

Homosexuality – how to evaluate it and how to deal with it.

I have been asked to say something about homosexuality, both on how to view homosexuality (and argue against it) and on how to treat homosexuality pastorally. While this might seem to be to topics for two different papers, I think there is an advantage in keeping the two topics together. Our view on the solution to homosexuality should be formed by our view on the problem of homosexuality.

When these two topics are treated separately, there is a danger, that we try to find the solution to homosexuality in something else than our theology. But when we first treat homosexuality theologically, then we are able to say, how we should treat it pastorally on the basis of the word of God.

Our current situation in church and society

While there are difference between the US and Europe/Denmark, I do believe, that we share the major trends, when it comes to homosexuality, both in church and society. While Denmark and Europe in general might be more liberal than the US, they are going in the same direction.

The ELCA-2009 church assembly resolved to accept homosexual clergy. In Denmark and the other Scandinavian countries this has been accepted for many years. In the US civil unions and gender-neutral marriages are discussed intensely. In Norway and Sweden the State has introduced gender-neutral marriage-laws. In Denmark we only have civil unions. Official church blessings of civil unions have been discussed for quite a while in Denmark.

The Ministry of Church in the Danish government has just issued a report on the question with minority opinions from two members of the committee, who rejected any kind of blessing. The rest discussed whether to endorse a church blessing of civil unions or asking the government to introduce a gender-neutral marriage-law.

So homosexuality is a hot topic in Denmark as I is in the US.

The conservative pietists in the State Church have a program for treating homosexuality. My impression is that homosexuality is seen by many conservative Christians mostly as a psychological disorder that needs treatment and less as a sin that needs repentance. Homosexual feelings and lusts are by many people not seen as sinful in themselves, when they are not resulting in homosexual behavior.

Homosexuality is also not seen by conservative Christians as something the state should stick its nose into. It is seen as a private and religious matter, which a secular state should not legislate about.

This is just to tell you where I'm coming from, so that you might better understand my viewpoints and some of the issues I stress, that you might see as obvious.

I will now look at homosexuality. First we will look at how homosexuality should be looked at from a scriptural and theological viewpoint. Then we will look at, how we should treat it pastorally.

Natural law and homosexuality

The reason behind modern acceptance of homosexuality should be seen in light of the modern denial of natural law. In both legal theory and most ethical thinking, natural law is flatly denied and ethical norms as well as laws of the state are seen as merely human constructs.

When creation and the existence of God are denied, then the denial of object morality follows inevitable.

We see that clearly in the legal political philosophies that rule in our societies. In Denmark, the ruling legal theory for many years has been legal positivism, which denies natural law and only accepts positive human law as law. In Denmark the leading philosopher of law in the 20th century, Alf Ross was a legal positivist, who denied natural law and every connection between the law of society and morality. What is lawful is what society decides.

This is just the legal and philosophical expression of ethical relativism which denies every eternal and immutable moral law.

In today's philosophy the orders that used to be seen as orders of creation are instead seen as social constructs. Feminism tries to help women see their gender roles as just social constructs. I

In this view also marriage between a man and a woman is seen as a social construct and not as an order, given in nature. Marriage is nothing more than a human contract. Therefore it can be constructed in another way too. Western Governments no more feel any obligation toward God's law.

When secular democracies deny natural law, they put the opinion of the majority in the place of God. They are in reality making themselves into gods and denying Gods right to be God.

Even inside so-called Lutheran churches as the ELCA and also the Danish state church, natural law is often denied. This is caused in great part by the influence of existentialism on 20th and 21 century theology, where Christian where law and gospel are separated from their concrete content in Holy Scripture. The law is seen merely as an existential force without clearly determinable content and the gospel is seen as the solution to this fluffy law.

The denial of the third use of the law and natural law go hand in hand in these liberal churches. If there is no eternal will of God, written on the human heart then there is no eternal will of God for the Christian either.¹ The law is reduced to that which frightens people and makes them feel guilty and not that which in fact makes them guilty before the throne of God.

The gospel is no more the solution to the real condemnation of the law before the throne of God, but only the solution to the feeling of guilt and condemnation. When the law is emptied of its scriptural content, so is the gospel. If the law doesn't condemn real sins that are against the eternal will of the creator then the gospel no more absolves sins before the creator and judge.

