

# **Homosexuality: Legally Permissible or Spiritually Misguided?<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

One of the most divisive issues facing the Christian church today is the ubiquitous issue of the acceptance of homosexual behaviour within the parameters of church leadership. Revisionist theologians contend that the church must redress her stance on this issue to keep in step with the prevailing culture of the day, which favours the acceptance of homosexual behaviour due to its proposed biological determinism.

This article analyses this divisive issue from four perspectives: (a) historical attitudes towards homosexuality in a variety of cultures across time, (b) empirical studies regarding the causation of homosexual orientation, (c) the witness of scripture and (d) the implications for pastoral ministry.

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## **1. Introduction**

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For more than two decades few topics have become as divisive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century church as the issue of homosexuality. The heated debate touches on a variety of issues that are contested throughout the culture: sexual ethics, the meaning of marriage and family and, most significantly, the genetic basis for same sex relationships. Within the church, debated issues on homosexuality have involved revisionist theology regarding scriptural interpretation, ecclesial authority and theological understandings of creation and sexuality.

One popular argument often posited by revisionists is that the church's stance should be re-evaluated in the light of new scientific evidence which suggests that homosexuality is a genetically inherited condition and thus a permanent state. Their consensus, therefore, is that homosexuality should be accepted by the church as a natural variant of sexual orientations, a manifestation of the richness of God's creation (Austriaco 2003).

As a result of theological revisionism, the schism within several mainline denominations in the USA (e.g., Presbyterian, Episcopal, United Methodist, Lutheran, United Church of Christ and Anglican) has proved painful. The Protestant church, particularly the Episcopal Church, has been on the verge of rupture since the 2003 election of an openly homosexual bishop, V. Gene Robinson of New Hampshire (Rossi 2006).

This issue was an impetus which caused the battle over gay marriage which shook the political and religious foundations of South African society when archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane supported V. Gene Robinson's election in 2003. South Africa became the fifth country in the world to allow gay marriages. Retired Anglican Bishop David Russell of Cape Town posits that South Africa is now dividing along new lines—this time over sexuality (Kane 2007). Additionally, the United Methodist Church faced issues “so deep as to harbour the danger of explicit disunity or schism” (Christian Century, 1998).

Predictably, many church members are confused over what constitutes sound Christian teaching. Those who take the traditional and conservative view hold that sexually active homosexuals are ineligible for ministry. Those who are

more liberal argue that the church is being rigid and out of touch with social progress; it needs to modernise its criteria for appointing ecclesial leaders.

### **1.1. Dichotomy in cohesive theological thought**

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Revisionist theologians (Nelson 1977; Boswell, cited in Humphreys 1985) acquiesce to a climate of tolerance toward same sex behaviour and posit that one must re-examine scriptural interpretations to include more relevancy to the current cultural mores, while conservative theologians argue that scriptural tradition maintains that there is a generally accepted code of morality, derived from the inerrancy of the scriptures, and deviations from that code should be labelled as abnormal, deviant behaviour (sin).

Max Stackhouse (quoted in Helm 1998), professor of Christian ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary, contends otherwise when he states:

I think a rough consensus has been reached among mainline churches: They agree to defend the rights of homosexuals and on the need for a policy of tolerance toward people in homosexual relationships. Although, most churches agree that homosexual relationships are not the ideal. They are not something the church should praise or celebrate. Despite disagreement on ordination, there are these two over-arching agreements.

Is faulty theological reasoning behind the gay hermeneutic? Clearly, the confusion of the church on the issue of homosexuality is varied with both liberal and conservative views. Is there a possibility to assuage the confusion and bring to light God's revealed plan for all human behaviour?

### **1.2. Statement of purpose**

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The purpose of this paper is to examine critically the divisive issue of homosexuality from four perspectives: historical, empirical, scriptural and pastoral.

- *Historical*. The article will examine ancient societies in an attempt to determine the origins of the practice and to learn whether they were tolerated by those societies. Proponents of homosexual behaviour contend that anti-homosexuality ideas originated from the Western Christian churches. This article will explore the historical accuracy of these contentions.
- *Empirical*. The paper will examine the findings of empirical, scientific research regarding the causes of homosexuality to determine there is convincing scientific evidence showing that homosexual behaviour is biologically or genetically determined. The salient issue of homosexual orientation versus chosen behaviour will be examined, asking questions such as: Are people born gay? Can a homosexual change his/her sexual orientation? Is there a gay gene for homosexuality?
- *Scriptural*. The article will briefly present the traditional view of the witness of Scripture. Although revisionist theologians postulate against the witness of scripture, it is essential to give careful and accurate interpretation to God's mandates on homosexual behaviour.
- *Pastoral*. Finally, particular emphasis will be given to the implications of the study for pastoral ministry within the context of the current and future church of Christ. Two of the most salient issues facing pastoral counsellors today will be examined: If homosexuality is legally permissible, (a) should the church conduct same-sex marriages? (b) should homosexual "Christians" be given full rights among church leadership in all aspects of teaching, preaching and leading?

### **1.3. Defining homosexuality**

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The word "homosexuality" was first used in 1869. Even the root word "sexuality" is a 19<sup>th</sup> century coinage (ACUTE 1998). For clarity of this research, the following definition of the word "homosexual" will guide the contents of this paper:

People whose sexual attraction is predominantly towards their own sex, whether or not it is expressed in homoerotic sexual activity, and that the term "homoerotic sexual practice" be used

to denote genital or other activity pertaining to sexual arousal between people of the same sex (ACUTE 1998:17).

Let us examine the historical dimensions of ancient societies to determine the origin of the practice. When and where did the practice surface? How were homosexuals treated by society?

