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John C. Yates

Towards a Theology of Homosexuality

Dr Yates has previously written for the EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY on 'The Origin of the Soul' (EQ 61, 1989, 121-140). As he explains, the present contribution arises out of a controversy within the Anglican Church in Australia over a topic which is equally controversial in this country.

The immediate impetus for this paper comes out of a series of highly public and controversial events in the Anglican Diocese of Perth, Western Australia. On the 20th of August 1992 David McAuliffe was ordained a priest in the chapel of the Archbishop of Perth in a ceremony which could best be described as semi-private. On the 30th of the same month the city's *Sunday Times* opened its front page with three centimetre high lettering: 'Priest Wants Gay Weddings'. Although McAuliffe's comments were in fact dated the tabloid correctly noted that he had first come to Perth to open a chapter of the Metropolitan Community Church, a denomination which caters specifically for homosexuals.¹ The publicity led to a flurry of communication in all forms of the electronic media, newspapers and in correspondence within the church at a national level. This all came to a head with two motions presented at Perth's Diocesan Synod in October 1992 whose clear intention was to express disapproval for all forms of homosexual activity. As it happened neither motion was put to the vote, and in what many saw as a lack of nerve Synod requested the Archbishop to establish a Special

¹ The term 'homosexual' is at this stage of the paper not capable of precise definition. There are those who consider the word can only be used adjectivally e.g. A. W. Steinbeck, 'Of Homosexuality: The Current State of Knowledge', *Journal of Christian Education*, 59, 1977, 58-82; 58: 'the homosexual as such does not exist, but persons who at time fantasize, feel and act homosexually do'. Others insist that homosexual identity is a component of personal identity e.g. as represented in the comments of the gay activist Denis Altmann 'The greatest single victory of the gay movement over the past decade has been to shift the debate from behaviour to identity . . .' cited in K. Giles, 'Beyond Bigotry', *On Being*, October 1991, 10-13; 12.

Commission on the Theology of the Human Person, whose task it was to facilitate informed discussion on sexual issues within the diocese. Part of my brief as a member of this commission has been to work on a theology of homosexuality.

To do justice to this issue is no mean task.² On the face of it one would need to be expert at least in the fields of medicine, psychology and ethics, as well as biblical and systematic theology.³ In practice this is the methodology of many modern ecclesiastical investigations.⁴ Notwithstanding the usefulness of this approach it seems to me to be exposed to a fatal flaw, in the majority of cases in the literature there is no explicit distinction drawn between constructionist and essentialist perspectives of reality.⁵ Constructionist views interpret sexuality within a framework of cultural meanings embedded in language, narratives, practices and codes of various societies which shape biological drives within a framework of socially constructed meanings. Essentialist views need not deny the significance of culture but wish to appeal to a reality deeper or higher than culture for principles to guide human relationships.

Prima facie it would seem to be a strange form of *Christian* theology which appealed to a constructionist paradigm in order to deal with the question of homosexuality.⁶ This is because it would seem reasonable to expect any theology which might reasonably wear the epithet 'Christian' to contain as one of its axioms a doctrine of creation. Traditionally at least the doctrine of creation is a statement about the postulated God-world relationship where 'God' cannot be dissolved into 'world' without remainder, including the 'world' of culture. God is uniquely responsible for the fact that there

² The Gale Research Company obtained from the US churches alone position statements totalling two hundred and sixty nine tightly packed pages. J. G. Melton (ed), *The Churches Speak on Homosexuality*, Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1991.

³ Cf. J. B. Nelson, 'Homosexuality', in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, eds. J. Macquarrie and J. Childress, London: S.C.M., 1986, 271-274; 271.

⁴ For example, *A Christian Understanding of Human Sexuality*, British Methodist Conference: Working Party of the Division of Social Responsibility of the Faith and Order Committee, 1979; G. S. Dicker (ed), *Homosexuality and the Church* (A Report of the Assembly Committee on Homosexuality and the Church), Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1985; *Report of the Task Force on Human Sexuality to the 208th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Maryland*. Baltimore: Diocese of Maryland, 1992.

⁵ For exceptions see: D. F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988; C. Peck, 'What is Natural?', *The Modern Churchman*, 31, 1989, 25-29; M. Vasey, *Evangelical Christians and Gay Rights*, Bramcote: Grove, 1991.

⁶ Or any other *theological* question for that matter.

is a world, the God-creation link provides the ground of the world's being and so the framework for an essentialist view of sexuality.

This however is not at all self-evident when one examines the current literature on homosexuality. There is a plethora of material which wants to insist, as B. Jaudon puts it, that "justice-love" is the single moral standard by which sexual relations are judged'.⁷ As long as the sexual relationship between two persons of the same gender is one of fidelity and mutual care then there can be nothing to morally prohibit it, it cannot be sinful.⁸ It seems inherently impossible to deny on ethical grounds that any loving and just relationship is pleasing to God. I concur with the view of the traditional Roman Catholic apologist J. G. Milhaven: 'Christians of the old and new morality can agree that love, as the promotion of human good, is what makes Christian ethics. As Thomas Aquinas puts it "a man offends God only inasmuch as he acts against the human good of himself or another man"'.⁹

Unfortunately this point seems not to be understood by many conservative Christians whose final appeal is not love but law.¹⁰ For the biblical Christian however the only absolute can be love, because this is the revealed nature of God (1 John 4:8). To set law in contrast to love is certainly an expression of legalism and rises out of a failure to understand that the sole purpose of law is to serve love, where love is understood as the highest good of another.¹¹

The above comments may seem so self-evident that they funda-

⁷ B. Jaudon, 'From debate to dialogue', *Australian Ministry*, July 1992, 5-9. (Reprinted from *Sojourners*, July 1991).