¹ Scott Murray has showed in his 'Law, Life and the living God', how the denial of the third use of the law in American Lutheran Christianity has led to the mess, that the ELCA now find itself in. I think that his analysis of the ELCA quite well fits the debates in the Danish state church. In the end, the question is whether there is an eternal and immutable will of God, which is expressed both in natural law and in the revealed law.

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Nevertheless we shouldn't forget, that the thing about natural law is, that it exists even for those, who deny it with their mouth. Walther reminds us in his first evening lecture on law and gospel:

*Man was created with the Law written in his heart. True, in consequence of the fall this script in the heart has become quite dulled, but it has not been utterly wiped out. The Law may be preached to the most ungodly person and his conscience will tell him: That is true.*²

Natural law exists even though everyone denies it. My boy intuitively likes tractors, guns and swords even before anyone has tried to force social gender-constructs on him. Natural law exists just like external realities exist in spite of those, who deny them.

When atheists and deniers of natural law are met with unrighteous behavior, they themselves appeal to natural law – unchanging moral truths.

Marriage between one man and one woman is such an objective moral truth, which is written on human hearts from creation.

Holy Scripture also appeals to natural law, when it condemns homosexuality as a sin. Let us quickly review the relevant texts.³

The Biblical witness regarding homosexuality

Old Testament witness

We should not start with the texts explicitly condemning homosexuality, but rather with the texts that positively state the order of creation. That is where we find the natural law, which condemns, what is against it.

² <http://lutherantheology.com/uploads/works/walther/LG/lecture-01.html>

³ I will not treat all the objections from pro-homosexual "exegetes" here, but refer to the book: "Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law" by James B. De Young, Kregel Academic & Professional; First Edition edition (August 2000) or this paper by Richard D. Starr "The Scriptural Teaching on Homosexuality and Modern Trends in Christian Churches" found at <http://www.wlssays.net/node/1832>

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In Genesis 1 we read: ²⁷ *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.* ²⁸ *And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Gen 1:27-28 KJV)*

Man was created as male and female. Gender-categories are therefore not social constructs, but Gods created order. Here we also hear that the first command to Adam and Eve was to be fruitful and multiply – something which only a man and a woman can be. There is no room for homosexuality here in the created order.

And in verse 31 we read: ³¹ *And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. (Gen 1:31 KJV)*

When God created man and woman and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply, everything was good. We know that it didn't stay that way. But Gods creation of man and woman and his command to be fruitful and multiply predated the fall into sin.

In Genesis chapter 2 we hear again about the order of creation. The reason for creating Eve is mentioned: ¹⁸ *And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. (Gen 2:18 KJV)*

God wanted to create a helper that was meet or suitable for Adam, the man. We then know how God presented the different animals for Adam, but he found no one to be suitable for him: *but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. (Gen 2:20 KJV)*

Then God created Eve out of the rib of Adam, and the conclusion is: ²² *Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.* ²³ *And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." (Gen 2:22-23 NKJ)*

From the foregoing it is clear, that God now created someone, who was suitable for Adam – for man. Woman was created so that she might fit with man. Man and woman are the perfect match.

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This is also the conclusion in Genesis 2: ²⁴ *Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.* (Gen 2:24 NKJ)

Because woman was created from man and to man, those to fit together and they shall join themselves to each other in marriage.

We really don't need the texts that specifically deal with homosexuality. In Genesis 1 and 2 God presents to us the natural order.

And that is the order, which everyone is able to discern even without looking in scripture. Man and woman is the perfect match. Man and man are not. Man and woman can have children which are the natural consequence of having sex and one of the purposes of sexual relationships. A man and a man can't have children.

Everyone knows this and the reason for aggressive homosexual propaganda against it might be that they know the truth. If they were not condemned by natural law, they shouldn't care about some stiff-necked old-believing Christians. But they do and they feel condemned by our mere existence, because they know the law of nature, which is written on their own hearts and which condemns their desires and actions.

The ungodly rage against Gods law is maybe the best argument from experience for the existence of natural law. That people do feel condemned just by knowing that there are people, who believe in God's law, shows that it is not a mere social construction and that not even the deniers of the created order really believe that it is. They just hate God and his law.

