such as women having to
813 keep quiet in congregations, that it is `against nature´ for a man to have long hair, and for
814 a woman to have short hair, etc. Often it will be said precisely about these words, that they
815 are bound to their time, and that they are not mandatory for us today, and it is hard, if not
816 impossible, consequently to carry this view through. Here, we can also point out that Jesus
817 declares that divorce can only take place in the case of adultery, and that the remarriage

818 of divorcees is equal to adultery (Matt. 19: 9) – a word which many Christians today
819 choose to discard.

820
821 Others consider faithfulness to the Bible to be a question of being faithful to the spirit of the
822 writings. Rules and norms are not seen as timeless but must be interpreted in the light of
823 the Scriptures, of the life of Jesus, and of our insight into a given ethical problem,- an in-
824 sight which the biblical writers did not have. The decisive question is: Can we find a com-
825 mon thread or an objective center in the plurality of the biblical texts? The strength in this
826 approach is (1) that it takes serious the plurality of the Bible itself, (there are laws and
827 guidelines which are mutually contradictory), (2) that it attempts to shield us against read-
828 ing our own time and problem-complexes into the Bible, and (3) that it also takes our own
829 knowledge and insight seriously. The weakness is that it may give room for a certain sub-
830 jective arbitration.

831
832 Shortly, the question is: Do we see the relationship between the Scriptures and our pre-
833 sent time as in a `1 to 1´ ratio – or do we think that the words of the Bible must be inter-
834 preted; and what it says must be seen in the light of the insights which we have today?

835
836 Concerning the presented question on homosexuality, it is clear that the view on homo-
837 sexuality in biblical times and today differ. Today, most people (yet not all) will recognize
838 that there are people who have a *homosexual identity*. Whether it is conditioned genetical-
839 ly, physiologically, biologically, or socio-economically – that, science is not in agreement
840 about. The Bible speaks of different kinds of *homosexual conduct* which took place in Old
841 Testament and New Testament times, but it does not speak to that which most today rec-
842 ognize as an existential dilemma – also for some Christians – that they have to live with
843 the painful realization that their sexuality is directed toward their own sex. It is not a sexu-
844 ality which one chooses, but which one *has*. Anyone who has homosexuals in their family
845 or among their friends can sign to that. You cannot on the basis of the biblical texts claim
846 that it is a sin to *be* homosexual. The texts of the Bible immediately condemn the homo-
847 sexual conduct. The imagination of a monogamous homosexual twosome relationship
848 based on a mutual covenant – characterized by faithfulness and security – thus lies be-
849 yond the biblical texts. If such a relationship can be counted within the possibilities of a
850 present-day Christian ethics, it must be decided on the grounds of the weight we ascribe
851 respectfully to the biblical texts, the pastoral counseling aspect, and the insight we get
852 about this from science. It is a qualified conversation about this that we owe one another in
853 the churches.

854
855 Finally, we wish in this section to point out that, while the church has condemned homo-
856 sexuality which only scantily is spoken of in the Bible, we have often been completely quiet
857 when it comes to condemning other things which the Bible consequentially and repetitively
858 speaks against; such as suppression, violence, hypocrisy, exploitation of the weak, greed,
859 quick-temperedness, etc. This does not repeal the ethical questions about homosexuality,
860 but it must for the sake of decency be mentioned. We lose our credibility if we `thunder´
861 against homosexuals while at the same time we look through fingers with other kinds of sin
862 which are mentioned in the same breath. Homosexuality apparently does not belong to
863 Jesus' `top ten´ list of sins. In any case, he never mentions it. On the top of this list, how-
864 ever, we hear of the sin of looking for the sins of others, while we just happen to overlook
865 our own (Matt. 23).

866 867 **4. 5. Conclusion**

868
869 The church's attitude toward homophilia has traditionally been based upon a sequence of
870 texts which clearly condemn the homosexual conduct. As we have seen, homosexual acts
871 are spoken of relatively few times in the Bible, and these places do, at the best of judg-
872 ments, not speak to homophilia as many understand it today. We have also seen that the

873 Bible exposes homosexual conduct as a `special` sin, but usually mentions it in the same
874 breath with other sins which we today have gotten used to looking milder upon, e.g. lies,
875 boasting, strife, envy etc. The overview raises the question of how honest and consequent
876 we are in our use of the Bible.