⁸ See, for example, *A Christian Understanding*, E. 38; G. Edwards, 'A Critique of Creationist Homophobia', in R. Hasbany (ed), *Homosexuality and Religion*, N.Y., Harper and Row, 1989, 95-118; 115; J. McPherson, 'Second Best in a Broken World', *St Mark's Review*, 136, 1988, 10-14; 14; N. Pittenger, *Time for Consent*, London: S.C.M., 1978, 123-130; J. Spong, 'An Honest Church?', London: L.G.C.M., 1992, 3; I. Williams, 'A Biblical and Theological Understanding of Human Sexuality', in *Affirming Faith and Sexuality*, Homosexuality Task Group, Division of Social Justice, Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria, n.d., 7-12., R. Woods, *Another Kind of Love*, Chicago: Thomas More, 1977.

⁹ J. G. Milhaven, 'Homosexuality and Love', in E. Batchelor (ed), *Homosexuality and Ethics*, N.Y. Pilgrim Press, 1980, 63-70; 65.

¹⁰ On page two of the *Report on Homosexuality* prepared for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, Sydney: Ethics and Social Questions Committee, 1972, we read: 'Love does not make any action right but love is concerned to know and do the right action.' cf. J. R. W. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1984, 315: 'the biblical Christian . . . cannot accept that love is the only absolute . . . love needs law to guide it . . .'

¹¹ Cf. Williams, 'Biblical and Theological', 10; H. Thielieke, *Theological Ethics*. Vol 3: Sez, tr. J. W. Doberstein, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1979, 90-93.

mentally settle the issue, as with most liberal commentators, or so banal as to be almost useless. If one remains within the domain of love expressed so far, there does not seem to be much more that can be said except to qualify the meaning of love in terms of its particular sexual expression.¹² This is commonly defined in terms of intimacy. Whilst intimacy may be essentially inexpressible it is usually spoken of in terms of the union of persons at the deepest possible level, the mutual interpenetration of finite selves. In intimacy it is not so much something about the other person which is experienced but the other as person.¹³ Sexual acts per se cannot guarantee intimacy because the personal is more than and other than the physical.

If love is defined in terms of intimacy and intimacy in terms of personal union, with the context of coitus particularly in mind here, we must press on to ask under what essential conditions such intimacy is possible. Not to pursue this point to its final destination is to be committed *de facto* to one form of constructionism or other. The reality of this methodological procedure is often masked by ways of talking about relationships which convey the impression that they are free standing phenomena which have their own ground. That they are a sort of thing-in-itself which can be self-explanatory or self-justifying, as if a 'good relationship' were the final word in ethics. Matthew Fox, for example, cites Meister Eckhart with approval: 'relation is the essence of a thing'.¹⁴ Michael Keeling invokes the influential personalist philosophy of Martin Buber in order to argue that mature self-giving relationships are possible between homosexual persons.¹⁵

Whether it be the use of Eckhart's talk about the primacy of relation, Buber's I-Thou paradigm or any similar appeal, the 'liberal' appeal to intimacy as the final ethical reality is question begging except we are given a framework in which to evaluate the assertions

¹² J. P. Hanigan, *Homosexuality*, N.Y. Paulist, 1988, 89ff, is correct to point out that love undergirds a variety of relationships—parent-child, that between relatives and friends and so on without any sex being appropriate. Cf. *Issues in Human Sexuality: A Statement by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England*, December 1991, London: Church House, 1991, 22–23.

¹³ On intimacy see G. Ballard, 'Sexuality and Spirituality', in *Male and Female God Created Them*, A.C.T., Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulbourn, 1992, 28–31; 28–29; M. E. Kenel, 'A Celibate's Sexuality and Intimacy', *Human Development*, 7, 1, 1986, 14–19., *A Christian Understanding*, A. 35–37., Pittenger, *Time*, 31–33; P. Ramsey, *One Flesh*, Bramcote: Grove, 1975, 16.

¹⁴ M. Fox, 'The Spiritual Journey of the Homosexual' in R. Nugent (ed), *A Challenge to Love—Gay and Lesbian Couples in the Church*, 157–204; 201.