The next text we should turn to is the account about the two angels visit to Sodom and Gomorra in Genesis 19. They visit Lot looking like two men. We read: ⁴ *Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house.* ⁵ *And they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally."* (Gen 19:4-5 NKJ)

The word translated with “know them carnally” is the same word used three verses after I verse 8: ⁸ *"See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof."* (Gen 19:8 NKJ)

Even though some exegetes try to cast doubt on, what the people of Sodom wanted, there is no doubt, when it is read as it stands and interpreted in light of the context. The sin, that made the angels announce, that Sodom would be destroyed in spite of the righteous Lot was homosexuality. It was not just inhospitality or rape, but the unnatural sin of homosexuality. From Gen 18,20 we know, that the sins of Sodom already existed before the angels came to visit Sodom. Sodom despised natural law and was therefore destroyed.

The account presupposes natural law. It presupposes that the people of Sodom could and should know that homosexuality was wrong and that their sin deserved temporal punishment. Sodom is mentioned many times in Scripture later on. In every instance we should understand their sin to be the pride by which the despised natural law.

In Leviticus we hear again explicitly about homosexuality in 18:22 and 20:13. We read: ²² *'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.* (Lev 18:22 NKJ) and in Lev 20:13: ¹³ *'If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.* (Lev 20:13 NKJ)

In Leviticus 18 the word “abomination” is used about incest among blood-relatives, sex with animals, child sacrifices to idols and homosexuality. These same sins are punished with death in Leviticus 20. Homosexuality is here put at the same level as other sins against natural law. Some have argued that since sexual intercourse with a woman during her menstruation is condemned in the same chapters and called an abomination in Leviticus 18, the chapters are not about natural law but about violation of old testament ceremonial laws of purity.

But if we look at the penalties in chapter 20 there is a difference between the sins that violate natural law and for example having sexual intercourse during menstruation. The “punishment” for the last one is to be “cut of” from ones people. This expression is not used solely about death penalty but mostly about being temporarily removed from the people (as in Numbers 19:13)⁴.

When Leviticus punishes all theses sins with death penalty on the same level, it is condemning all of them as being against natural law.

New Testament witness

In the New Testament, we should also first look to the positive statements about the created order, before we look at the condemnations of homosexuality.

Jesus is clearly presupposing marriage between a man and a woman as the created order of things, when he says: ⁴ *And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning`made them male and female,' ⁵ "and said, `For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh ' ? ⁶ "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Mat 19:4-6 NKJ)*

This is said in a specific context and Jesus is talking about divorce.

But the questions are not as separate as we might think. Ryan C. MacPherson comments: *Same-sex “marriage” arrives as the jurisprudentially obvious counterpart to no-fault divorce: if any two people may cease to be married, simply because one or both of the choose, then why shouldn’t any two persons become married, as a mere exercise of preference.*⁵

When marriage and divorce are made into merely social constructs that can be chosen or not, then marriage itself is seen as a social construct that can be altered.

⁴ For a summary of linguistic material on this question see this article on Apologetics Press: <http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=7&article=1456>

⁵ The Natural Law of the Family. By Ryan C. MacPherson, Ph.D. Chapter 11 in Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal, edited by Robert C. Baker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), p. 217.

To put it another way: When Jesus says about the concrete marriage between a man and a woman, that no man may separate, what God has joined, the same thing may be inferred to the order of creation itself. What holds true of the application of the law to the concrete marriage also holds true of the order itself. It is therefore implied in the text, that the order of joining man and woman in marriage itself may not be separated by man. God has joined man and woman in the order of marriage – not man and man.

While Jesus doesn't explicitly condemn homosexuality here, he is doing it by implication. There is one created order of sexual relationships, which may not be separated. And that order is between a man and a woman.

The words of Jesus in this text are in my opinion the clearest words in Scripture, when it comes to the created order of marriage between a man and a woman.

We would be able to condemn homosexuality as a sin without having any other texts about the issue. The condemnation of homosexuality is just an application of the words of Jesus, when he makes marriage the created order of God.

But we do have other texts in the New Testament that explicitly deal with homosexuality. One of them is Romans 1, where Paul deals with Gods revelation of wrath on idolatry: ²⁶ *For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.*

²⁷ *Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.* (Rom 1:26-27 NKJ)

Here Paul mentions explicitly, that the sin of homosexuality is against nature and that that the physical affection between a man and a woman is the natural use. This is a clear reference to natural law and the created order.