877 878 **5. The church's traditional view of homosexuality**

879
880 The text from Romans (1: 26 fwd.) – which speaks of women and men who exchanged
881 `natural relations with unnatural` – was from about the year 100, applied in support of a
882 view on nature which declares everything which is `unnatural` for immoral. This influence
883 came from theologians who were tinted by the Greek culture, in which the growth of the
884 church began to escalate. Homosexuality was `against nature` because the purpose of
885 human nature is propagation, to have children. `Nature` has built-in a purpose which ho-
886 mosexual love violates.

887
888 After Christianity became state religion in the Roman Empire (throughout the 4th Century),
889 the ethics of the church and the Greek-Roman culture melted into one entity. Emperor Jus-
890 tinian, in the 6th century, interpreted homosexuality as Gods punishment over the people.
891 The Emperor saw in the `devilish tendencies` – when `certain men` lend them to shameful
892 lust which is `against nature` – a danger to the public, since God might choose to take re-
893 venge for this by sending `famine, earthquakes, and plague` upon the entire empire.

894
895 The complex of laws of Justinian (from 529 A.D.), therefore, introduced prohibition against
896 all forms of homosexual proliferation- which was now to be punished with death at the
897 stakes. The passing of his laws was influential on both ecclesial and civic laws. The opin-
898 ion of the Emperor shaped the pattern for later laws passed in Europe – right up to Hitler's
899 decree in 1936 which condemned homosexuality as `a symptom of degeneration that po-
900 tentially could destroy our race`.

901
902 The judgment upon homosexuality was thus given an array of different expressions
903 throughout the centuries. At first, homosexuality was condemned as idolatry (already in the
904 biblical writings), then as unnatural (when Christianity comes under the influence of Greek
905 thinking), and later as heresy (according to Emperor Justinian's law-complex) – and up
906 through the centuries homosexuality has been seen as a greater or lesser danger to the
907 state.

908 909 **5. 1. The Roman Catholic tradition**

910
911 This kind of `natural thinking` has been the foundation for the official understanding of the
912 Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality. Thus, the Catholic tradition has – from its in-
913 terpretation of Paul by way of Thomas Aquinas (the greatest middle-age theologian within
914 the Roman Catholic tradition) up to Vatican Council II (1962-62) with its *Declaration on*
915 *sexual morality* – deemed all homosexual acts at the same time as unnatural and sinful.

916
917 The Vatican-document distinguishes between 1) homosexuals whose disposition is
918 caused by faulty up-bringing, lack of sexual development, habit, bad examples, or the like,
919 causes that are temporary or at least not incurable; and 2) homosexuals who definitively
920 are so because of a hereditary sort of instinct or an abnormal peculiarity which is deemed
921 incurable. The latter category `must be handled with understanding and support in the
922 hope of overcoming their personal difficulties and their lack of ability to fit into society`.
923 There is no base for justifying their acts: `Homosexual acts are in accordance with their
924 nature a disorder and can in no case be accepted`. The reason given is that sexuality be-
925 tween people of the same sex does not serve to the propagation of the race.

926 927 **5. 2. The Protestant tradition**

928
929
930
931
932
933
934
935
936
937
938
939
940
941
942
943
944
945
946
947
948
949
950
951
952
953
954
955
956
957
958
959
960
961
962
963
964
965
966
967
968
969
970
971
972
973
974
975
976
977
978
979
980
981
982

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:

<p>Marriage 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.</p>	<p>Blessing 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.</p>	<p>Registered partnership 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.</p>
---	--	---

984

985

6. 2. The three-clover model

986

987

988

989

990

991

992

993

994

995

996

997

998

999

1000

1001

1002

1003

6. 3. The one-way model

1004

1005

1006

1007

1008

1009

1010

1011

1012

1013

1014

1015

1016

1017

1018

1019

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.`

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

1020 state and church in this matter. But that does not mean that we, thereby, are exempted
1021 from making decisions regarding a possible blessing of two of the same sex, if they are to
1022 wish God's blessing upon their life together.

1024 **6. 4. Conclusion**

1025
1026 The present ethical discussion about marriage of homosexuals would be simplified if Dan-
1027 ish law separated the civic act – which has legal binding and which takes place in the
1028 mayor's office – from the couple's celebration of their life together in a service in the
1029 church to which they belong. This should, of course, count for all, both by the assumption
1030 of marriage and by the registering of partnership. Hereafter, we would as churches have to
1031 make decisions regarding the ethical question about the blessing of a homophile life to-
1032 gether.