¹⁵ M. Keeling, 'Christian Love and the concept of "maturity"', London: G.C.M., n.d., 1–4; 1.

concerning homosexual intimacy.¹⁶ It is not sufficient merely to stipulate, observe or report that this is so,¹⁷ for the same has often been claimed for pederastic and incestuous relationships. To miss this point is necessarily to remain in a subjectivism which by its very character fails to admit of certain conclusions.¹⁸ To be fair however some advocates of committed homosexual relationships have tried to escape the constructionist net by appealing to the framework of nature. This takes on various forms. The simplest form is to equate what occurs in nature with what is morally normal. Characteristically such writers refer to the frequency of homosexual behaviour, its trans-cultural character, same-sex activity among animals and whatever evidence there may be that the origin of the phenomenon lies in genetic or physiological factors.¹⁹ This thesis as it stands is open to a seemingly insuperable objection—how is it possible to derive the morally desirable or permissible from the merely factual? Or, in the language of ethics, how can one derive 'ought' (a moral judgement) from 'is' an empirical (non-moral) reality. The inference which derives ethical judgement from factual or descriptive observations is sometimes called the 'naturalistic fallacy'.²⁰ Richard Hays is correct to remind us: 'We should take care . . . to avoid

¹⁶ The problem with the application of Eckhart's and Buber's categories to human relationships *simpliciter* is that human beings are not pure persons—we are creatures, animals, bodies and so on. Only of the Persons of the Trinity would it be correct to say that the identity of each Person is constituted completely out of their (intratrinitarian) relations.

¹⁷ This is exactly the point missed by G. T. Sheppard, 'The Use of Scripture within the Christian Ethical Debate concerning Same-Sex Oriented Persons', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 40, 1980, 13–35; especially pages 30–32 where he argues that the warrant which requires us to set aside 'the normative biblical expression' on homosexuality is 'the testimony of the lives and words of contemporary homosexual Christians'.

¹⁸ For example, Jim McPherson, 'Second Best', 13 affirms Harry Williams' testimony concerning his experience: 'I have seldom felt more like thanking God than when thus having sex (with men)' *Some Day I'll Find You*, Fount, 1984, 197. McPherson's interlocuter R. A. Naulty, 'Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality', *St Mark's Review*, 137, 1988, 32–33, replies that: 'In the end, our moral evaluations rest on feeling . . . It is because we find homosexual acts, *per se*, disgusting that we assess them as morally reprehensible.'

¹⁹ For example, J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 15; C. S. Ford and F. A. Beach, *Patterns of Sexual Behaviour*, N.Y., Harper and Row, 1951; S. Kingman, 'Nature and Nurture', *The Independent*, 4 October 1992, 55–57; G. Remafedi, 'Fundamental Issues in the Care of Homosexual Youth', *Medical Clinics of North America*, 74, 5, 1990, 1169–1179.

²⁰ A. C. Ewing, 'Naturalistic Ethics', in J. Macquarrie (ed), *A Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, London: S.C.M., 1967, 225–226.

confusing the descriptive findings of empirical studies with the value judgements that are often attached to them . . .²¹. This principle of course cuts both ways, it just as equally invalidates a homophobic appeal to what is against 'nature'.

Others are more purposefully theological in terms of their appeal to nature. We might put this in the form of a simple syllogism:

1. God is the Creator of human sexual nature
 2. Human sexual nature includes homosexuality
- ∴ God is the Creator of homosexuality.²²

Either of these premises could be challenged in a number of ways, but the heart of the argument is that God is responsible for that which is human and that what is human is *ipso facto* good. The person who is most explicit about this is Matthew Fox.

What we have in each of these instances (of prejudice) is one group, namely the dominant political group—white heterosexual males . . . setting itself up as the criterion for what is and is not natural, for what is and is not creation as God meant it to be . . . does Aristotle or Augustine or Aquinas know enough about 'nature' or 'creation' to condemn others in creation's name? I take just one example, that of the homosexual. Science, whose task it is to study nature or creation, has arrived at the fact that about ten percent of any given human population will be homosexual.²³ Thus we can only conclude that homosexuality is indeed "natural" for ten percent of the human race . . . Since grace builds on nature . . . then it is imperative that we let nature be active and let homosexuals be homosexuals.²⁴

We might take dispute with these comments at a number of points, but the critical question, and the turning point of this essay, has to do with the optimistic epistemology of Fox (and others). He might suppose that the will of the Creator is clearly read in the order of

²¹ R. B. Hays, 'Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1, *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 14, 1986, 184–215; 208. Cf. *Issues in Human Sexuality*, 31: 'neither a genetic nor a psychological explanation can itself say whether a condition is good or bad, nor does a genetic origin mark a particular condition as in accordance with the will of God'.

²² Cf. J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual*, Kansas City: Sheed, Ward and McMeel, 1976, 155–156; C. Morris, 'The Image and Likeness of God', *Sojourners*, July 1991, 27–28.

²³ Fox seems here to rely on the famous Kinsey data. A. C. Kinsey, W. B. Pomeroy, C. E. Martin, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, Philadelphia: Saunders, 1948. More recent research indicates a figure closer to two per cent. Alan Gutmacher Institute publication April 15th 1992, cited in *Weekend Australian* 1–2/5/93, 20.