Critics have tried to deny, that Paul is referring to natural law claiming that there was no concept of natural law at the time of Paul. As we have already seen, there was such a clear concept in the Old Testament – the Bible of Paul. And we only have to look at chapter 2 in Romans to ascertain, that Paul had a concept of natural law: ¹⁴ *for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,* ¹⁵ *who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)* (Rom 2:14-15 NKJ)

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Here, Paul uses the same word (physis), when he writes “by nature”. Romans chapter 2 v. 14-15 is the sedes doctrinae for the doctrine of natural law. To deny that Paul is clearly arguing from natural law is therefore very bad exegesis (to be polite).

But there was also a concept of natural law among both Greeks and Romans at Paul’s time.

This has been recognized in the history of law.

Aristotle used the same term (physis) about natural law, as Paul used about nature in Romans.⁶ Also the stoic philosophers taught the existence of natural law. Cicero did the same.

In the first systematic introduction to roman jurisprudence, Gaius’ *Institutiones* from around 160 AD, a century after Paul, the distinction is made in the first chapter between civil and natural law, or as modern philosophy of law would say: positive and natural law. This distinction is probably inherited from the Greeks or maybe just something, the Romans made themselves because of the actual existence of natural law. Since natural law does exist, one doesn’t really have to inherit the idea from another philosopher.

Paul does therefore teach that homosexuality is against nature. It is not only against natural law in the sense that lust after another person’s wife is. For this is a sinful pollution of the natural physical attraction. But homosexuality is even changing the natural attraction to the opposite sex.

The explanation of homosexuality is also given in Romans chapter 1. Paul writes:²⁰ *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,*²¹ *because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.* (Rom 1:20-21 NKJ)

⁶ For primary sources from Plato, Aristotle and Cicero translated to English, see: <http://www.nlprac.org/classical>

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The reason why God gave them up to vile passions against nature was that they despised natural law and natural revelation. They despised Gods revelation of himself in creation.

This revelation would of course not make anyone into a believer in and of itself. But it was meant to make people aware of the fact, that there is a God, who is to judge and thereby prepare the way for the preaching of law and gospel. God's self-revelation of his judgment and righteousness in creation was also meant to keep people from extreme sinfulness. This is what is called the first use of the law.

But since they rejected Gods revelation and worshipped themselves and their idols instead, he gave them up to their vile passions.

The explanation for homosexuality is therefore idolatry and despise for Gods natural law. Homosexuality is not a mere sickness, but a sinful desire, produced by contempt for Gods law.

Paul also mentions homosexuality in two other letters, namely 1. Corinthians and 1. Timothy.

In 1. Corinthians, we read: ⁹ *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,* ¹⁰ *nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.* ¹¹ *And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1Co 6:9-11 NKJ)*

Both the word translated with homosexual and sodomite means a homosexual.

Paul doesn't mention natural law here, but homosexuality is mentioned as unrighteousness, which implies, that it is against the eternal will of God – the law.

We should also pay attention to the fact, that Paul mentions homosexuality among other sins, which the believers in Corinth no longer commit. Change is possible according to Paul. Change is a result of being washed, sanctified and justified through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

We should not make the impression that homosexuals can't change (just like we shouldn't make that impression about thieves or drunkards). Homosexuality is a sin, which can be changed through repentance and faith in the gospel.

That doesn't mean that everyone struggling with this sin will never again be tempted. That is exactly why Paul writes about these sins to the Corinthians; so that they will not give in to these temptations but remember that they are justified and sanctified through the gospel.

While the new creation isn't a homosexual, homosexual lusts might still live in the old nature, which we carry with us in this life. But we should remember, what Paul writes later in his letter to the Corinthians: ¹³ *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.* ¹⁴ *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.* (1Co 10:13-14 NKJ)

Paul also addresses homosexuality in his first letter to Timothy: ⁸ *But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully,* ⁹ *knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,* ¹⁰ *for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine,* ¹¹ *according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.* (1Ti 1:8-11 NKJ)

Here Paul is implicitly referring to natural law. The law with its threats is not supposed to rule the Christians, who do the works of the law without those threats. But the ungodly should be kept from giving into their passions by the law. This implies that the government should make laws that correspond to natural law and keeping them from following their evil passions. The infallible norm, by which we can make the distinction between natural law and its distortions is “the glorious gospel”, which here refers to the whole word of God, specifically the revealed law.

While we cannot use Scripture as an argument in the public discussion about what to make laws about in secular states, we can use it to make sure, what natural law is saying and then appeal to natural law, knowing that everyone's conscience will agree with what we are saying even though they try to make their consciences still.