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## **2. Historical dimensions of homosexuality**

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Many proponents of homosexuality argue that hostility toward homosexual behaviour originated with the Christian church. One prominent proponent of this ideology was Professor John Boswell, a Roman Catholic professor of history at Yale University. Upon his death to AIDS in 1994, Boswell left a legacy of being the foremost scholar on the history of lesbian and gay Christianity. In his book *Homosexuality, Intolerance, and Christianity*, Boswell set out to claim evidence that the church was the cause of hostility to homosexual people. However, he claims *not* to have found such evidence when he wrote: “As it happens, it isn’t what I found in the documents in this case” (Boswell, quoted in Humphreys 1985).

Animosity to homosexuals did not originate with the Christian church. Abhorrence to such behaviour was evidenced in ancient and pagan societies, beginning with the ancient Hebrews, Egyptians, and Assyrians. Historical evidence maintains each of these societies had laws against homosexual practices (Davis 1993).

Other ancient societies also showed a clear aversion to homosexuality.

*Hittite Laws.* Hittite law from the second millennium B.C. classified homosexuality as an abomination which incurred harsh and cruel punishment. For instance, a man convicted of homosexual rape was subjected to forcible penetration, then castrated (Greenberg 1988:126).

*Iran (early Persia).* Zoroastrianism founded in Iran (unknown date) took a very harsh view of homosexuality. Its teaching places sodomites among the ranks of those who may be killed on the spot. Later texts of the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. continue to regard homosexuality as heinous (Greenberg 1988:186).

*Greek Society.* Although from the 6<sup>th</sup> century homosexuality was referred to in the art and literature of Greece, it is historically clear that ancient Greek culture never fully accepted homosexuality as a societal norm. For example, Aristotle, Herodotus, and many Stoic and Cynic philosophers expressed moral disapproval of homosexual practices (Davis 1993). Other Greek societies strongly disapproved of sexual relationships between men of the same age. Men who did not marry, according to Plutarch, were scorned or punished by Spartan authorities (Hine 2007).

*Roman Society.* Similarly, in ancient Roman society, visibility of the practice through the writings of Suetonius, Catullus, and Martial, was ridiculed and not met with general social approval (Davis 1993; Norton 2004).

*Ancient Pagan Societies.* Additionally, there is a lack of historical evidence for the acceptance of homosexuality within the pagan cultures. The 8<sup>th</sup> century Vikings, Visigoths, Celts, and Vandals vehemently opposed homosexual activity. As a result, some of these pagan cultures punished the people severely. The Visigoths' law condemned homosexuals to be burned at the stake (Davis 1993). Equally, Salvian, 5<sup>th</sup> century presbyter of the church in Marseille, France, described the Goth, Saxon, and Vandals as strictly chaste: "The vandals were not tainted by effeminacy, nor did they tolerate it" (Greenberg 1988:243).

Within the pagan culture of the Celts, homosexuality was strongly disapproved and completely unacceptable. Such men were regarded as abominations. Homosexual men were often exiled from their homeland and if they kept the practice hidden and were discovered, they were put to death by mob rage (Hine 2007).

*Germanic Peoples.* Homosexual relationships were frowned upon amongst the Germanic peoples of the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tacitus reports that the German custom was to bury alive in a swamp anyone found guilty of homosexual behaviour (Greenberg 1988).

*Early Europe.* From 1000 to 1500, Europe began to experience an increase in homosexual activity. From the late 16<sup>th</sup> century to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, sexual deviation grew in England. In 18<sup>th</sup> century London, homosexuals

“married” without legal sanction in central London in places called “molly houses”. These places consisted of disorderly pubs and coffee houses where homosexual activities transpired (Norton 2004).

*The Netherlands.* In 1969, 44 percent of the Netherlands population rejected homosexuality (DeBoer 1978). Loving relationships between two men or two women was by no means generally accepted in the Netherlands (Sandors 1980:1). However, a transition in the societal norm occurred when homosexuality was transformed from sin and pathology into psychological and social problems that could be treated in mental health care, thus ushering in a change in relation between religion and healthcare. Religion lost importance in modern Dutch society because physicians, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists created new areas of intervention in people’s private lives and took over the traditional task of the church in the field of charity and pastoral care (Oosterhuis 1996).

*North America.* American settlers from England in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries labelled homosexual behaviour a sin and a crime, an aberrant act for which the person received punishment in this life and the next. During World War II, USA armed forces excluded homosexuals from serving in the military.

In North America, during the 1940s, there were strong societal norms (religious beliefs, laws, and medical sciences) against homosexual behaviour. Typically, anti-homosexuality attitudes prevailed as a theme of American political culture throughout the same era. It was during the 1950s when America swung the pendulum in favour of homosexuality.

A leading advocate of gay rights began when Henry Hay, a member of the Communist party, founded what is known as the homosexual emancipation movement, the Mattachine Society (D’Emilio 1983). As a result, growth of homosexuality escalated into the 1970s through gay bars in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. These highly gay-oriented establishments served as a marketplace for homosexual liaisons (Murray 1996).

In North American history since the 1970s, homosexuals have been increasingly visible and militant. It was in 1973 that homosexual activists pressured the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexual from

its list of mental disorders as outlined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (Davis 1993; cf. APA 2007). However, since that time some psychologists have questioned the validity of removing homosexuality from the illness model. Their rationale is that, despite its legitimate therapeutic and sociopolitical drawbacks, the illness model of homosexuality included elements of causality that are lacking from newer theories (Gonsiorek 1990:1).

Neither ancient nor modern history support the contention that abhorrence to same-sex behaviour originated with the Christian church. Pagan cultures, too, found the practice to be unacceptable for a variety of reasons.

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### **3. Multifactorial causation of homosexuality**

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#### **3.1. The interactional model for homosexuality**

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Recently, scientists have postulated that there may be factors that pre-dispose one to homosexual behaviour. Matheson (2007) studied the predisposition of homosexuality and made several compelling discoveries. Evidence suggests that three main groupings of factors are involved in complex interactions: biological drives, interpersonal relations and psychological factors. These comprise what social scientists call an interactional model for homosexuality.

