

THE SPIRITS THAT MOTIVATE THE WORLD

SESSION FIVE

HOMOSEXUALITY: PUBLIC JUSTICE, PUBLIC MORALITY AND CHRISTIAN COMPASSION

1. Some background to the contemporary situation.
 - (a) with reference to "The problem of Homosexuality" by D L Roper. Available from Chris Gousmett or Stuart Henderson.
 - (b) with reference to the video material from TVNZ.
 - (c) with reference to "The Homosexual Law Reform Bill" by David Stewart. Available on request from Duncan Roper.
2. A look at the Biblical material.
 - (a) with reference to the joint Methodist, Presbyterian Public Questions committee paper entitled "Biblical perspectives on Homosexuality." Available on request from Duncan Roper.
 - (b) with reference to "Some comments on the joint Methodist, Presbyterian Public Questions committee "Biblical perspectives on Homosexuality." by A R Kerr. Available on request from Duncan Roper.
 - (c) with reference to "The joint Methodist, Presbyterian Public Questions committee "Biblical perspectives on Homosexuality." by D Stewart.
 - (d) with reference to "The social effects of Homosexuality in New Zealand." By the Coalition of Concerned Citizens.
 - (e) with reference to "The problem of Homosexuality" by D L Roper.
3. What causes homosexuality?
 - (a) with reference to "The returns of love" A Davidson, IVP.
 - (b) with reference to "The social effects of Homosexuality in New Zealand." By the Coalition of Concerned Citizens.
 - (c) with reference to "The problem of Homosexuality" by D L Roper.
4. Homosexuality: Public justice, public morals and christian compassion.
 - (a) with reference to "The social effects of Homosexuality in New Zealand."
 - (b) with reference to "The problem of Homosexuality" by D L Roper.

THE PROBLEM OF HOMOSEXUALITY

D L ROPER

INTRODUCTION

In the present article I try to give some background to the present vexed social and political climate in which the debate on the Fran Wilde bill to the New Zealand Parliament is taking place, together with a review of some of the Biblical exegesis on the subject, all with a view to suggesting guidelines as to how the matter should be dealt with from a Biblical perspective. As such the material presumes a familiarity with the material presented earlier in the series "The spirits that motivate the world."

SOME BACKGROUND TO THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

On Saturday July 23, 1977, the Wellington "Evening Post" featured a half-page advertisement sponsoring the cause of social justice for homosexuals. It was signed by a number of prominent Wellington academics and clergymen, and invited further public support. Sunday July 24 saw the opening of Gay Pride Week taking the form of a church-like service commemorating the persecution and killing of homosexual persons by the Nazis. On the following morning, the national network's programme "Morning Report" interviewed two of those persons responsible for organising Gay Pride Week. When asked why they had gone to clergymen for support, they replied, that they did so in an effort to gain **respectability** for their cause. On Tuesday July 26, the "Evening Post" carried an article on the "Gay" response to accusations that homosexuality in San Francisco has reached proportions warranting it being called a modern Sodom.

The scene eight years later:

1985 has seen the introduction of a Bill into the New Zealand Parliament seeking to make widespread changes to the legislation on homosexuality. We have been made aware of the threat of AIDS. We have seen the mobilisation of a major petition against this Bill. We have seen vigorous "debate" that has often been little more than name-calling with attempts to slander the other side as "perverts" or "Fascists." We have heard extreme suggestions made, some on the part of those who vigorously oppose the Bill, others from those who support the Bill, regarding the intent of those who oppose it. Some churches have vigorously opposed the Bill; others have equally vigorously supported it. I would like to suggest that all the elements of the 1985 dilemma were present in the events that took place in late July 1977.

The advertisement appearing in the "Evening Post" on July 23 1977 would appear to have been supported by people loosely connected with the Association for Homosexual Law Reform, an organisation that has been in existence for many years with the {1} relatively limited objective of decriminalising homosexual acts between consenting adult males in private, without necessarily seeking widespread changes in respect to the ethical aspects of homosexual practise. However, the linking of this advertisement with the other events described in "Gay Pride Week" 1977 saw the whole issue take upon an almost bizarre complexity.