²⁴ M. Fox, *Original Blessing*, Santa Fe: Bear, 1983, 269; 'The Spirituality of the Homosexual', 196.

nature but a long philosophical tradition asserts the exact opposite.²⁵ At the very least nature as we know it is full of ambiguities, much of which we encounter in the world does not immediately strike us as good. The various approaches to homosexuality which I have discussed so far seem to stand closer to the tradition of natural religion than to that of revealed religion. Those authorities which triumphantly proclaim the inadequacy of the Bible to deal with this issue, by asserting its ambiguity,²⁶ diversity,²⁷ cultural limitations²⁸ or heterosexism²⁹ seem blissfully unaware of the epistemological hazards which lie before them. The end of such a path has been for many not certainty but agnosticism.

The alternative is to reckon that the Creator must communicate his will in a special way. The traditional position of the Christian Church, especially in its Protestant modalities, has been that: 'because reason is incapable of forming a true concept of good according to nature alone concepts of the good must come from revelation' (Olsen).³⁰ We need to be told what is good, either God prescribes or we cannot know with certainty.³¹ This is the point of the great divide, the unbridgeable chasm between religion as man's endeavour to ascend to God or his mind, and a theology of the Word understood as divine encounter and indeed confrontation.³² The Word is not something which we discover, but it discovers, and unveils, us. It is God who personally summons us to think, act and live accountable to him. We are not searching for a law or principle to which we must conform, even the principle of love, even a principle supported by biblical prooftexting, but we seek God's self-

²⁵ See especially David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, H. D. Aitken (ed), N.Y., Hafner, 1948, part x, 61–70.

²⁶ *Homosexuality And the Church*, 39.

²⁷ Peck, 'What is Natural?', 27.

²⁸ *A Christian Understanding*, A. 16.

²⁹ M. Morrison, 'A Love That Won't Let Go', *Sojourners*, July 1991, 12–16; 13; D. Spencer, 'The Risks of Reconciliation', *Sojourners*, July 1991, 22–23; 23.

³⁰ G. W. Olsen, 'The gay middle ages: A Response to Professor Boswell', *Communio*, 1981, 119–138; 120. Olsen's work is a conclusive refutation of Boswell's thesis, *Social Tolerance*, that the patristic and early medieval church did not condemn homosexual acts *per se*. See also D. F. Wright, 'Homosexuality or Prostitutes? The meaning of ARSENOKOITAI (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10), *Vigiliae Christianae*, 38, 1984, 125–153; 'Early Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality'; *Studia Patristica*, 18, 2, 1989, 329–334; J. R. Wright, 'Boswell on Homosexuality: A Case Undemonstrated', *Anglican Theological Review*, 66, 1, 1984, 79–94.

³¹ *Homosexuality and the Church*, 41.

³² The classic statement here is of course that of Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, tr. G. T. Thomson and H. Knight, Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1956, I/1, 17.

revelation.³³ The locus of God's self-revealing activity today is Holy Scripture.

It has often been observed by writers from a wide range of theological positions that sexuality and personal identity are integrally related.³⁴ Although the two are not to be equated we cannot divorce our sense of sexual identity from our source of personal identity. If we take this as a given we may proceed to ask what part of the Bible most profoundly discusses these issues. The obvious answer seems to be the first two chapters of Genesis.³⁵ Despite the explicit use of these chapters in the New Testament, not least in Jesus' bringing together Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 (Mark 10:6–7), many commentators on the subject of homosexuality, from both a liberal and conservative perspective, fail to attend to these passages in detail.³⁶ It is my judgement that this is a major source for the present confusion about this issue.

R.S. Anderson makes a crucial point in saying: 'In biblical theology the touchstone for any critical examination of what is human is the concept of the *imago Dei* (image of God)'.³⁷ The basic text here is Genesis 1:26–27:

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'

³³ Cf. R. S. Anderson, *On Being Human*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982, 119; Thielicke, *Ser*, 269–270. It is this reality which separates out all genuine theologies of the Word from religion, whether it takes the form of constructionism or fundamentalism.

³⁴ For example: *A Christian Understanding*, A. 28–29; O. O'Donovan, *Transsexualism and Christian Marriage*, Bramcote: Grove, 1982, 15–18; J. B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978, 17–18; Stott, *Issues*, 301; D. S. Bailey, 'Sex', in Macquarrie (ed), *A Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, 316–318; 317; J. Kleinig, 'Reflections on Homosexuality', *Journal of Christian Education*, 59, 1977, 32–57; 35.

³⁵ This is occasionally denied eg. *Report of the Task Force*, 9; Edwards, 'Creationist Homophobia', 105. The substance of such denial depends on what follows.

³⁶ A notable example is that in the important work of Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1983, 114–115 'the argument (in Romans 1:26–27) has nothing to do with . . . the interpretation of the Genesis stories of creation' (my emphasis). But see, C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1975, vol 1, 125; J. De Young, 'The Meaning of "Nature" in Romans 1 and Its Implications for Biblical Prescriptions of Homosexual Behaviour', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 31, 1988, 429–441; 439; Hays, 'Relations', 190–191; D. F. Wright, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*: *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 38, 1, 1985, 118–120; 119; and so the majority of commentators on Romans.

³⁷ Anderson, *On Being Human*, 104.