1034 **7. God's blessing and registered partnership**

1035
1036 In this section we will try to narrow in on what a blessing means in biblical context. Then
1037 we will discuss whether God's blessing can be imparted upon a registered partnership,
1038 where two of the same sex, wish to have the blessing given over their life together.

1040 **7. 1. What constitutes God's blessing?**

1041
1042 The concept 'to bless' or 'blessing', is a central act throughout the entire biblical story. In
1043 Hebrews, the word entails the act itself and the power, joy, delight, and enjoyment which
1044 the blessing imparts. The same word is used about God who 'blesses' his work of crea-
1045 tion, thus also man, and is used of people when 'we praise' God. In common speech, it
1046 was thus God who should be the object of our blessing. This original meaning quickly
1047 shifted – from blessing God for the bread, to us praying God to bless the bread. We thus
1048 make God the subject when it comes to 'blessing' us and all that is ours!

1049
1050 In the New Testament, the blessing is tied to the kingdom of God which Jesus proclaims
1051 and actualizes for us. That is clearly expressed in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Here Je-
1052 sus states that everyone who in the one way or the other is marginalized, is 'blessed' –
1053 'blest', not because of their troubling life-conditions, but because the kingdom of God from
1054 now on is their possibility (Matt. 5, 3 fwd.). All who occupy themselves with the qualities of
1055 the kingdom of God (peace, joy, justice) bring the blessing of God to others (Matt. 5, 6
1056 fwd.). Paul, in the same perspective, maintains that the gospel of salvation, which he aims
1057 to bring to the ends of the earth, consists in 'the blessing of Christ in all its fullness' (Rom.
1058 25, 34).

1059
1060 The blessing which one person pronounces over another person usually takes its form of a
1061 prayer or a wish which points to God as the source from whom the actual blessing flows.
1062 Even though it is people who lend their voice to the blessing, then profoundly it is God who
1063 blesses. So the blessing is our prayer that the powers of the kingdom of God (peace, joy,
1064 happiness) becomes a reality for the one who is being blessed – so the goodness of God
1065 thereby is promoted. God's blessing is always attached to the expectation that they who
1066 are being blessed themselves become a blessing to others (Gen. 12, 1-3). To receive the
1067 blessing of God does, thus, not mean the sanctioning of the life that we choose to live. The
1068 blessing is a prayer that the will of God be done in and around us so that the powers of the
1069 kingdom of God are put in circulation around us where we go.

1071 **7. 2 Blessing and ecclesial acts.**

1072
1073 Any worship service normally ends with a benediction, 'the blessing is pronounced', i.e.
1074 the worship leader quotes the Aaronic (Num. 6, 24-26), the apostolic (2 Cor. 13, 13), or a

1075 similar blessing. The idea is that the people of God are now sent out `to say and do what is
1076 good´ - subsequent that they, now, themselves have received God's blessing.

1077
1078 At special occasions in the life of people and in their service for God – at child dedication,
1079 at baptism, at weddings, at the dedication to different types of service, and at intercession
1080 at a sick bed – the mentioned blessings can also be put to use. The perspective is in every
1081 case the same: A wish that the reality of the kingdom of God (peace, joy, salvation) will be
1082 received so that the one or those who have been blessed will promote `all the good´,
1083 which they themselves have just received.

1084
1085 In some cases the blessing is accompanied with a touching – by `the laying on of hands´.
1086 `Laying hands upon´ has biblical roots, and Jesus made use of this act in connection with
1087 the blessing of the children (Mark 10, 16) and in connection with healings (Mark 5, 23).
1088 Here, the act is tied to the coming of the kingdom of God and Jesus' promise of salvation.
1089 In the Acts of the Apostles it expresses the impartment of the power of the Holy Spirit (8,
1090 17; 19, 6). The gifts of God are given to the individual – as blessing, as restoration, and as
1091 equipment to service. The one or those who are to be blessed, step forward in person. The
1092 laying on of hands signifies that `now it is about you´! The perspective of the blessing does
1093 in this way not shift, but the blessing is given an actual `face´, it is personified.