Byne and Parson (2007) concur with Matheson (2007) that an interactional model exists for homosexuality, combining biological and environmental influences. However, there is a caveat when discussing the biological aspect of homosexuality. Herein, lies the apex of the debate and it is at this conjecture that Christians must exercise caution and gain clarity on the issue. Let us further and more clearly define the biological model for homosexuality.

Biological research on homosexuality is driven by powerful ideologies. Research on same sex behaviour is not “immune to the cultural and political context within which it takes place” (Abbott 1995:59). Biological theory suggests that genes or prenatal hormones cause homosexuality. Some scientists (e.g., Schuklenk, Stein, Kerin & Byne 1997) propose that the brain and hormones direct our behaviour in a one-way cause and effect manner. Biologic theory assumes that the brain affects behaviour, but behaviour does not influence (or change) behaviour.



However, Valenstein (1998:126-128) argues that experiences or behaviours can indeed modify the brain:

A person's mental state and experience can alter the brain. . . . Various experiences can cause structural and functioning changes in the brain. . . . Genes are responsible for establishing scaffolding of the brain, but a large amount of neuronal growth that leads to the establishment of connections has been shown to be influenced by experience.

Thus, we learn that it is through the biological model for homosexuality that the issue causes intense debate and concern for Christians. If one espouses this model, one is in agreement that homosexuality is an illness for which the person is helpless to control. Thus, society and the church must fully accept homosexuals into complete fellowship.

Environmental theorists, such as Matheson (2007), posit that social experiences such as an unhealthy parent-child interaction and or sexual abuse contribute to same sex behaviour and, therefore, the behaviour is primarily learned.

Abbott (1995), however, brings another compelling component into the debate when he proposes that an interactional model for homosexuality, which addresses biological, environmental and psychological issues, fails to consider the aspect of freedom of choice in shaping sexual orientation and behaviour. As in all human behaviour, there is the element of personal choice which is a strong component in shaping behaviour. Following is a careful analysis of the free agency aspect of persons when discussing contributory causal factors of homosexuality.

### **3.2. Free moral agency of human beings**

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It is imperative to assess the individual's own active participation (choice) in sexual preference, that is, a person's freedom to choose a homosexual lifestyle. Diamond (1998) addresses this salient issue when he contends that while biology may bias a person's sexual orientation, individual behaviour is flexible when responding to environmental influences, and therefore free

choice must be considered. It is generally agreed that humans are at least somewhat free to make behavioural choices regardless of past or current experiences (Abbott 1995).

The concept of “free agency” implies choice, free will or self-determinism—the ability to make decisions independent of past choices or circumstances (Burr, Day & Bahr 1993). Humans do have agency to make conscious choices and are free to alter their thinking, emotions and behaviours (Warner 2001). A sober example of a person’s free agency to choose moral behaviour even amidst the most dehumanising situations comes from the Nazi concentration camps of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Viktor Frankl a psychiatrist and survivor of the Nazi concentration camp during World War II concurs that the experiences of the camp (Nazi prison) life prove that man/woman does have a choice in his/her actions. Frankl (1985:86) concludes:

There were always choices to make. Every day, every hour offered the opportunity to make a decision. In the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision and not the result of camp influences alone. Fundamentally, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him—mentally and spiritually.

In a similar way, individuals have been predisposed to homosexuality due to a variety of environmental influences may make decisions that lead to same sex behaviour. But, if they do, there is always an element of choice or free agency involved.

Theologically, free agency is a two-fold process. First, there must be “knowledge of truth”. Second, a person must make a decision to “live truthfully”. Agency does not consist chiefly in doing what we want; rather it consists in doing what we should do, that is, knowing true principles and making a conscious *choice* to live by them (Williams 2004). In the Old Testament, Joshua admonished the Israelites to make a choice when he said: “Choose this day whom you will serve” (Josh 24:15, ESV). God has always granted mankind the freedom of choice.

Freedom without moral principle is not freedom. Thus free agency cannot exist in a moral vacuum (Needleman 2004). Psychologist Allen Bergin (2002:206) concurs:

For sexual expression to nurture relationships, . . . it must be guided by spiritual principles. Behaviour outside these principles puts at risk our ability to attain the highest joys of sexual expression. Such principles come from our Creator.

Therefore, free agency is the ability to grasp the true reality of our sexual natures and the conscious, deliberate choice to fulfil our true roles as heterosexual beings. The individual is considered able (in most situations—apart from extreme mental handicaps) to alter his/her thinking, emotions, and behaviour to live in harmony with revealed truth (Abbott 1995).

Glock (2004) cogently summarises the impact of free will upon the engagement in same sex relationships:

Scientists effectively ignore free will as a possible causal agent. This is not because scientists do not believe in a free will. Certainly in their everyday lives they think and act as if free will exists. When they function as scientists, however, they have not found means to establish if free will may be operative as a determinate of human behavior.

While science gives no credence to free will as a possible contributor to behaviour, neither does science offer proof of its non-existence (Glock 2004). Both environmental factors which predispose one to homosexuality and freedom of choice must be considered as factors contributing to the causation of homosexuality.

Is there a natural orientation toward same sex behaviour or is it clearly a chosen behaviour?

### **3.3. Natural orientation or chosen behaviour?**

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As evidenced previously, debate in the sexual polemics of the day continues in the blurring of the line between sexual orientation (biologic basis) and chosen

behaviour (free agency) of homosexuals. The standard Roman Catholic position on homosexuality does not condemn homosexual orientation; it does condemn homosexual behaviour.

While the homosexual community denies that sexual orientation is chosen (most homosexuals believe they have no choice, since they were “born that way”), it fails to recognise that, indeed, homosexual behaviour in its human dimension is a chosen act of life (O’Brien 2004).