So God created man
 in his own image,
 in the image of God
 he created him;
 male and female
 he created them. (NIV)

The first question to be answered is the meaning of 'let us' (v. 26). At least six important answers have been given historically,³⁸ but only one of these seems significant for the issue at hand. Whatever the author of Genesis may have intended Christian expositors have traditionally seen here a reference to the Trinity.³⁹ One can hardly claim to be Christian if one denies that the God who created us in his own image is a plurality of Persons, not in the sense of three distinct entities which could conceivably subsist without the existence of the others, but in the manner of a necessary coinherence. God has his very being in relationship, God is being-in relationship. This is, strictly speaking, an ontological claim, God is this and could be no other. God could not be three 'Fathers' nor three 'Sons' nor three 'Spirits'. Unity without identity is what constitutes God. Or to put it another way, there are three distinct but necessary modes of being God and being in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This will become an important observation when we consider what it means to be human.⁴⁰

It has long been disputed as to whether our text helps us identify what it means to be created in the image of the Trinitarian God.⁴¹ A comprehensive solution seems to have been provided by a most unlikely pair of allies, the neo-orthodox systematic theologian Karl Barth and the feminist theologian Phyllis Tribble. Barth seems to have been the first to argue that: ' "He created them male and female" . . . is the interpretation immediately given to the sentence "God created man" '.⁴² Most contemporary theological opinion has followed Barth in his assertions that the *imago Dei* is not to be found in a property of man e.g. rationality, but the human being as such, and in his emphasis on relationality as constitutive of the divine likeness. He

³⁸ See G. W. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Waco: Word, 1987, 27ff.

³⁹ For example, Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 12, Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 12. 6. 6–7.

⁴⁰ I am not supposing that there can be an identity between what it means to be God and what it means to be human, only an analogy. Cf. Barth, C.D. III/1 220; P. K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984, 45.

⁴¹ See C. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, tr. J. J. Scullion, London: S.P.C.K., 1984, 147–160 for the history of interpretation of 'image of God'.

⁴² Barth, C.D. III/1, 185.

has however been strongly opposed across the theological spectrum in his commitment to the duality of man and woman as the analogy between God and man.⁴³

Sometimes the objection is a denial of Barth's kerygmatic methodology,⁴⁴ at other times the conviction is that the crucial determinant of our humanity is co-humanity (rather than sexual bipolarity),⁴⁵ or that man was originally made androgynous.⁴⁶ Most of this paper has already concerned methodology, so I leave the issue there. The Genesis text as it stands does not seem to allow for androgyny. As Gerhard von Rad puts it: 'Sexual distinction is also created. The plural in v. 27 ("he created them") is intentionally contrasted with the singular ("him") and prevents one from assuming the creation of an original androgynous man. By God's will, man was not created alone but designated for the "thou" of the other sex. The idea of man, according to P, finds its full meaning not in the male alone but in man and woman'.⁴⁷ Neither does the text permit us to conclude that the crucial determinant of our co-humanity is a gender unspecific I-Thou confrontation. It is at this point that Tribble's contribution proves invaluable.

Whereas Barth was content to argue as a dogmatician Tribble subjects the text to careful literary analysis. Genesis 1:27 exhibits a parallelism in 3 lines. Line 2 'in the image of God he created them') is an inverted parallel to line one, built on a chiasmic pattern. Using the Hebrew word sequence Tribble showed this as follows:⁴⁸

	a	b	c
1.	And created	God	humankind in his image;
	c'	b'	a'
2.	in the image	of God	created he him.

'Male and female he created them' is line 3. This forms a formal or

⁴³ So, G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, tr. D. W. Jellema, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962, 72-74; E. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption. Dogmatics: vol. 2*, tr. O. Wyon, Philadelphia: Lutterworth, 1952, 63-64 for opponents from within Barth's basic theological tradition.

⁴⁴ C. E. Curran, 'Homosexuality and Moral Theology: Methodological and Substantive Considerations', in *Homosexuality and Ethics*, 171-185; 174.

⁴⁵ J. B. Nelson, 'Gayness and Homosexuality: Issues for the Church', in *Homosexuality and Ethics*, 186-210; 195; Scanzoni and Mollenkott, 'Neighbour', 129-130.

⁴⁶ Edwards, 'Creationist Homophobia', 111-114. cf. N. Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1954. 3.3.

⁴⁷ G. von Rad, *Genesis*, tr. J. Bowden, London: S.C.M. 1972, 60. Cf. Jewett, *Man*, 25; P. Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978, 18.

⁴⁸ Tribble, *Rhetoric*, 16-17.

complementary parallelism in which 'male and female' explain 'image of God' in line 2, the fulcrum of the three liturgical lines.⁴⁹ Additionally, the switch from the singular 'him' in line two to the plural 'them' in line 3 provides a key for interpreting *ha 'adam* (man) in line one. Tribble concludes:

The plural form reinforces sexual differentiation within the unity of humanity . . . As the most basic way to know mankind in its fulness, 'male and female' is the vehicle of a metaphor whose tenor is the 'image of God' . . . 'male and female' is the finger pointing to the 'image of God'.⁵⁰

It is one thing to accept this exegesis but another to fill it out theologically, and in such a way that we reach a definitive answer about homosexuality, here we must return to Barth.