Since homosexuality is spread through propaganda and not biologically, the state has a duty and a mandate to try to restrict it and at least not to support the homosexual propaganda by instituting false civil unions or same-gender “marriage”.

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Paul also hereby says, that the law should reveal the sins of the ungodly, when the word is preached. Because homosexuality is against natural law, we should preach Gods law to homosexuals in order to prepare them to hear the gospel.

Scripture is full of references to natural law and the orders of creation and there is no doubt that homosexuality is against Gods law as it is revealed in both our consciences and in Holy Scripture.

Luther and the confessions on homosexuality

We should also take a quick look at the Lutheran confessions. Here also, we find a connection between natural law, orders of creation and the condemnation of homosexuality.⁷

We will start with a quote from Melanchthon's Apology for the Augsburg Confession article XXIII, which deals with the marriage of priests and states, what the natural right and the order of creation is regarding marriage.

⁷ For a deeper investigation of the teaching on natural law in the confessions, I refer to Natural Law in the Lutheran Confessions By Prof. Roland Ziegler Chapter 4 in Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal, edited by Robert C. Baker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), p. 65-78.

This is a longer quote, but I find all of it relevant to our theme: *Secondly, And because this creation or divine ordinance in man is a natural right, jurists have accordingly said wisely and correctly that the union of male and female belongs to natural right. But since natural right is immutable, the right to contract marriage must always remain. For where nature does not change, that ordinance also with which God has endowed nature does not change, and cannot be removed by human laws. ^{10]} Therefore it is ridiculous for the adversaries to prate that marriage was commanded in the beginning, but is not now. This is the same as if they would say: Formerly, when men were born, they brought with them sex; now they do not. Formerly, when they were born, they brought with them natural right; now they do not. No craftsman (Faber) could produce anything more crafty than these absurdities, which were devised to elude a right of nature. ^{11]} Therefore let this remain in the case which both Scripture teaches and the jurist says wisely, namely, that the union of male and female belongs to natural right. ^{12]} Moreover, a natural right is truly a divine right, because it is an ordinance divinely impressed upon nature. But inasmuch as this right cannot be changed without an extraordinary work of God, it is necessary that the right to contract marriage remains, because the natural desire of sex for sex is an ordinance of God in nature, and for this reason is a right; otherwise, why would both sexes have been created? ^{13]} And we are speaking, as it has been said above, not of concupiscence, which is sin, but of that desire which they call physical love [which would have existed between man and woman even though their nature had remained pure], which concupiscence has not removed from nature, but inflames, so that now it has greater need of a remedy, and marriage is necessary not only for the sake of procreation, but also as a remedy [to guard against sins]. These things are clear, and so well established that they can in no way be overthrown.⁸*

Here, Melanchthon both presupposes the existence of natural law and applies it specifically to marriage. He is defending the marriage of priests on the grounds that it is natural for men and women to get married. Of interest is the argument: because the natural desire of sex for sex is an ordinance of God in nature, and for this reason is a right; otherwise, why would both sexes have been created?

⁸ See <http://bocl.org/?AP+XXIII+9>

We might ask with Melanchthon: If homosexuality is not against the created order and the natural desire of sex for sex is not an ordinance of God in nature, why would both sexes have been created? In this whole section, Melanchthon argues from both reason and Holy Scripture, that the only exception to getting married is those, whom God have given a special gift. Hereby Melanchthon is clearly ruling out homosexuality on the basis of natural and revealed law.

There might also be an explicit reference to homosexuality in the Lutheran Confessions: *From this you see how this popish rabble, priests, monks, and nuns, resist God's order and commandment, inasmuch as they despise and forbid matrimony, and presume and vow to maintain perpetual chastity, and, besides, deceive the simple-minded with lying words and appearances [impostures]. 214] For no one has so little love and inclination to chastity as just those who because of great sanctity avoid marriage, and either indulge in open and shameless prostitution, or secretly do even worse, so that one dare not speak of it, as has, alas! been learned too fully.*⁹

Luther knew about homosexual relationships among monks and nuns. In his commentary on Genesis 19, he claims that it is the Carthusian monks, who have introduced the sin of the sodomites in Germany from Italy. I do not doubt that it is homosexual sins, Luther is referring to in his Large Catechism.

Luther also hints at the reason for homosexuality in his Large Catechism. The reason is the suppression of the natural attraction to woman – the suppression of natural law. The child-abuse-scandals in the roman-catholic church provide further evidence for Luther's claim.