Scientific literature has often concluded that the sexual orientation of a person cannot be changed any more than one can change his/her eye colour. Thus, it postulates a biological (illness) model for homosexuality. However, Throckmorton (2003:4) compellingly contends:

My literature review contradicts the policies of major mental health organizations because it suggests that sexual orientation, once thought to be an unchanging sexual trait, is actually quite flexible for many people, changing as a result of therapy for some, ministry for others, and spontaneously (as a matter of choice) for still others.

Even psychiatrist Robert Spitzer, a member of the American Psychiatric Association who was instrumental in helping to remove homosexuality from the *Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1973, now concurs that some people can change. He reached this conclusion following his interviews in 2000 with 200 men and women who claimed to have completely turned from homosexuality (Abbott 1995).

In a further discussion of sexual identity development, Strauss (2006) postulates that it is a safe observation to conclude that humans are personally aware beings able to make choices regarding their own sense of identity and course of behaviour.

### **3.4. Empirical research on the causes of homosexuality**

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In evaluating a multifactorial causation for homosexuality, scientific research on sexual orientation has taken many forms. One early approach was to discover evidence of a person’s sexual orientation in his/her endocrine system.

The hypothesis was that homosexual men would have less androgenic (male) hormones or more estrogenic (female) hormones than heterosexual men. However, an overwhelmingly majority of studies failed to demonstrate any correlation between sexual orientation and adult hormonal constitution (see Schuklenk, Stein, Kerin & Byne 1997).

Perhaps one of the most globally divisive moral questions today is whether or not there is a gay gene for homosexuality. This debate initially ignited a media fire-storm during the 1990s when there was a surge of interest by western scientists to push toward the discovery of a major gene for homosexuality. Revisionist theologians and pro-homosexual activists often cite the following three scientific studies published in the 1990s to prove their position that homosexuality is a genetically-inherited condition.

#### **3.4.1. LeVay: neurons in the hypothalamic region of the brain**

The first study was conducted by Simon LeVay in 1991.<sup>3</sup> A scientist at Salk Institute in San Diego California, he reported his findings that a group of neurons in the hypothalamic region of the brain appeared to be twice as large in heterosexual men than in homosexual men. Previous studies in primates suggested that the hypothalamus is a region of the brain involved in regulating sexual behaviour. Other studies indicated that these neurons are larger in men than in women. As a result, LeVay concluded that sexual orientation had a biological basis (Austriaco 2003).

Later, LeVay admitted that all nineteen of the subjects identified as homosexuals had died of AIDS complications. Medical doctors agree that it is possible that the reduced size of their hypothalamus may have been caused by their illness rather than their homosexuality (Fryrear 2006:2). At a later interview, LeVay himself revealingly opined:

Time and again I have been described as someone who proved that homosexuality is genetic. . . . I did not. It is important to stress what I didn't find. I did not prove that homosexuality is genetic, or find a genetic cause for being gay. I didn't show that

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed analysis of LeVay's research and the three problems identified in his paper, refer to [www.NARTH.com](http://www.NARTH.com) website and "Science" 253 (1991): 1034.

gay men are born that way . . . nor did I locate a gay center in the brain.

Although, LeVay himself has made public statements that gay men are not “born that way”, proponents of homosexuality continue to spread erroneous information to the uninformed populous.

### **3.4.2. Bailey and Pillard: study of identical twins**

The second scientific study to determine a genetic basis for homosexuality was undertaken in December 1991 by John Bailey and Richard Pillard. They reported that it was more likely for both identical twins to be homosexual than it was for fraternal twins or both adopted brothers. Bailey and Pillard reported that 52 percent of identical twins were homosexual; 22 percent of fraternal twins were both homosexual, and 11 percent of the adoptive brothers were both homosexual.

It is now clear, however, that there were scientific problems with each of these reports, which seriously undermined the validity of their study. Bailey’s (Bailey et al. 1994) follow-up study in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* suggests that the genetic influence may be dramatically less than his earlier studies indicated. Since then, it is well known in the behavioural science community that Bailey’s statistical methods have been refuted (Jones 1999:53).<sup>4</sup>

### **3.4.3. Dean Hamer’s study of chromosomes**

The third and perhaps the most widely publicised research suggested a genetic link to homosexual behaviour. In 1993, Dean Hamer and his colleagues at the USA National Institute of Health studied forty pairs of homosexual brothers and concluded that some cases of homosexuality could be linked to a specific region on the human X chromosome (xq28) inherited from the mother to her homosexual son.

This study, however, has come under heavy criticism both inside and outside the behavioural sciences. The office of Research Integrity of the Department

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<sup>4</sup> For further study of Bailey and Pillard’s (1991) research, see *General Psychiatry* 48:1089.

of Health and Human Services, USA, investigated Hamer for alleged fraud in this study (eventually he was cleared of the charges). Significantly, the study could never be reproduced. Although Hamer, as a behavioural scientist, was well aware that you cannot verify the validity of research without innumerable such correlations.

Two subsequent studies (Hamer et al. 1995; Bailey et al. 1999) of other homosexual brothers have concluded that there is no evidence that male sexual orientation is influenced by an X-linked gene (Austraico 2003). In July 1993, the *Science* research journal was quick to publish the study by Hamer which posited that there might be a gene for homosexuality.

Unfortunately, what was not disseminated and understood by the non-scientific community was the fact that Hamer and his research team performed a common type of behavioural genetics investigation called a “linkage study”. This is a limited model of research whereby researchers identify a behavioural trait that appears to be prevalent in a family and then proceed with the following:

- They look for a chromosomal variant in the genetic material of the family.
- They determine whether that variant is more frequent in family members who share the particular trait.<sup>5</sup>

Importantly, despite intensive scientific and medical research, there is no sound evidence that people are born homosexual. Rather, studies indicate that behaviour is acquired and not instinctive.

#### **3.4.4. The genetics of behaviour**

It is erroneous to conclude that the correlation of a genetic structure with a behavioural trait implies that the trait is “genetic” or inherited. Hamer and his colleagues failed to relay to the non-scientific community that there cannot be a human trait without innumerable such correlations (NARTH 2004).