Everything else that is said about man, namely, that he is to have dominion over the animal kingdom and the earth, that he is blessed in the exercise of the powers of his species . . .⁵¹ has reference to this plural: he is male and female . . . the differentiation of sex, is something which formally he has in common with the beasts. What distinguishes him from the beasts . . . is the fact that in the case of man the differentiation of sex is the only differentiation. Man is not said to be created or to exist in groups and species, in races and peoples. The only real differentiation and relationship is that of man to woman, and in its original and most concrete form of man to woman and woman to man . . .⁵² Man can and will always be man before God and among his fellows only as he is man in relationship to woman and woman in relationship to man. And as he is one or the other he is man.⁵³

Whilst Barth's discussion is seminal it needs to be filled out. At a physical level it is true to say that the male-female differentiation is shared by man and beast, but sexuality in human beings goes beyond the merely biological. If, as has been argued so far, being male or female is intrinsic to what it means to be in the image of a

⁴⁹ On parallelism in Hebrew literature, see G. B. Gray, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry*, N.Y.: K.T.A.V., 1972., G. G. Boling, 'Synonymous Parallelism in the Psalms', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 5, 1960, 221-225.

⁵⁰ Tribble, *Rhetoric*, 19-20. Cf. Westerman, *Genesis*, 160: 'there can be no question of an "essence of man" apart from the existence of the two sexes'.

⁵¹ It's not clear whether Barth includes procreation here, but later makes it clear that this is not an essential part of the *imago Dei*. Barth, *C.D. III/1*, 198, cf. Tribble, *Rhetoric*, 15.

⁵² Barth, *C.D. III/1*, 165 etc. does not mean by man and woman simply husband and wife. The woman may be mother, sister, friend and so on, the man father, brother, friend likewise.

⁵³ Barth, *C.D. III/1*, 186.

personal God then human sexuality goes down to the deepest metaphysical grounds of our personal identity.⁵⁴ There are two and only two ways of being human, the necessary duality in human existence is male and female, or, in order to emphasise the personal and transcendent dimensions which make humans unique, man and woman. The point may need some clarification. Barth insists that the differentiation of man and woman is defined by God's command and so is not accessible empirically.⁵⁵ This should not be understood in the way of heteronomy, as if some foreign word of law stood over against human beings telling them what they should be, but rather as the power of God operating at the ground of our being moving us towards an appointed destination which is for our highest good. The command of God is that creative Word whose will it is to conform us to his image, it does not meet an already complete human being as it were from the outside, but operates at the ontological root of our personhood.⁵⁶

If what it means to be a man as opposed to a woman cannot be reduced to biological categories neither can it be defined merely in psychological or socio-cultural terms. Sexual differentiation is not primarily a matter of masculinity and femininity, where these may be understood as personality characteristics. Masculinity and femininity are composed of the values, beliefs, myths and expectations of what it means to be a man or a woman. There are however no intrinsically gender specific traits, at the psychological level we are dealing with a spectrum and culturally there are no fixed boundaries. It would be difficult if not impossible to argue that there is a specific Word of God concerning masculinity-femininity as there is concerning man-woman.⁵⁷

If this is correct it closes the door against one possible line of argument for homosexuality. Helmut Thielicke describes the theory that every person has a M(man) component and a W(woman) component of different proportions. On this basis the goal of eros is

⁵⁴ See, D. S. Bailey, *The Man-Woman Relation in Christian Thought*, London, Longman, 1959, 269–271.

⁵⁵ Barth, *C.D.* III/1, 153.

⁵⁶ For biblical language to this effect, see Job 31: 15; Psalms 22:9–10; 71:6; 139:13; Isaiah 44:2, 24; 49:5. On a philosophy of internal divine causation, see my: *The Timelessness of God*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1990, 252–256.

⁵⁷ One has only to think of the 'feminine' traits of God in the Old Testament and the emotions exhibited by Jesus. Sherwin Bailey wishes to argue: 'Metaphysically speaking man is always masculine and woman is always feminine'. *Christian Thought*, 291. It may be more helpful to see masculine and feminine as inappropriate categories for predication at the metaphysical level—whether for human or divine persons.

to discover someone with the corresponding M-W proportions. If, say, a man has 60% M and 40% W the woman must have 40% M and 60% W in order to harmonise. 'If a man has a proportion of half M and half W or even a preponderance of the W component, then no woman but only a partner of the same sex will suit him'.⁵⁸ While this may be a fair enough description of what is happening in homosexual relationships psychologically⁵⁹ it confuses several issues. Firstly it ignores matters at the biological level. At this level a person with normal biological endowment is not more or less a man or a woman but either a man or a woman.⁶⁰ It is from the biological endowment that the psychological and behavioural possibilities arise. To ignore this is not only poor anthropology, driving one ineluctably in the direction of an indefensible dualism, but also without theological justification.⁶¹ To treat the psychological domain of masculinity and femininity as the final arbiter of what is both possible and permissible in human sexual relationships is to elevate it into a sphere of self-validation and is simply another manifestation of the subjectivism which I have opposed so far. On the other hand with the either-or of biological maleness or femaleness to which the human race is bound we are confronted with the good gift of God in creation which is affirmed by the authority of the transcendent Word: 'very good' (Genesis 1:31).