1094
1095 There is no mention in NT that the blessing – with or without the laying on of hands – ex-
1096 isted among the first Christians in connection with marriage. But we do know from the
1097 scarce information we have about the wedding in the Old Testament, that it was customary
1098 for the bridal couple during the celebration of the wedding feast to be greeted with God's
1099 blessing, thus expressing the wish that their marriage might be fruitful (Gen 1, 28; 24, 60;
1100 Ruth 4, 11-12). It is likely that this wedding custom has tied both blessing and the laying on
1101 of hands to weddings among the early Christians – if it so happened.

1102 1103 **7. 3. Blessing and registered partnership**

1104
1105 When it comes to the question of ecclesial (church-) blessing of the registered partnership,
1106 then it becomes complicated for two reasons. For one, disagreement remains (as de-
1107 scribed above) as to how homosexuality is to be deemed ethically. Further, there is a lack
1108 of theological clarity concerning the content of `ecclesial blessing´. There is hardly any way
1109 of getting around the fact that the concept `ecclesial blessing´ is pretty much understood
1110 as the church's `acceptance´ of the implied way of living together.

1111
1112 If homosexuality is `an expression of sin´ then it gives no meaning to bless a registered
1113 partnership. To this, comes, that theologians with this opinion define the blessing – when it
1114 comes to a blessing in connection with a wedding – more narrowly than we did above. In
1115 connection with a wedding, the blessing consists in a declaration that alone the marriage
1116 between man and woman expresses `the order of God´ for creation.

1117
1118 The couple, who is married in the church, is met by the blessing of God in the form of a
1119 declaration – stating that the union into which they enter has God's word and will as pre-
1120 script and is, thus, his blessed ordinance. Next, the blessing quite clearly consists in an
1121 intercessory prayer for the couple. It is noteworthy that the prayer is not for the two spous-
1122 es as a married couple, nor for their love. It is not the love between the two which is the
1123 object of the blessing, but rather the marriage itself as the ordinance of God. In the ritual,
1124 this ordinance is blessed while the couple is admonished to love. In the cause of the crea-
1125 tion, marriage is appointed to be the way in which man and woman live together, and it is
1126 the framework for the family-formation. It is this order, or `function´, which is being blessed,
1127 and that cannot be moved over to another way of living together- ways which only at some
1128 points resembles a marriage. Thus, goes the argument for a Lutheran understanding that

1129 marriage is an order, instituted by God for man and woman in creation – and homosexu-
1130 lity, subsequently, is understood as a form for co-existence which is not pleasing unto God.

1131
1132 If, on the other hand, we see homosexuality as *an expression of a life-condition*, then
1133 God's blessing may become a possibility for registered couples. In such a case it will be
1134 possible to maintain the broad perspective which we unfolded above. The blessing then
1135 becomes a wish for the power of God upon the couple's life together – including their sex-
1136 uality, and it becomes an intercession that love, faithfulness, joy, and courage for life may
1137 signify their monogamous relationship. It is a given, that this also is the point of the bless-
1138 ing for a heterosexual couple. The only difference between the two ways of living together
1139 remains that God's blessing upon a same-sex couple, of course, cannot include the prop-
1140 agation of the race as a possibility. However, the propagation of the race is not the primary
1141 `function' which is in the foreground – where the blessing of God is imparted for the pur-
1142 pose of serving others in love. And so, it is not either with, Jesus with whom the blessing –
1143 as we saw above – consisted in putting the powers of the kingdom of God into circulation.

1144
1145 To be `created in the image of God' is not a static `order of creation' for `man and wom-
1146 an'. In the light of the understanding of the New Testament of `the image of God', we
1147 speak of a dynamic process. Christians – also homophile Christians – are called to be
1148 shaped into the `image of God' – which is that of Christ (2 Cor. 4, 4 and Rom. 8, 29). In
1149 this process, sexuality is not at the center; just as it was not the center of the life of Jesus.
1150 Jesus had no sex-fixation. Instead, he makes any kind of sex-fixation relative (see Mark 3,
1151 35 and Luke 11, 28), where people followed him and became his disciples. The conception
1152 in the New Testament of Jesus being `God's image' thus delivers a critical commentary to
1153 any attempt to exclusively understand the human as `created in God's image' according to
1154 his/her sex and sexuality. When `God's blessing' is imparted in this perspective, then what
1155 matters for hetero- as well as for homo-sexual couples must be being able to further the
1156 kingdom of God.

1157 1158 **7. 4. For consideration**

1159
1160 Does this mean that the church can set the registered partnership on an equal foot with
1161 marriage when it comes to the imparting of God's blessing? That is the question we are to
1162 discuss, because homophile couples – on the background of their decision to live in a life-
1163 long and binding relationship – come to us with the question if we will pray for God's bless-
1164 ing upon their life – `for everything good'.