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<sup>5</sup> For a complete study of Hamer’s research, see “Science 261” July 16, 1993:321.

A more recent study conducted by researchers at the University of Chicago (UIC) was published in March 2005. Psychologist Brian Mustanski led the team. UIC press release boasted the following:

In the first-ever study combining the entire human genome for genetic determinism of male sexual orientation . . . , we have identified several areas that appear to influence whether a man is heterosexual or ‘gay’ (AFA 2005).

Dr Warren Throckmorton, professor of Grove City College in Pennsylvania, conducted a very thorough critique of Mustanski’s study. He cites admissions by the researchers that their evidence of genetic differences between heterosexual and homosexual men falls short of being statistically significant. Three members of NARTH also reviewed Mustanski’s study and found it to be lacking. One member, Dr. Dean Byrd states:

Sexual orientation involves complex behaviors which involve multiple factors. Homosexuality might involve predispositions that are strongly influenced by cultural and environmental factors. (AFA 2005:1).

Behavior scientists tell us that in understanding the theory in genetics-of-behavior, one must clearly comprehend two major principles that guide the research: (a) heritable does not mean inherited; (b) genetics-of-behaviour research which is valid will identify and then focus only on traits that are directly inherited (NARTH 2004).

Reputable scientists concur that although almost every human characteristic is potentially heritable, few human behavioural traits are directly inherited. Inherited means directly determined by genes and changing the environment of a person will not prevent or modify the trait (e.g., eye colour or height).

Even Dr Hamer, who, following his landmark study in 1991, was dubbed the “gay gene guru”, now recognises the multifactorial components to homosexuality. He was later poignantly quoted in several sources: “Environmental factors play a role. There is not a single master gene that makes people gay.... I don’t think we will ever be able to predict who will be gay” (Fryrear 2006:1). Five years after Hamer’s study was published, he



consented to another interview and reiterated: “There is not a single all-powerful gay gene, and for the record, there is no gay gene” (Gallagher 1998:1).

Often researchers, in qualifying their findings, will use scientific language that is unfamiliar to the non-scientific community. Although to their fellow scientists the researchers have been honest in acknowledging the limitations of their findings, the media does not always receive the same understandings. As a result, this evades general understanding and, if not clearly understood by the press, will be avoided in publications. A case in point is an example of scientific jargon used by one researcher: “The question of the appropriate significance level to apply to a non-Mendelian trait such as sexual behaviour is problematic.” Although this rings of scientific jargon to the lay populous, it is actually a very significant statement which translates as follows: “It is not possible to know what the findings mean – if anything- since sexual orientation cannot be inherited.”

Dr Joel Gelenter, a Yale scientist, refutes the recent genetics-of-behaviour research for homosexuality when he asserts:

Time and again, scientists have claimed that particular genes or chromosomal regions are associated with behavioral traits, only to withdraw their findings when they were not replicated. Unfortunately, it is hard to come up with findings linking specific genes to complex human behaviors that have been replicated. All (findings) were announced with great fanfare; all were greeted unskeptically in the popular press; all are now in disrepute (NARTH 2004).

Gelenter (NARTH 2004) is correct when he affirms that often researchers’ overzealous public statements to the media are grandiose, yet when addressing their colleagues in the scientific community, they respond with caution.<sup>6</sup> For example, Dean Hamer, when addressing the scientific community in an interview by “Scientific American”, was asked the volatile and controversial

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<sup>6</sup> For current article on how scientific research is sometimes manipulated and produced by Scientists, see Hubbard and Wald (1999).

question as to whether homosexuality had a biologic determinism. He quickly replied:

Absolutely not. From twin studies we know that half or more of the variability in sexual orientation is not inherited. Our studies try to pinpoint the genetic factors . . . not [to] negate the psychosocial factors (NARTH 2004).

#### **3.4.5. Bailey and Martin: female same-sex orientation**

A scientific study set out to determine a genetic basis for same sex female orientation was conducted by Northwestern University professor Michael Bailey and Australian geneticist, Nicholas Martin. They concluded:

Female sexual orientation is more a matter of environment than heredity. We would say our research did not find evidence that female sexual orientation has a genetic basis. (Bailey et al. 1993).

Thus far, this paper has demonstrated two components in the complex issue of homosexuality: First, this researcher identified the ancient practices and history of homosexuality. Second, relevant empirical scientific reports were analysed as to the validity of the scientific community's assertions that there could be a biologic or genetic determinism for homosexuality. Documented quotes by the scientists themselves lend validity to the basis that indeed, a gene has not been discovered to confirm that homosexual behaviour has a pathological basis. Let us now turn our attention to another very salient and divisive issue among the behavioural scientists: Is it possible for homosexuals to change their behaviour and live productive and rewarding heterosexual lives?

#### **3.5. Changing a person's sexual orientation**

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Matheson (2007) is a current licensed professional counsellor (LPC) in New Jersey and is the director of the Center for Gender Wholeness. Matheson's counselling practice works primarily with male gender issues in trying to

restore homosexual men toward heterosexual behaviour. He contends: “Overcoming unwanted same-sex attractions is absolutely possible.”

Evidence supporting environmental theories posit that same-sex behaviour is primarily learned and, therefore, can be unlearned or changed. Van der Aardweg (1985), Nicolosi (1991) and Satinover (1996) have collected data suggesting that homosexuals have been successful in completely reversing their sexual orientation. A significant study was conducted by MacIntosh (1995) when he interviewed 422 psychiatrists regarding their assessment of homosexuals who change their orientation to heterosexuality. The doctors reported that 23 percent of their patients had converted to heterosexuality, and 84 percent made significant improvement toward heterosexual identity. Nicolosi, Byrd, and Potts (2000) surveyed 882 individuals who had gone through some type of conversion education or therapy (mostly in religious settings). Amongst those responding, 34 percent reported a significant change toward heterosexuality. Twenty-three percent reported no change; and 43 percent reported some change. About 7 percent of the men reported that they were doing worse psychosocially than before the conversion interventions (Throckmorton 1998).