This enables us to approach the question of sexual differentiation and complementarity more completely. If Genesis 1 describes the *imago Dei* as an I-Thou confrontation between man and woman Genesis 2 explicates this in terms not only of sexuality but sex. Whereas the existence of the sexes in the first creation saga is a matter of goodness, in the second 'It is *not good* for the man to be alone' (Genesis 2:18a). The man is represented as essentially incomplete without 'a helper suitable for him' (Genesis 2:18b). This could easily be translated as 'a helper as his opposite'⁶² or 'a helper as one who corresponds to him'.⁶³ There is present not only the idea of similarity but also supplementation. The completion of humanity

⁵⁸ Thielicke, *Sex*, 94.

⁵⁹ See especially the theses of E. R. Moberly, *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*, Cambridge: James Clarke, 1983, *Psychogenesis*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983 and L. Payne, *The Broken Image*, Westchester: Crossway, 1981.

⁶⁰ This is the point made by O'Donovan, *Transsexualism*, 7. Even in situations of biological ambiguity this is judged from the perspective of the expected absence or presence of a 'Y' chromosome and the physiology this entails.

⁶¹ For a lengthy discussion of these issues see J. W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.

⁶² Thielicke, *Sex*, 4; von Rad, *Genesis*, 82.

⁶³ Wenham, *Genesis*, 363.

in Genesis 2 is not simply another human being but another of a different kind. The pre-requisite for the 'one flesh' state in Genesis 2:24, which includes but transcends intercourse, is the polarity of being male and female experienced as complementarity. This intimacy, known within the Bible only in the context of heterosexual marriage, involves the mutual surrender of the whole psychophysical ego,⁶⁴ or, in the language used earlier, a metaphysical encounter.⁶⁵ This is a metaphysical encounter of a particular form, for the 'I' of a man is not the same as the 'I' of a woman. Manhood and womanhood are forms of personal being where personal being is understood as an emergent property dependent on but not reducible to physicality.⁶⁶ The I-Thou confrontation implicit in the heterosexual union cannot be the same as the I-Thou confrontation in homosexual union because the biological substratum underlying manhood is different from that underlying womanhood. Such a difference is understood in Genesis 2 to be the essential complementarity necessary for full interpersonal union. The animals are too much 'other' to allow such fellowship, only the woman is of man and yet different from man. The act of sexual intercourse is purposefully, even if mythico-historically, represented as a sort of 're-union' between the man and that which has been taken out of him.⁶⁷ In the light of the fuller revelation of biblical truth about sexual union viz. Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:31-32) it would be erroneous to limit this union to a merely physical reality.

At this point we may reflect meaningfully on the much defamed remark of Barth:

The real perversion takes place, the original decadence and disintegration begins, where man will not see his partner of the opposite sex and therefore the primal form of fellow-man, refusing to hear his question and to make a responsible answer, but trying to be human in himself as sovereign man or woman, rejoicing in himself and self-satisfaction and self sufficiency. The command of God is opposed to the wonderful esoteric of this *beata solitudo* . . . The command of God shows him

⁶⁴ Barth, *C.D.* III/4. 139.

⁶⁵ Bailey, *Christian Theology*, 281. This has been helpfully represented diagrammatically by L. Bailey, 'Identity and Intimacy: Growing Persons in Developing Marriages', in *God Created Them*, 41-46; 44.

⁶⁶ On the philosophy of emergence see my, 'The Origin of the Soul: New Light on an Old Question', *Evangelical Quarterly*, 61, 1, 1989, 121-140, and the references cited therein.

⁶⁷ Stott, *Issues*, 310-311; von Rad, *Genesis*, 84.

irrefutably—in clear contradiction to his own theories—that as a man he can only be a man with woman, or as a woman with man.⁶⁸

What Barth is promoting here is the priority of a theological anthropology properly informed by the Word of God over any ethical position which stands in contradiction to this Word. It is totally mistaken to suppose that he is opposing one ethical principle based on the use of a few bible verses against another which is dependent on some other authority—say science or reason. Rather his claim is that the Word of God is constitutive of reality, and of the reality of humanity in such a way as man and woman that all homosexual acts are essentially or intrinsically de-humanising. The Barthian position, and the essentialist viewpoint defended in this paper, is that manhood and womanhood are mutually complementary *ontological* realities. Gender difference is not an accidental acquired property but something essential to our humanity, it belongs to the order of being human itself. It is more than the psychological, biological or cultural, as Anderson puts it: ‘“he” and “she” belong to the same *theological dogma as imago Dei*’.⁶⁹ What we are dealing with in human sexuality, the bipolarity of man and woman, is not a mere order of history but an order valid for all eternity.⁷⁰

It necessarily follows that to seek sexual fulfilment⁷¹ outside of the heterosexual arrangement is to violate the order of creation. Homosexuality, as a displacement within the ontological order must have the status of a dysteleology. It fails on each of the counts represented as the purpose of sex in the first two chapters of Genesis. The homosexual act does not contain within it even the possibility of a willingness to procreate. As such it is an implicit denial of one of the good ends to which God has ordered sexuality, it is on this basis vocationless, unable to generate a new centre outside of itself around which a family grows, develop and serves society. In the case of homosexuality sex adds nothing essential to the love of a couple.⁷²

The other end of sex is fellowship. I have already spent some time arguing that same-sex relationships lack the ontological and so

⁶⁸ Barth, *C.D.* III/4, 166.