The Lutheran Confessions are as clear as Scripture, when it comes to homosexuality. It is a sin against nature and against natural law.

Sickness or sin?

In our treatment of the problem of homosexuality, we also have to look at the causes of homosexuality.

⁹ Large Catechism I, Sixth Commandment, 213-214: <http://bocl.org/?LC+I+213>

There might be necessary biological causes, but they cannot be sufficient causes. They all need human sinfulness in order to develop homosexuality. That means that not all people are capable of developing homosexuality but no one is a homosexual by nature. Instead, homosexuality is against nature.¹⁰ Another way of saying this is that some people are tempted by homosexuality, while others are not. But temptation itself does not make anyone sin. The sinfulness of the human heart does. Satan's temptation of Eve in the garden was a necessary cause of her sin, but not a sufficient cause. The decisive factor was Eve's decision to listen to the temptation.

Just like no drunkard is forced by the bottle to empty it, so no homosexual is forced by biology or others sins against him, to be a homosexual. We cannot rule out biological causes or child experiences as necessary causes, without which a person would not have become a homosexual. But we can and must deny that these biological causes or child experiences in and of themselves make anyone a homosexual.

The real cause of homosexuality is sinful idolatry of pleasure. James writes in his letter: *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.*¹⁴ *But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.*¹⁵ *Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.* (Jam 1:13-15 NKJ)

No one can accuse God of having created him to become a homosexual. While some people might not be tempted to become homosexuals, no one become homosexuals solely because of biological causes or because of past experiences.

How to deal with homosexuality pastorally?

I have not had to deal with this issue pastorally myself. But I don't think, that experience is necessary in order to show, how we should address homosexuality.

¹⁰ See Blame It on the Brain: Distinguishing Chemical Imbalances, Brain Disorders, and Disobedience (Resources for Changing Lives), Edward T. Welch, P & R Publishing (June 1998) p. 151-182

Generally homosexuality should be treated as other sins and as other sinful bondage. We all know about pet sins, special temptations that we have. Most of us know about sinful sexual temptations ourselves, even though we might not have experienced temptations to sin against nature.

But when it comes to dealing pastorally with homosexuals, the same principles apply to this as every other sin.

In the Danish debate about homosexuality in the church, someone once wrote in defense of homosexuality, that it isn't a bigger sin than other sins. My response was that it isn't a smaller sin either.

I believe, that the church has made too much out of the difference between homosexuality and other sins, when it comes to dealing with it pastorally. The same principles of law and gospel apply to homosexuality as to every other sin.

Paul puts it on the same level as other sins in his letter to the Corinthians, when he writes about sins, that they have no left. We all know that the old flesh still tempts us with the same desires and pet sins. Many of us have experienced bondage to specific sins, idols that we return to for pleasure and security.

The only weapon against these sins is to expose them as sins before God and here the gospel of the forgiveness of sins. I think Walthers theses on law and gospel are very helpful also when it comes to homosexuals.¹¹

Let us examine a few of the theses:

Thesis VII: In the third place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when the Gospel is preached first and then the Law; sanctification first and then justification; faith first and then repentance; good works first and then grace.

¹¹ Find them here: <http://www.lutherantheology.com/uploads/works/walther/LG/theses.html>

We should be sure, that we do not deal with homosexuals in such a way, that they get the impression that they have to be cured of homosexuality, before they can hear the gospel. As soon as they fear God's wrath, we should preach the gospel to them, as Walther teaches in his thesis XI: *In the seventh place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when there is a disposition to offer the comfort of the Gospel only to those who have been made contrite by the Law, not from fear of the wrath and punishment of God, but from love of God.*

We should know that the law cannot produce good works, but only show people their sins. Thesis XIII reads: *In the nineteenth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when an attempt is made by means of the demands or the threats or the promises of the Law to induce the unregenerate to put away their sins and engage in good works and thus become godly; on the other hand, when an endeavor is made, by means of the commands of the Law rather than by the admonitions of the Gospel, to urge the regenerate to do good.*

Sanctification is a fruit of faith in the gospel and not just fear of the law. We do however need the law both to show us our sins again and again and to guide us as long as we have our sinful flesh, because it always tries to confuse us about God's will for our life.