The efforts of the Gay Liberation Movement are nothing less than an attempt to change public opinion in such a way as to make both homosexual tendencies and homosexual practise ethically and socially acceptable, and support from the clergy for **this** cause can only be interpreted as attempts on the part of both them and the Gay Liberation movement to grant **respectability** if not **pride** to these conditions and forms of conduct. In this connection it is worthwhile remembering that the clergyman who led the church-like service at the Wellington

Cenotaph on July 24, 1977, had previously made comments over the public media during 1975 to the effect that Jesus Christ himself was a homosexual.

Doubtless those clergy who were supportive of the Cenotaph celebration consider that the example of Jesus Christ is one which calls for an association with the oppressed and the outcast of society. Did he not associate with the Samaritan woman, with Zacchaeus the tax-collector? Did he not save the adulterous woman from stoning?

The Cenotaph celebration on July 24 is intriguing from another standpoint. Taking its cue from the "establishment RSA service" it sought to commemorate the homosexuals persecuted and killed under Nazism. As such it was an ugly foreshadowing of the extreme statements that have been bandied about in 1985.

It should **not** be forgotten that Zacchaeus is recorded as **repenting** of his extortion, and that the woman taken in adultery was **exhorted** to go and sin no more. It should not be forgotten that the assertions in respect of Jesus Christ's "homosexuality" are little more than pure conjecture and that there are sounder grounds for suggesting that, as a good Jew who upheld the Law of Moses, the very idea would have sent him to the cross to face his own guilt, not that of others. (Matt 5.17-20) Equally it should not be forgotten that the **main** holocaust on the part of the Nazis was in respect to Jews, **not** homosexuals.

The almost bizarre conflation of ideas on the part of liberals in respect to these goings on is very serious. There is little doubt that we are on the edge of an ideological conflict as much as anything else. There is therefore much need for christians, especially, to be alert to the full complexity of this issue, as it takes its course in our midst. As such the issue itself is but the tip of an iceberg. It is yet another example of the way in which the spirits that motivate the world are shaping the form of our social fabric. {2}

A LOOK AT THE BIBLICAL MATERIAL

The joint Methodist, Presbyterian public questions committee put out a short paper entitled "Biblical perspectives on Homosexuality" which attempts to look at what the various words used in the OT and NT in relation to homosexuality, actually connote, especially when viewed against their cultural background. The conclusion of this paper reads as follows:

"The New Testament and indeed the Old Testament references cannot be used to help us sort out the issues today. The references there ire to a condemnation of a practise widespread in the Graeco-Roman world but one which is not applicable today. The New Testament writings do not deal with the issues which we now face... We are left looking for a **theological** but not a **Biblical** basis for helping us to sort out what a christian response might be to the introduction of this bill on homosexual law reform."

This Public Questions Committee Report conclusion begs so many questions that its very title purporting to be a "Biblical perspective" is quite misleading. ("The Biblical perspective on homosexuality" would imply that there is one!) The conclusion is, in fact, that because there is **not** a Biblical perspective on this matter, we need a **theological** perspective.

One is left wondering whether this resort to theology is, in fact, little more than an attempt to place serious discussion of the whole issue beyond the reach of the ordinary christian into the hands of academic experts who call themselves theologians. However, when one analyses most of what they have to say on a broad spectrum of issues, it appears to be remarkably similar to what their secular, non-theologian counterparts have to say!

With respect to the more detailed comments and criticisms in respect to the "exegesis" of

this report, I refer the reader to Alan Kerr's report to the Mataura Presbytery of the PCNZ, and also to the reply by David Stewart of the BCNZ.

For quite a different perspective upon the Biblical material presented, I turn to the way in which the Biblical material is presented in "The social effects of homosexuality in New Zealand," published under the auspices of the Coalition of Concerned Citizens. It reads as follows:

"If there is any doubt that God is clearly against homosexual acts, reference should be made to the following sections of the Bible:

- * Genesis 1:27-28; 2:2-23. God's original plan for human sexuality is for man and woman.
- * Genesis 19:1-29. Sodom and Gommorah are destroyed by God as a consequence of the homosexual sinfulness of the city of Sodom. (The men of Sodom also breached the law of {3} hospitality, but this was incidental to the sinful practises for which the town was destroyed.)
- * Leviticus 18:22. A very clear statement that God hates homosexual behaviour.
- * Leviticus 20:12. Homosexual activity referred to as a disgusting thing.
- * Romans 1:24-27. As a result of homosexual sin, men bring upon themselves the punishment they deserve.
- * 1 Corinthians 6:9. Homosexual acts will prevent a man from entering into God's kingdom.
- * 1 Timothy 1:9-10. Laws are needed, not for good but for bad people, including those who engage in homosexual behaviour.
- * 2 Peter 2:4-10. Homosexual behaviour confirmed as a reason for God's punishment.
- * Jude 17. Sexual perversion suffers the punishment of eternal fire.