Robinson (1998) summarized his findings after interviewing seven married men who had been previously involved in a high level of homosexual activity. Reportedly, these men were reactivated into religious worship and had not participated in homosexual activity for at least one year. As a result, they no longer had compulsive same-sex lustful desires or thought patterns. Robinson (1998:319-320) summarized his findings:

The most important conclusion of this study is that change is possible . . . the change was experienced as being personally fulfilling and greatly increasing the quality of their lives socially, emotionally, and spiritually.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For a testimony from a former homosexual, see Duncan (1989). For additional studies proposing that homosexual behaviour can be reversed, Nicolosi (1991; 1993) and Nicolosi, Byrd & Potts (2000).

### **3.6. Multiple causation of homosexuality**

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Other behavioural scientists (Matheson 2003; LeVay 1996; McFadden 1998; Goldberg 1994) share the view that sexual orientation is shaped for most people at an early age through complex interactions of either environment, parent-child relationships, social interactions and/or psychological components, thus comprising multifactorial causation for homosexuality. Simon LeVay (1996) concurs: “At this point the most widely held opinion (on causation of homosexuality) is that multiple factors play a role”.

Neuroscientist, Dennis McFadden, from the University of Texas, opines:

Any human behavior is going to be the result of complex intermingling of genetics and environment. It would be astonishing if it were not true for homosexuality (Charlotte Observer 1998).

Steven Goldberg concludes: “I know no one in the field who argues that homosexuality can be explained without reference to environmental factors” (Goldberg 1994).

Thus far, this paper has critiqued and analysed two important components in assessing the issue of homosexuality: Firstly, the historical dimension of the origin and accepted practices of same sex behaviour and, secondly, the presentation of the scientific community’s empirical studies and evaluation of the biologic determinism for homosexual behaviour versus the multifactorial causation.

The third essential component for evaluating the issue of homosexuality is that of the tradition and witness of scripture interpretation. Throughout the span of human history, the moral values of civilized societies have given credence to the stated moral code of the holy scriptures as given by God himself to mankind. History is a witness to the fall of sophisticated societies that turned from biblical mandates on accepted human behaviour. Therefore, let us carefully examine the theological determinants on the moral behaviour of men and women.

#### **4. The tradition and witness of Scripture**

Proponents of homosexuality contend that Christians selectively choose from scripture to defend their stance that homosexuality is wrongful behaviour. Several biblical passages, however, which deal directly with homosexuality have been expounded upon admirably by many ancient and modern biblical scholars from both the Old and New Testament writings, such as the following: Gen 19:1-29; Rev 18:22, 20:13; Matt 15:19; Mark 7:21; Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9; and 1 Tim 1:10 (ACUTE 1998).

Additionally, a general pattern of clear biblical teaching on sexuality was affirmed and well summarised by the House of Bishops' 1991 statement "Issues in Human Sexuality." There was in scripture an evolving convergence on the idea of lifelong monogamous heterosexual union as the setting intended by God for the proper development of men and women as sexual beings (ACUTE 1998:16).

*Genesis 1-2.* For a complete and succinct understanding of human sexuality, it is foundational that we begin by examining the creation account in Genesis 1-2. It is here that one clearly discovers that human sexuality is reflected in the extreme physical differentiation between our first parents, Adam and Eve. It is in such a design that God defines sexual differentiation as the basis of human marriage and pro-creation. It is at the beginning of creating mankind when God determined that homosexual relationships cannot fulfil the procreative dimensions of human sexuality and marriage which God so brilliantly designed (Davis 1993). God purposely designed physical differentiation between men and women.

*Genesis 19.* The first reference to homosexual behaviour in the Bible is found in Genesis 19:1-11. This text has been the object of intense debate among revisionist theologians. The passage describes how Lot entertained the two angels sent to the city of Sodom. That night some of the men of the city demanded to see Lot's visitors: "Where are the men that came to you tonight? Bring them out that we may know them (19:5)."

Revisionists (e.g., Nelson 1977) argue that the demand to "know" (Hebrew, ידע) the strangers was nothing more than a desire to get better acquainted in a

hospitable fashion, to show respect and acceptance toward the visitors. The problem with this assumption, however, is that in the book of Genesis, the Hebrew word ידע is used twelve times and in ten of those instances it denotes sexual intercourse (Davis 1993). In Genesis 19:8, ידע is used in a way that unmistakably refers to sexual intercourse. It is clear that the men of Sodom were not asking for a friendship acquaintance, but rather they were demanding homosexual intercourse with Lot's guests.<sup>8</sup> Both the immediate context of Genesis 19:5 and a history of both Jewish and Christian interpretation point to the true meaning of the text: homosexual practices. Therefore, the revisionist interpretation of this passage is a gross misinterpretation.

*The law of Moses.* Homosexual behaviour is strongly condemned in the Mosaic laws of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The word “abomination” (תועבה) is used five times in Leviticus chapter 18. It is a term of strong disapproval, depicting what is detestable and hated by God.

*Judges 19.* In Judges 19 there are explicit references to homosexuality. We find the same Hebrew word ידע in verses 22 and 25 to demonstrate that the men of that city were demanding homosexual intercourse with the visiting Levite. The language of the biblical narrative is consistent with the reference to homosexuality and that such practices are viewed with abhorrence (Davis 1993).

Why does scripture evidence that homosexuality is so abhorrent to God? Ashton (2007) suggests that the nations who inhabited Canaan before the Israelites conquered the land practiced homosexuality and prostitution only in connection with their heathen worship; this is what the law was trying to prevent. Homosexuality was generally rampant in many of the Canaanite cities. The word “sodomy” has become a widespread term used to describe the homosexual act. The term derived from the city of Sodom during the prevalent time of homosexual practices of that particular society. There is historical evidence that rife homosexuality had infiltrated the very fabric of ancient societies, in a similar way that is transpiring in many 21<sup>st</sup> century societies.