The way of sanctification is daily contrition and faith in the gospel, as Luther writes plain and clear in his small catechism to the fourth question about baptism: *What does such baptizing with water signify?--Answer. It signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise; who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.*¹²

One of the problems in the church's dealing with homosexuals and perhaps many other sins too, is that the church often fears, that law and gospel is not enough.

Because of the influence of modern psychotherapies, which often have a very different worldview, sins are looked at as diseases and not as sins by many people.

¹² <http://bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php#baptism>

The mix of psychotherapy and Christianity has changed the view on homosexuality among many Christians, who still believe, that it is wrong. It is seen as a product of external causes like upbringing and relationship to parents and not as a sinful rebellion against God and human nature.

This might be a hindrance for repentance on the part of the homosexual.

If my sin is really the result of other people's sins against me or other external causes, then I am really not to blame. I am a victim and not a sinner. My impression of many Christian treatments of homosexuality is that they make the homosexuals into victims of external forces instead of showing them their sin. By this approach they might even make it harder for homosexuals to repent of their sin.

In the end, the homosexual will be able to blame God for his sin, if it is seen as a sickness resulting from external causes alone. If external causes are sufficient causes for homosexuality, then God is ultimately to blame, because he is the king of the universe.

While the sinful human heart might find external excuses for its sinful desires, it is the sinful human heart, which is the ultimate cause of homosexuality as well as every other human sin.

We might instead speak about homosexual temptations as crosses of the Christian.¹³

One Christian might be tempted by homosexuality, while another is tempted to another sin. God allows these temptations in order to chasten us and showing us our sinful heart. This doesn't mean that God is the cause of temptations. No, that is the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. But God allows these temptations in order to keep us from other temptations. God allows Satan to tempt us to certain sins in order to save us from self-righteousness and in order to drive us to self-denial.

¹³ I recommend Deutschlanders book, The Theology of the Cross, which is the best treatment, I have found of the theology of the cross and how to preach and teach this. It can be ordered here: <http://online.nph.net/p-1532-the-theology-of-the-cross.aspx>

Instead of letting ones crosses reveal ones sinful heart and repent thereof, we are often tempted to use them to accuse God of unrighteousness. This in itself reveals our sinful and self-centered hearts. Our chief idol is ourselves and our passions. We all need to repent thereof.

When we approach homosexuals pastorally, we should therefore also take the log out of our own eyes first, so that we do not go to them in self-righteousness, but recognize, that our sinful flesh is not better than the homosexual.

We should help those tempted by homosexual desires to take this cross up and mortify their flesh by daily contrition and faith in the gospel.

We should teach them about sanctification and the daily struggle between the new and the old man. The new man delights in the law of God, while the old man must be coerced to do the works of God. There is no quick solution to sinful bondage. The law will keep on accusing and homosexuals will have to be comforted with the gospel again and again.

The main goal is not merely to change the homosexual so that he no longer is tempted, just like the main problem is not homosexuality in and of itself. The main problem is the sinful human heart with its idolatry. Therefore the main goal is salvation. Homosexuality is a symptom, which should be used to reveal the sinful human heart.

The advice given by our confessions about dealing with special sins and temptations is to use the confession and absolution. I think, that that is a very helpful advice that we should use in dealing with homosexuality. We should teach those, who struggle with this, that even their homosexual desires are sinful. Perhaps the best way to combat theses desires is to expose them as often as one can and confess them to the pastor in order to be absolved from theses sins.

In that way the homosexual is helped to return to baptism and the other means of grace in order to drown old Adam by contrition and let a new man daily rise.

Conclusion

Homosexuality – how to see it and how to deal with it. – paper for the convocation of the Orthodox Lutheran Confessional Conference (OLCC) 2011 by Pastor Magnus N. Sørensen from the Evangelical-Lutheran Augustanachurch in Aarhus, Denmark

Our pastoral approach to homosexuality is formed by our theological approach. When we see homosexuality as a consequence of idolatry and denial of natural law, we must respond, not by making people feel sorry for themselves but by preaching Gods law in all its sternness. And because we know, that God has inscribed his law on the hearts of every man, we can preach the law to homosexuals knowing that their own conscience agrees with us. When we see homosexuality as a sinful revolt against God’s law as it is revealed in human heart and in Holy Scripture, we also know the solution to the problem.

When the main problem is sin and idolatry and not other external causes, the solution is the gospel in word and sacrament. The treatment necessary for homosexuals is the continual hearing of Gods law and the continual use of the means of grace.

Pastor Magnus N. Sørensen