Homosexuality has been compared to adultery in terms of sinfulness but there is a difference. Homosexuality is not just sinful, it is also unnatural and abnormal.

* God loves the sinner but hates the sin... Because of God's love and His mercy, there is no sin that he will not forgive. John 8:2-11."

("The Social Effects of Homosexuality" pp41-42)

I am much more in sympathy with this approach to the Biblical data than that offered by the Joint Public Questions Committee of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches. However, there are certain ways in which I would suggest it does not give a full Biblical picture of what is involved.

The picture presented from this kind of survey all too readily allows (albeit if it is not intended) the conclusion that homosexual conduct represents almost the end of the line as far as human sin goes, and should be made criminal, even if marginally so.

I have no problem agreeing that the Scriptures condemn homosexual acts along with other sin. I query whether it should be viewed as signalling "the bottom line" and whether in our cultural

and social context it should be branded as criminal, at least among consenting adults in private. These more specific questions I shall take up later. For the moment, let us take a broader look at the Scripture passages that have been listed above by looking at them along with others in their full context. {4}

A CAREFUL LOOK AT THE BIBLICAL MATERIAL

1. With reference to Genesis 1:26-31 and Genesis 2:24-25, the following points are clear: [A] Man as image-bearer of God involves both men and women, normatively relating to one another in every way, including sexually. [B] Men and women have the responsibility to "be fruitful and multiply" as well as "filling the earth and subduing it." [C] An individual man should "leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, becoming one flesh with her." "Cleaving" (or at least the promise to do so) precedes "becoming one flesh." Heterosexual acts between husband and wife as an expression of mutual love, commitment and affection are the norm for sexuality within the life of humankind.

2. Genesis 3. Ceasing to "cleave to God in his heart, and turning to a source of truth that is other than the normative Word of the Lord, is the root of sin, whereby men and women become estranged from God, estranged from themselves and aliens in the world. Yet despite the rebellion of men and women, God will redeem his world through one who will bruise the serpent's head." The curse shall be removed.

3. Genesis 12. God chose a people to bear witness to his saving purposes in the world. One of the features of their way of life was to be a calling to fulfill the Law, together with forgiveness through sacrifice when it was broken. This law had many features, one of which was normative sexual conduct. Leviticus 18:6-30, 20:10-21 set out a reasonably full list of the kind of sexual conduct that should be repudiated amongst the people of God, along with very strong punitive measures. It is of some interest to note that adultery, incest, homosexual acts and sexual acts with animals all incur the same punishment!

4. Sodom and Gomorrah were cities in which there was much wickedness, and Abraham sought the Lord to be merciful upon them. (Genesis 18:16-33) It is often assumed that the main offence of Sodom was indeed Sodomy (cf. the events recorded in Genesis 19:1-29). However, it is interesting to note that the commentary upon Sodom recorded in Ezekiel 16:43-58, esp. 49-50, records her sin as "pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before Me, therefore I removed them." Only by reading into the text does homosexuality qualify exclusively for the "abominable things" mentioned in v.50. It should also be noted that the wider context of Ezekiel 16 is with reference to Israel's covenantal unfaithfulness to God, symbolised by a sexual imagery that brings to mind the unfaithfulness of a wife to a husband.

With reference to 2 Peter 2:4-10 and Jude 7, there is certainly an implied reference to the consuming homosexual passion of the men of Sodom, but I would suggest that this has to be seen in the full context of other sin. Moreover it should be noted that the several lists of sins that warrant people being kept out of the Kingdom of God do not specifically mention {5} homosexuality. Revelation 21:8 for example mentions the cowardly, the faithless, fornicators, sorcerers, idolators and all liars, but not homosexuality specifically.

5. Romans 1:24-27. The general thrust of the teaching of the chapter is that of the fallen condition of mankind, who have turned away from serving and worshipping the Living God to the service and worship of idols. As a consequence the power of sin is unleashed in their lives, as demonstrated in a variety of modes of conduct. The emphasis is every bit as much upon the root cause idolatrous turning from God in the hearts of men and women) as upon the conduct itself. Homosexual acts are included in the latter.