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<sup>8</sup> For a more thorough analysis of the views of Josephus, Justin Martyr, Origen, Methodius of Olympus, and the Jewish commentator Rashi, see Davis (1993).

*The New Testament*. In three places of the New Testament: Romans 1:26,27; 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10, there are strong prohibitions to homosexuality. Romans 1:26-27 discusses homosexuality from the perspective of the larger context of man's relation to God and God's general revelation in nature—because they turned away from God:

Even women exchanged natural relations with unnatural ones . . . men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men.

Biblical scholars safely conclude that in Romans 1, homosexuality is seen not as a violation of some Jewish or Christian sectarian code, but rather as a transgression against the moral law of God our Creator (Davis 1993). Davis further contends that it is significant in Pauline analysis of his New Testament writings, that homosexual practices derive ultimately from the human heart or inner disposition which has turned away from God.

This inward and invisible apostasy of the heart (away from God) becomes apparent and demonstrable in immoral and deviant sexual behaviour.

More specifically, in 1 Corinthians 6:9, the apostle Paul used two terms, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, which are generally considered by biblical scholars to refer to homosexual behaviour.<sup>9</sup> The term *arsenokoitai* is used in the New Testament only in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and in 1 Timothy 1:10. The word is a compound from *arsen* “male” and *koite* which is a word with definite sexual overtones. The literal etymology of this compound term suggests “males who go to bed with males” (Davis 1993).

Both the Old Testament and New Testament have quintessential teachings that homosexuality is contrary to the moral law of God as defined in the holy scriptures. Therefore, revisionists who erroneously conclude otherwise use forced and arbitrary modes of interpretation to strengthen their claim that the

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<sup>9</sup> There has been some debate about the proper translation of these two terms. The debate is reflected in these translations: (a) “effeminate and abusers of themselves with mankind” (KJV), (b) “male prostitutes and homosexual offenders” (NIV) and (c) “homosexual perversion” (NEB).

scriptures need to be reassessed to keep abreast with the modern cultural mores, which contend that homosexual behaviour should be an acceptable lifestyle.

Revisionist theologian, Nelson (1977), served as professor of Christian ethics at United Theological Seminary in Minnesota. He asserts and supports propagating the following (erroneous) revisionist ideology:

- 1) Seek the church's full acceptance of homosexuality without prejudgement on the basis of a sexual orientation—given that they had no basic choice.
- 2) Espouse fresh insights from feminist theologians and gay Christians... who frequently manifest God's "common grace".
- 3) Some stories in the Bible are based on a biological misunderstanding of man.
- 4) The Sodom story in Genesis refers to the men of Sodom wanting to show hospitality and not sexual perversion toward Lot's guests.
- 5) In the Pauline letters, Paul does not claim that homosexual practices are the cause of God's wrath.
- 6) "Perhaps we should accept Paul for what he was—a peerless interpreter of the heart of the gospel and one who was also a fallible and historically conditioned person."
- 7) "Sexuality is not intended by God as a mysterious and alien force of nature, but as a power to be integrated into one's personhood and used responsibly in the service of love."

For the past two decades, the question of moral authority has been seriously eroded in our society and churches. As evidenced above, even Christian leaders and teachers are granting moral legitimacy to what God condemns. The prevailing ethic in the minds of many scholars and teachers, has sadly become a genetically-based morality.

To base morality on scientific study is to relegate the scriptures to an outmoded moral law that needs revision and is irrelevant to address the complexity of human needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century church. To do so is to commit the suicide of Christian theology. It seems clear that the Old and New Testament scriptures, when correctly interpreted, consistently condemn



homosexual practices while repeatedly affirming that God can forgive any repentant sinner.

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## **5. Implications for pastoral ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

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Proponents of homosexuality struggle with the church accepting their humanness as homosexuals and their need to feel human within the context of the church. Their premise is that within the household of God, there are no aliens.

What are appropriate responses by the church to the issue of homosexuality? If same sex marriages are legally permissible should pastors be obliged to conduct homosexual unions? Should homosexuals be given full rights among church leadership in preaching, teaching and leading? What about gay Christians who are celibate? Should celibate homosexual Christians be eligible for ordination? How does one respond to the person who says he/she is homosexual and a follower of Christ? Should evangelical congregations welcome and accept sexually active homosexuals? Should pastors defend the rights of homosexuals as a persecuted minority and evidence support by participating in gay parades, marches, etc.? Each of these are salient issues facing today's pastoral leader.

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### **5.1. The church's balanced response**

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Simply put, homosexual behaviour, or any other lifestyle that is contrary to God's law, is absolutely incompatible with Christ's call to holy living and constitutes disobedience to the known laws of God. Therefore, a pastoral response to a homosexual should be the same response offered to anyone caught in the web of sin (e.g., adultery, fornication). One cannot legitimise that which God clearly labels sinful behaviour.

Condoning a behaviour that is strictly forbidden in scripture lends to one's own disobedience to God's clear mandates. Pastoral counsellors are under an obligation to call a brother or sister to repentance by speaking the truth in love (Craven 2007:1). Pastors must seek a balanced response from the church which should include two key components: biblical teaching and meaningful support.

First, firm biblical teaching on the subject will ensure that confusion does not rest with Christians who are influenced by media and the behavioural sciences. Pastoral counsellors are responsible to God to sound forth to society a clear word from God. The Bible does not teach that homosexuality is an unforgivable sin: offer them hope and help. Reject the sin while embracing the sinner.

Second, meaningful personal support for the homosexual who is seeking change from the orientation is vitally important. Christian supportive fellowships can be established to support people in their brokenness and desire to change their sinful behaviour. Homosexuals must be faced with a caring and compassionate church to assist them in seeing a God who reaches out to them even through condemnation of the behaviour. At the same time, the church must teach that homosexuality is contrary to the divine purpose for human sexuality.