1165
1166 In Folkekirken (the state church) it is being intensely discussed if the church can use the
1167 same ritual for marrying homophiles as is used for marrying a man and a woman. The
1168 Bishops have promised the (government) Minister for equality and church, Mr. Manu Sa-
1169 reen, to formulate a suitable ritual if the mentioned proposed law goes through in Folke-
1170 tinget (the parliament). For Baptists, rituals have never been at the center of the Christian
1171 life. More important than the question on ritual is, of course, the prayer for God's blessing
1172 – and that is in every case the same, since truly it comes from the one and same God.

1173 1174 **7. 5. Conclusion**

1175
1176 We saw above that God's blessing is imparted through prayer; that the powers of the king-
1177 dom of God (peace, joy, happiness) may be allotted the one or the ones who are being
1178 blessed. Some maintain that this broad perspective is narrowed in when the blessing is
1179 used in connection with a wedding. For here the blessing is directed toward God's order
1180 which consists in man and woman being united in view of the propagation of the human
1181 race. Therefore, the blessing cannot be used in the establishment of a registered partner-
1182 ship. Others maintain the broad perspective which claims, that if God's blessing is an in-
1183 tercession that love, faithfulness, and joy may shape people's life together, then it can also

1184 be used in connection with the initiation of a monogamous relationship in the case that two
1185 Christians of the same sex might so wish.

1187 **8. How do we as congregations relate to homosexuals?**

1188
1189 Till now, we have dealt with homosexuality as an ethical question. We have exposed the
1190 topic *contemporarily* and out from the *biblical* writings. We have also included the question
1191 as to what stand we should take in relation to the *marrying* of homophiles and the *blessing*
1192 of a monogamous homosexual relationship. Our considerations have been marked by a
1193 theoretical approach to the topic. Now we come closer to `real life`. As already mentioned
1194 in the introduction, ethics is always about people – about `sisters and brothers in Christ`.
1195 We, therefore, now approach homosexuality from a *pastoral care* perspective. To this, al-
1196 so, belongs the question of how we understand what it means to be a Christian church.
1197 Fellowship plays a role for all Christians, regardless of sexual orientation. Therefore, we
1198 must also consider how a fellowship of faith- which calls itself a Christian congregation-
1199 ought to live. Our *church understanding* comes into play.

1201 **8. 1. Pastoral care aspects**

1202
1203 If homosexuality is a *sin*, how, then, are we to explain to the homophiles- who want to de-
1204 nounce their sexual orientation and therefore at length have attempted to suppress it – that
1205 they have this disposition? How do we create space and care for meeting these homo-
1206 philes with the love of Jesus without first meeting them with condemnation of their homo-
1207 sexual conduct? The church's view on homosexual conduct will, today, most often be
1208 heard and understood as condemnation of the persons themselves. Sexuality, today, has
1209 become such a big part of our personality that it, at times, can be difficult to distinguish the
1210 person and the sexuality from each other.

1211
1212 If homosexuality is a *life-condition* with which some people have to live, then that is of con-
1213 sequence for how we as churches ought to act toward the homosexuals. By life-condition,
1214 we mean that some people quite simply are homosexual or are homosexually disposed.
1215 The scientists are, as already mentioned, at odds about this.

1216
1217 If we presume that homosexuality is a life-condition for some, then that raises several pas-
1218 toral care questions:

1219
1220 - Is it a life-condition that can be changed by divine intervention, by intercession and/or by
1221 therapy?

1222
1223 - How do we explain to homosexuals who declare themselves healed through divine inter-
1224 vention – or, for that matter, through conversation or therapy – that homophilia can also be
1225 a life-condition?

1226
1227 - Which help should we recommend to homosexuals who wish to be set free from their
1228 homophile disposition?

1229
1230 - Should we interpret such a wish as a 'giving-in' to a sociological or religious pressure in
1231 order to fit the norm – where the best help, therefore, would be that they accept their ho-
1232 mosexual condition? Or should the church offer support and help so that they might be
1233 freed of their homosexual orientation?