⁶⁹ Anderson, *Being Human*, 111. (my emphasis). This is the reply to the question raised at the beginning of the article, if ‘homosexual’ does not have ontological status it cannot be used substantively to describe personal identity.

⁷⁰ Barth, *C.D.* III/4, 158. In theological terms, a true order of creation, cf. Thielicke, *Sex*, 104.

⁷¹ In this context, genitally. This remark needs to be made because sexual desire need not include the desire for sex, intimacy is not dependent upon physical orgasm.

⁷² See Hanigan, *Homosexuality*, 89–112.

personal differentiation necessary for the intimacy designed by God to be expressed in sexual intercourse. One cannot simply appeal to 'love' as a self-justifying principle. Love is what it is because of a certain order of being, first in God then in humanity. John Chryssvagis puts the point well: 'Love must be an overcoming of incompleteness and division. It is only through a genuine, full yet continent, love towards another person that one may re-establish wholeness. In this, perhaps, lies the weakness and sin of homosexuality: the other person that one loves must be *fully* other, completely complementary. Every act, every manifestation of love meets a corresponding response and reciprocity and communion . . . Women is an "I" to the "Thou" of man . . .'⁷³ If this is true then the search for love through sex in homosexual relationships is the desire for an impossibility, the sex component of homosexual love cannot be love at all and it is to be expected that the usual homosexual state marked by a deep lack of fulfilment at the level of personal being will be characterised by promiscuity.

Another point needs to be made here. Earlier it was argued that the male-female complementarity of Genesis 1 reflected the internal diversity of the Trinity. It is commonly recognised that the sexual act is sacramental, pointing to a reality beyond itself, the absolute love which the three Persons in God possess for one another.⁷⁴ Heterosexual union, as the overcoming of difference, points to the sort of union believed to be in God. Whilst recognising that we are dealing with an analogy here it is fit and proper to ask: 'What is homosexual union pointing to?' Lacking the ontological differentiation of heterosexuality it can only point to a Trinity other than that of traditional orthodoxy: a 'Trinity' perhaps of three 'Fathers' or three 'Sons' or three 'Holy Spirits'.

Perhaps the advocate of homosexuality might wish to deny altogether that manhood and womanhood constitute ontological differences. Appeal could be made to the words of Jesus: 'When the dead rise they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven' (Mark 12:25). Yet Jesus did not say that in the resurrection of the dead there will be neither male nor female.⁷⁵ Unlike the situation with the roles of men and women which are not eschatologically determined but social, (for example

⁷³ Chryssvagis, 'Love and Sexuality: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 40, 3, 1987, 321-333; 326.

⁷⁴ For example, *Issues in Human Sexuality*, 37-38.

⁷⁵ Cf. Barth, *C.D.* III/4, 144-145. One need only try to imagine genderless human persons to see the difficulty with this suggestion.

there will be neither men nor women clergy in heaven) our sexuality *per se* is essential to our humanity.⁷⁶

At this stage one searches in vain for a specific Word of God to create a basis for homosexual practice or to uphold the same. If the theological anthropology which underlies the view of man and woman, and so sex and marriage, represented in this paper is rejected then there seems to be no alternative but to leave the issue of sexuality to the psychologist and the ethicist. This is precisely of course the constructionism which I have rejected earlier in this article. What I find most unsatisfactory about the liberal position is that it either does not seek nor is it able to provide a necessary reference to God in its theology of homosexuality.⁷⁷ The final appeal is to some form of human authority—either in the domain of personal experience and observation, that of science or an appeal shared with common humanity to an ethic of love and justice. In raising the most basic of theological questions, that of ontology, I have tried to show that in attempting to construct a theology of homosexuality one is pursuing an illusion or raising a structure without a foundation. As I have already remarked this is the difference between natural religion, however it may be dressed up as ‘Christian’, and a genuine theology of the Word. Until a rejoinder is made to these arguments along essentialist lines I for one must conclude that a true theology or spirituality of homosexuality is an impossibility.

Abstract

Theologies of homosexuality may be categorised as essentialist or constructionist. The latter interprets sexuality within the relative framework of culture and socially constructed meanings, whereas essentialism seeks an ontological ground for deciding what is just and loving in the sexual arena. A theological anthropology based on Genesis 1:26–27 sees both a trinitarian reference and the necessary corollary that male *plus* female is constitutive of the image of God. The differentiation of humanity as male and female in an ontologically complementary manner is the ground for the ‘one flesh’ union of Genesis 2:24. The union of persons which is the goal of intercourse is therefore impossible in same-sex coupling. Thus homosexual practice is essentially disordered and de-humanising.

⁷⁶ So, Anderson, *Being Human*, 118–121.

⁷⁷ Merely quoting bible texts without an appropriate theology to undergird them is almost as damaging.