The old sin nature can be transformed through repentance and faith in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit within the depths of every personality. There is no such thing as a “powerless grace”. If behavioural scientists, Masters and Johnson, can achieve a 66 percent success rate in dealing with homosexuals, how much more can pastoral counsellors accomplish with the power of the Holy Spirit? It is a biblically-based hope which pastors and churches should hold forth as a tangible possibility for delivering people from the bondage of destructive homosexual behaviour (NARTH 2001).

Dr Russell Waldrop (2001) is a pastoral counsellor, psychiatric chaplain and a licensed professional counsellor. He provided this warning to the church:

There is a real threat here to the church and it comes from both within the church and outside it. From outside the church, secular licensing and training groups could withhold licenses from people who do not believe in gay-affirming counselling . . . and they might be able to withdraw the licenses from those who still do not agree with gay-affirming counseling.

The divisive issue of whether to ordain homosexual clergy has received centre attention in many Christian churches throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century world. It has been clearly stated: the scriptures give very clear guidelines for the appointment of ecclesial leaders. Churches seeking to align themselves with the authority and inerrancy of scripture cannot ordain avowed and practicing homosexuals to positions of leadership. If unrepentant sexual practices bar one from the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9), surely it must prohibit one from leadership in the church (Davis 1993).

Another issue facing pastoral leadership today is: Should churches support the drive to ensure “civil rights” for homosexuals? Christians cannot consistently support making a civil right that which has been condemned in scripture to be morally wrong. Equally wrong, would be for Christians to participate in campaigns to physically harm and persecute homosexuals (Davis 1993).

## **5.2. Care and counselling resources for homosexuals**

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The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) has offered three well-defined guidelines for the care and counselling to homosexuals: education, friendship, and healing and counselling resources.

- *Education.* They recommend that the church provide education on the biblical understanding of human sexuality through sermons, study, and support groups in order to lay a foundation for understanding. Those seeking answers to their sexual confusion may work toward wholeness in Christ.
- *Friendship.* The basis of friendship must be a recognition of our common need for the grace of Christ. Evidence the incarnation of Christ by identifying those we are trying to reach. There is a need for homosexuals to experience an acceptance of their person apart from their sexual concerns.
- *Healing and counselling.* It is essential that the church provide resources for healing in the area of sexual identity through Christian counselling or other ministries to homosexuals. These could include: pastoral counselling, Christian psychologists, worship and prayer. As homosexuals move away from their behaviour, they need supportive

and caring Christians to assist them toward wholeness in Christ (EPC 2005).<sup>10</sup>

In counselling homosexuals, Matheson (2006) has developed a counselling paradigm that incorporates four principles of change. He believes the reason that many homosexuals become discouraged when their feelings and attractions do not change quickly is because their efforts at change are not broad enough. Therefore, he suggests using the acronym M-A-N-S: masculinity, authenticity, need fulfilment and surrender.

Masculinity:	men in the change process need to feel masculine and bond with other men.
Authenticity:	getting out of the false self and facing feelings in open relationships.
Need fulfilment:	develop relationships, experiences, and opportunities that strengthen, nurture, and lead to joy and personal satisfaction.
Surrender:	letting go of everything that prevents change from happening and letting in the things that restore the growth processes.

Matheson (2006) developed these principles of change in order to counsel homosexuals to live in freedom from homosexual behaviour. Although he does not give scriptural mandates against homosexual behaviour, the fourth change principle—*surrender*—could be effectively developed by pastoral counsellors from a biblical paradigm of change through transformation by the Holy Spirit.

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## 6. Conclusion

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This research explored four critical components involved in homosexual behaviour: history, causes, the witness of scripture, and implications for pastoral ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian church. These are some of the most significant conclusions of the study.

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<sup>10</sup> For a comprehensive listing of resources to assist homosexuals in reversing their sexual orientation to heterosexuality, see Appendix A.

- Anti-homosexual predilection did *not* originate with the Western Christian church's teaching; on the contrary, many pagan cultures abhorred the practice.
- A thorough literature review of scientific research reveals that there are multiple factors that cause homosexuality, but there is no empirical evidence to suggest that genetic or biological determinism is one of them.
- Both the biological (illness) and environmental models fail to consider the aspect of free agency as a constituent factor of homosexuality; that God designed humankind with the cognitive capacity to make autonomous decisions for or against any human behaviour. Behavioural scientists have confirmed this often neglected aspect of homosexuality (Byne & Parsons 1993; Warner 2001; Needleman 2004).
- In sum, then, homosexuality does not have a genetic basis; neither is it determined by hormonal imbalances. Rather, multifactorial causes point to its origin: environmental and psychosocial factors (e.g., previous sexual abuse and/or poor parent-child relations). Furthermore, the free will agency of choice in choosing homosexuality as a lifestyle must not be discounted as a causation.
- Failure on the part of the media to communicate the findings of empirical research accurately can lead the non-scientific community to believe unsubstantiated claims. Critical investigation is paramount when anatomising behavioural science research, paying particular attention to vague statements such as "there may be a gene...", "we think we have discovered..." or "the possibility exists that...".
- If the scriptures are soundly interpreted, both Testaments clearly and consistently condemn homosexual behaviour. The revisionist gay interpretation of key texts does not conform to sound hermeneutical principles.
- Empirical studies have indicated that homosexuality can be reversed. Importantly, one cannot dismiss the Holy Spirit as a powerful and final change agent for same sex behaviours. Treatment of homosexuals within the body of Christ should be the same as anyone who is caught in the clutches of sin's grip. Gentle restoration is the example of Jesus Christ's ministry, which he calls us to follow.

Further research should include a comprehensive study of the role of free agency in sexual identity development, particularly homosexuality. A more complete review of the literature is required. A valid understanding of the role of choice in homosexual behaviour is essential when counselling homosexuals who desire to reverse their sexual desires from same sex to healthy heterosexuality. This is a critical component of which pastoral counsellors need to be cognizant.

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