1234
1235 Pastoral counseling has always been a difficult art. If the counselor or the social environ-
1236 ment in which healing might take place – i. e. the church – is in doubt as to whether homo-
1237 philia should be accepted as an unchangeable life-condition, or if intercession and therapy
1238 should be offered with view of healing, then the task becomes even much more difficult for

1239 all parties. Is it in the end, the homophile who determines the cause of events when he
1240 asks for accept or help from the counselor or church? Or is it the church's qualified work
1241 with the ethical questions which, in the end, determines how the meeting with the homo-
1242 phile should be embarked upon?

1243 **8. 2. Understanding of church**

1244
1245
1246 Our understanding of what the church is plays a decisive role for how we act as churches
1247 toward the homosexuals. And it does so *independently* of whether we on the grounds of
1248 biblical texts deem the homosexual conduct as a sin, which should be healed, or a life-
1249 condition with which the homophile must live.

1250
1251 To facilitate the process of putting the different understandings of church into perspective
1252 we use three pictures – ‘the fence’, ‘the well’, and ‘the road’.

1253
1254 - We may determine what a Christian church is by focusing on the periphery - ‘the fence’ -
1255 where we set limits which indicate the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’. We could call this under-
1256 standing of the church ‘the exclusive church’, in which we work with church-care and
1257 church-discipline.

1258
1259 - We can also define the church from its center - ‘the well’ - which means that Christ em-
1260 braces all who wish to belong to him and therefore seek the sources of the church through
1261 preaching and prayer. We could call this understanding of the church ‘the inclusive
1262 church’ in which we primarily focus on Jesus Christ as the center.

1263
1264 - We can finally choose to focus on the walk with Christ - ‘the road’ - were we all are on
1265 the journey in the conviction that it is not until the end of the road – in the judgment – that
1266 we shall see everything clearly. We could call this understanding of the church ‘the tempo-
1267 rary church’, where the weeds and the wheat are allowed to grow side by side.

1268
1269 We have hereby attempted to describe the different understandings of church which we
1270 can expect to find among Danish Baptists. There will surely, also, be differences of opinion
1271 when it comes to the place of the homosexual in the church – also as this relates to *mem-
1272 bership and leadership responsibility*.

1273
1274 - For some, it will make an important difference if the church gives room for the homosex-
1275 ual to participate in the life of the church; or if he/she should wish to become a member. If
1276 a member stands by his/her homosexuality and does not wish to change, this must mean
1277 exclusion of the church.

1278
1279 - For others, the homosexual's partaking in the life of the church – with or without mem-
1280 bership – poses no problem, but they may be hesitant in giving him/her leadership respon-
1281 sibility by which the homosexual possibly will be seen as a role-model. This is how Norwe-
1282 gian Baptists have chosen to view the issue.

1283
1284 - Finally, there would be those who are ready to grant both membership and leadership
1285 responsibility to the homosexual.

1286 **8. 3. The homosexuals as a challenge to the church**

1287
1288
1289 When these perspectives have been clarified and we have pondered to which picture we
1290 ought to compare the church, then the most important challenge remains. As Christian
1291 churches we cannot get by with just answering a Yes or a No when we are to make ac-
1292 count for our view on homosexuals. Homosexuality challenges us to think about how we
1293 ought to live together as Christian churches. All people have a need to belong to others

1294 and to matter to others. We often speak of `homecoming`. Home is about a place where
1295 others expect *precisely me* and who will miss *me* if I do not come. That is what we are
1296 created for. And that is a good thing for which Jesus would create space for.
1297

1298 As Baptists we must ask ourselves what kinds of homes we can offer to them who are not
1299 able to create traditional families. The traditional core-family with a mother, a father, and
1300 children cannot be the only alternative in a society which is filled with lonely people, single
1301 mothers, and persons with different sexual dispositions. The answer to this challenge is far
1302 more important than to give a theoretical Yes of No to homosexual co-existence. This be-
1303 comes a front to our very well established way of building a church. The task of the church
1304 is to mirror that we want to see homosexuals as well as everyone else be a part of the
1305 Christian fellowship.
1306

1307 Homosexuality, thus, raises the question as to how we should be a church. How do we
1308 create fellowships that want to help others into the closeness of Jesus and, therefore, bid
1309 imperfect and struggling people welcome? Most homosexuals are no greater sinners than
1310 others on the grounds of their sexual inclination. In spite of the present day rhetoric about
1311 the freedom and right of the individual, we still believe that many of those who struggle
1312 with homosexuality do not do so because of a choice. Rather, their bodies have been
1313 marked by the fact that we live in a world in which we all, in different ways, experience that
1314 this world doesn't function as creation was intended to – or they live with a life-condition
1315 which they cannot just change without their identity being betrayed. The question, there-
1316 fore, goes: How can we embrace people who in this way are marked by the world in which
1317 we live? Where do we find the fellowship that can carry a marginalized person into life's
1318 love-filled center? Does this exist among us?
1319