6. In 1 Timothy 1:9-10, it is not clear that the "law" referred to is "the public legal order of the State or Empire" (Cf. Romans 13, in which it is "the authorities" or "the rulers" who are deemed to be a terror not to good conduct but to bad.") The wider context would seem to indicate that what is being referred to is "the Mosaic law as a whole." The extent to which this had legal force in the Roman Empire is, of course, minimal. The extent to which it should have legal force for us is a matter for considerable discussion.

7. Such passages as 1 Corinthians 6:9, 2 Peter 2:4-10 and Jude 7 of course do clearly indicate that sexual sin of all kinds is unacceptable to God.

8. Under the New Covenant, the people of God are no longer to be identified with a nation. They are rather a people that is "called out" of all nations in the world, "called out" as a witness to the coming Kingdom of God. By their life and witness they have a calling to proclaim Christ's role and his coming Kingdom.

This has important consequences for the way the OT provisions of the Law of Moses are deemed to apply to the public legal order, as I have already tried to point out in Session 3 of the current series. It is interesting to note that of the capital offences mentioned in Leviticus 20:10-16, most are not criminal offences in our legal system. This does create serious problems for our present moral climate in respect to what is normative sexual conduct, but I would query whether a legal sanctioning of personal morals in these matters is the primary way to correct this. Our legislation should certainly reflect a greater concern for the normativity of marriage and family life as a matter of public morals and thus indirectly affirm personal morality. Also many churches have gravely fallen short of their responsibility to uphold these features in a prophetic and effective manner. They are too busy trying to tell the State what to do!

9. John 8:1-11 indicates that we should be compassionate for the sinner and not condemning. The Law of God condemns us all. The grace of God is life to us; it is also potentially the source of life to all those presently outside of outside of Christ. In preaching guilt before the law of God we need to beware that self-righteousness is also sin.

WHY ARE PEOPLE HOMOSEXUAL AND WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

1. From a Biblical point of view the short answer to why there is homosexuality is the same as why there is war, divorce, rape, stealing, hate and avarice, sickness and death. It is part of the sinful, fallen condition of mankind that has been redeemed in Christ. It is therefore not 'natural' in the sense that it belongs to the original order of creation. It is no more 'natural' than war, than rape, than illness, than hate, than adultery, and slavery. However it is as real as all of these other ills that have tragically befallen humankind.

2. However, the arguments that are being put forward these days by Parliamentarians, by "Gay activists" and others is that "homosexual orientation" - whether people have a disposition to being "sexually attracted" to "the same" or to "the opposite" sex is rather like left-handedness or eye colour. It is a condition that the individual person concerned is not responsible for, and, as a consequence, should not be penalised against.

The 'natural' origins of homosexuality, therefore constitute the first plank of the pro-homosexual position.

The second plank is that people who have a homosexual pre-disposition should not be made to feel abnormal, unwanted, social misfits. On the contrary they should be accepted as they are, allowed to practice sex as freely as hetero-sexuals, and not be looked down upon for doing so.

The third plank is an unjustified preoccupation with the possibility of "stable homosexual

relationships" in which there would indeed appear to be some justification for saying that there is a realisation of love and care.

Whilst I acknowledge that all three of these planks are often argued with a certain amount of compassion and idealism, I would suggest that such attitudes are also accompanied by no small amount of an ignoring of the facts and of normative personal and inter-personal health and development.

3. (i) It is generally true to say that there is little 'hard' evidence that is able to substantiate the claim that homosexual disposition is inherited genetically.

(ii) It is equally true to say that whilst the causes are not well known or understood, it would appear basically to have to do with aspects of personal growth and development in ways that do involve personal choice and environmental nurture. These features bring the matter of ethics and normativity to the fore rather than genetics. Accordingly public attention needs to be focussed on normative choice and healthy environmental upbringing and the State has a responsibility to play in this. {7}

(iii) It is true to say that a homosexual disposition produces strong drives that are not easy to control, even when there is a moral recognition that homosexual acts are wrong, and there is a will to resist them. ('The Returns of Love', A. Davidson). We therefore need to have much compassion for the struggles of real people in such situations.