1320 When it comes to the roominess of the church and its character of a home, we must ask
1321 ourselves if we have forgotten the insight from the New Testament – that Jesus never
1322 judged the sinner, but the "just"? In this way he showed us our place. Our task is not to
1323 judge people in order for God to pardon them. The task is to learn a little from Jesus, to
1324 love people and to create fellowship with others – regardless that they are different from
1325 the majority.
1326

1327 If we consider homosexuality a sin, then the above argumentation does not necessarily
1328 lead to acceptance of homosexual conduct. At this point we will, based e. g. on the words
1329 of Jesus to the woman caught in adultery – `Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no
1330 more` (John 8, 1-11) – be able to point out that Jesus 1) did not condemn the woman. On
1331 the contrary, he 2) set her free and 3) admonished her to live another life style.
1332

1333 **8. 5. Other aspects that should be considered**

1334

1335 In the case that a church should consider performing marriage or blessing of homosexual
1336 relationships, then more considerations should be drawn in. These considerations are not
1337 theological in character but are to the contrary rational.
1338

1339 The first is in view of the relationship to other churches in the Baptist Union – among these
1340 the new ethnic (migrant) churches. There is no doubt that we, in this, touch upon an emo-
1341 tionally loaded debate; partly because it touches upon both scripture-understanding and
1342 the understanding of the church; partly because we here have to do with the break-down
1343 of a 2000 years old tradition. A decision about marrying or blessing a homosexual relation-
1344 ship will most likely create great waves among the congregations of the Baptist Union.
1345 This may happen between Danish churches, but the unrest doubtlessly won't be less in
1346 relation to the new migrant churches that only have a short knowledge of Danish culture
1347 and church life.
1348

1349 Above, we have seen that there are varying models in the Scandinavian Baptist churches
1350 when it comes to deciding whether the churches that wish to perform a wedding or bless-
1351 ing of a homophile couple can remain in the national church. The Norwegian Baptists decid-
1352 ed to exclude one of their congregations, while the Swedish Baptist Union gave its
1353 churches freedom to choose. In our Danish context, the national conference has never
1354 excluded a local church. Strong forces were in play to make this happen in 1984 when the
1355 first congregation introduced `transferred membership`, but the executive committee (the
1356 leadership) refused to bring the union-membership of the Aarhus-congregation to a vote,
1357 even though this was possible according to the constitution. It chose the Swedish model
1358 and set the congregations free to choose for themselves. At the same time, the union-
1359 fellowship created the possibility for local congregations to be able to make qualified deci-
1360 sions which mirrored both biblical and pastoral-care reflections. The time after 1984
1361 proved that this was a wise decision. The union-fellowship endured, and the churches
1362 could choose among different models for membership – in a matter which absolutely be-
1363 long to the central teachings of the Baptists.

1364
1365 Secondly, this also matters in relation to the ecumenical cooperation, not least locally. As
1366 we saw above, when it comes to Danish free-church life (i.e. the evangelical not-state-
1367 related churches) then we need a thorough discussion before local churches go solo on
1368 this. In this matter, congregations that introduce marriage or blessing of homophile couples
1369 will also go against significant parts of Folkekirken (the state church). Internationally, we
1370 must also reflect on how such a step would affect the relationship to the churches in Bu-
1371 rundi and Rwanda, with whom we cooperate.

1372 1373 **8. 6. Conclusion**

1374
1375 Several aspects are decisive for how we as churches should choose to act towards homo-
1376 sexuals. Certainly, there is a pastoral care perspective which goes on embracing homo-
1377 sexuals in the fellowship. But to this comes the different understandings of what a church
1378 is – and how we in the churches make decisions when our views differ in ethical questions.
1379 Further, the choice of the congregation is made more complicated when it comes to acting
1380 toward the homosexual by, whether we consider homophilia a sin or a life-condition. If we
1381 see it to be a life-condition, other questions then arise: Is it possible for such a life-
1382 condition to be changed? Or can it rightfully be lived out in a monogamous, homosexual
1383 practice? – Besides all of this we must also bear in mind that we are part of a long tradition
1384 which we, in the given case, will break away from. And at the same time we stand with an
1385 inter-denominational consideration which we must also handle – both in relation to other
1386 churches of Baptist observance and toward Christian churches with whom we cooperate,
1387 both in this country and internationally.

1388 1389 1390 **9. Belonging to a fellowship with qualified ethical differences**

1391 1392 **9. 1. Biblical reminders**

1393
1394 Paul describes strife in the church in Rome which we – in the light of his admonition to the
1395 church – normally consider a `first category`, i.e. an *adiaforon* (see Romans 14, 1 – 15, 7).
1396 In Paul's case, the ethical question was about whether the Christians in Rome were al-
1397 lowed to eat pork and drink wine. Paul's opinion was that he here dealt with an *adiaforon* –
1398 i. e. an `in-between-thing` which should be left to the assessment of the individual. At the
1399 same time he admonishes both parties – `the weak` and `the strong` – to relinquish their
1400 mistrust to one another. Instead, they should together seek the kingdom of God. This
1401 means righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. He, who thus serves Christ, is
1402 acceptable to God and approved by men. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and
1403 for mutual up-building` (Rom. 14, 17-19).

1404
1405
1406
1407
1408
1409
1410
1411
1412
1413
1414
1415
1416
1417
1418
1419
1420
1421
1422
1423
1424
1425
1426
1427
1428
1429
1430
1431
1432
1433
1434
1435
1436
1437
1438
1439
1440
1441
1442
1443
1444
1445
1446
1447
1448
1449
1450
1451
1452
1453
1454
1455
1456
1457
1458

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

1459
1460
1461
1462
1463
1464
1465
1466
1467
1468
1469
1470
1471
1472
1473
1474
1475
1476
1477
1478
1479
1480
1481
1482
1483
1484
1485
1486
1487
1488
1489
1490
1491
1492
1493
1494
1495
1496
1497
1498
1499
1500
1501
1502
1503
1504
1505
1506
1507
1508
1509
1510
1511
1512
1513

Some consider the question of homosexuality as an *adiaphoron*, 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*

1514 challenge. In this connection, when it comes to the fellowship within the Baptist Union, the
1515 question to us all is: Can we understand our stances as differing expressions that can all
1516 be contained within the frame-work of a present-day Christian ethics – which means to live
1517 with unity within plurality?

1518
1519 We now leave it to the congregations to discuss these present-day *ethical* questions. Prior
1520 to this discussion it is principally insignificant which viewpoints were held within the task-
1521 force *Theological Forum*. Were we to be asked, then we will admit that our stances can be
1522 found within Bexell's 2nd and 3rd standpoints above. But there was no agreement as to
1523 whether marriage of homophiles could take place with the blessing in the midst of the
1524 church.

1525

1526

1527 **Theological Forum, Copenhagen, February 2012**

1528

1529

1530

1531 **Jacob Broholm Møller**

Lone Møller-Hansen

Claus Bækgaard

1532

1533

1534

Ole Lundegaard

Bent Hylleberg

1535

1536

1537

1538

1539

1540

1541

1542

1543 **11. Literature**

1544

1545 (This list contains only a part of the literature used – the English language part).

1546

1547 Campolo, Tony & McLaren, Brian: *Adventures in Missing the point*. Zondervan 2003, Grand Rapids

1548

1549 Campolo, Tony: *Speaking My Mind*. W. Publishing 2004, Nashville, Tennessee

1550

1551 Grenz, Stanley: *Welcoming but not Affirming*. Westminster John Knox Press 1998, Louisville, Kentucky

1552

1553 Grimsrud, Ted & Nation, Mark Thiessen: *Reasoning Together*. Herald Press 2008, Pennsylvania

1554

1555 Hays, Richard B.: *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. T&T Clark 1996, Edinburgh

1556

1557 King, Michael: *Stumbling Toward a Genuine Conversation on Homosexuality*. Cascadia 2007, Pennsylvania

1558

1559 Stassen, Glen & Gushee, David: *Kingdom Ethics*. InterVarsity Press 2003, Illinois

1560

1561 Stott, John R.W.: *Issues Facing Christians Today*. Zondervan 2005, Grand Rapids, Michigan

1562

1563 Wink, Walter (red.): *Homosexuality and the Christian Faith*. Fortress Press 1999, Minnesota