(iv) It is also true to say that in some cases the homosexual condition is reversible to a normal heterosexual orientation, given a desire to change an openness to treatment. (Refer to op. 49-51 of "The Social Effects of Homosexuality.") However it is not legitimate to argue that specific case histories can be generalised to the extent that is sometimes claimed.

PUBLIC JUSTICE, PUBLIC MORALS AND CHRISTIAN COMPASSION

1. Public justice in respect of a pluralistic life principle would imply that the humanistic principles upon which much of the case for "gay liberation" is made (i.e. the humanistic view of freedom as doing what one wants in a way that is as unconstrained as possible by law and authority) should be permitted to function in NZ society, but not to have the role of an "established life principle." To allow homosexuals the freedom to promote the acceptability of their conduct on the basis of such principles amounts to little less than this. BUT, pluralism of life principle means that public institutions and workplaces should not be subject to humanistic principles only. The central problem to be faced by the people of God in this respect is "liberalism" in the church, as this is basically inspired by the same humanistic antinomian principles with regard to freedom.

2. Protection of public morality does not necessarily involve criminality in respect to personal moral behaviour. Acts of adultery, fornication, and drunkenness in private are not criminal in our public legal order. They become so only as they relate to public decency and health. I would suggest that there is good reason to treat homosexual conduct in the same way, albeit that it, like the other examples, is contrary to normative and healthy personal and inter-personal relationships.

3. I would also suggest that persons having a homosexual disposition should not automatically for that reason be thought of as homosexual practitioners. Accordingly not to discriminate against people on the grounds of a homosexual orientation is fair enough provided this does not imply and lead to an open, unashamed advocacy of homosexual conduct as morally acceptable or subversion of the young and impressionable.

3. However, the question of the State's responsibility to provide legal protection to public morality is a matter that is quite distinct from the decriminalising of homosexual acts. As I understand it, this is the basic difference between the Association for Homosexual Law Reform and "Gay Liberation". The public legal order should not only do justice to persons who, for {8} whatever reason, have a homosexual disposition, and sometimes fall prey to activity that accords with it, it should also reflect public morals, and seek to protect the weak, the innocent and the young.

As there is strong evidence to suggest that homosexual orientation is a learned behaviour that many, including both christians and humanists, believe to be abnormal, and would not want their children to be exposed to, it is the responsibility of the legislators to make clear that

- (a) objectionable peddling of "pro-gay" material in public places, in work places and in schools, in ways that causes offence to others, is contrary to public morality and should not be given legal sanction.
- (b) efforts be made by the public health and public welfare agencies to encourage the development of normal sexuality, and provide opportunities for remedial programmes for homosexually oriented people who wish to be helped to normalise their condition.

Moreover, the christian church should realise her task both to prophetically proclaim the high calling of marriage between one man and one woman, and that sexuality is rightly to be expressed within that context alone, irrespective of what other heterosexual, or homosexual temptations we might fall prey to, and at the same time to offer compassion and forgiveness to those who for whatever reason fall short of this calling.

The christian community in all its activities should seek to promote a view of the **wholeness** of the law of God, the **wholeness** of sin, and the **wholeness** of redemption, and thus **not** distort the Word of Truth.

4. I believe the current Bill before Parliament should be opposed, as it is couched in terms and in outlook in ways that may to some extent reduce certain public injustices, but at the grave expense of public morality and public health. The liberal elements in the church are guilty of promoting these same tendencies.

In my opinion not only the "liberal" but also the "conservative" elements within the church have got a very long way to go if the people of God are to be an effective "salt-of-the-earth" in these matters.

The liberals have taken the people of God in the paths of humanism and idolatry. They have distorted the word of truth and prophesy in vain. Conservative elements it seems to me, suffer from the fact that they have only recently discovered something about the humanistic direction in which Western culture has been going for a very long time now. The recent reaction to the homosexual law reform bill has not, in general, been accompanied by a breadth of vision that would have the insight to give our {9} culture a depth of new direction. Moreover, in some of its aspects there have been some comments made that have given sufficient fuel to the liberals to enable them to realistically be suspicious of Fascist tendencies, if not intentions.

I pray that God may grant us wisdom and understanding in this matter, particularly in respect to the depth of the need for cultural and social vision that is appropriate to a pilgrim people with a forward looking vision inspired by the coming of the kingdom of God. {10}