

CHAN Wai Sze: Different Sexual Orientation: the Challenges Faced by Christian Ethics

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I. Introduction

The current debate about different sexual orientation in the church has provoked a number of comments. The Church, as the conscience, the guide and the critic of society, it is a critical moment to recapture its prophetic zeal. [1] We can enter into dialogue, but not dispute, with people with different sexual orientation. Dialogue is necessary as we seek truth and acknowledge that our knowledge of God's truth is ever partial and distorted. Dialogue can be a way of teaching and of learning how to articulate the teaching of the church in a manner relevant to the contemporary context. Dialogue can also be a place where others correct us in our errors. [2]

This essay is certainly not the guidelines on Christian ethics or the instructions of ministering to the people who struggle with sexual orientation or are homosexual. Its purpose is to draw people's attention to the issue. It is time for our church to respond to the challenges to Christian ethics. At the same time, make sure that everyone is treated equally and properly in the church, regardless of sexual orientation. I hope that we stay alert in the battleground of multi-culture and multi-standard. I pray that we express both the heart and mind of God on this challenging issue.

II. Reality

A. The current debate of people with different sexual orientation

Contrary to the traditional view of homosexuality, some within the church say that the church should welcome homosexual people without restraint on or questions about their sexual lifestyle. They also urge the church should sanction the marriages of those homosexual couples

whose relationship are claimed to be based on love, devotion, and personal responsibility. [3] Some well-known celebrities, politicians or even church leaders openly avow their homosexual orientation. The current contention that homosexuality is a normal and God-given, or at least God-tolerated, lifestyle. The church cannot treat the issue casually.

B. The crisis of marriage system

Homosexual people are currently challenging the traditional teaching of the church. Some of them agree with traditional Christians that marriage should be between two individuals, and that in principle it should have a lifelong intention and be of a quasi-sacramental character. However, they assume that a couple is not necessarily confined to two people of different sexes. [4] There are plenty of them argue that marriage provides them with a structure of commitment which helps them to stabilize their relationships and cuts out the promiscuity which many people assume to be intrinsic to homosexual relationships. They claim that there are some homosexual couples have stable and long-term unions. In that case, they should call their relationship a marriage and enjoy the kind of legal advantages and responsibilities which matrimony entails. [5]

On the other hand, some of them tend to deny both the marriage system stated in the Bible and also the insistence on the duty of human beings to procreate children. They do not consider marriage is the inevitable result for a couple to develop intimacy, no matter same-sex or opposite-sex. Even though they love each other, it is not necessary for them to get married. In response to their worldview, the feasible way of bridging them to Gospel is to give them hope in their spiritual lives, at the same time, to give them a way out ethically.

C. The dilemmas faced by the church

The ministries to different groups of people in the church is getting varied. The most common way is to put people into groups according to their age, for example, the elderly, adults,

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teenagers, children, toddlers, etc. Some may group people according to their social status, for example, families, single-parent families, married couples, singles, etc. Some may be grouped by their race, for example, new immigrants, housekeepers from South-East Asian countries, etc. It is a trend to provide specific pastoral care that is tailor-made to a particular group of people. However, among the groups, there may be a group which is still being ignored or not ready to be reached by the church—the people who struggle with sexual orientation or homosexual people.

Something that worth our concern is the ministry to homosexual people. The unarguable fact is that there is inadequate support and experience of the church to provide pastoral care to homosexual people. From the point of view of the church, homosexuality is a painful issue because it is not a theological issue but a matter of pastoral care. ^[6] This group of people is within the church, they are the members of the church, not outsiders. There is a tension between a moral approach to ministering to them and the need for unconditional acceptance of them. ^[7]

Their understanding and beliefs of the Bible come from their spiritual experience. If the church can hold an open attitude, try to discuss the Bible with them, it is believed that we can understand the meaning of the Gospel and the Church from a different angle.

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When we discuss issues related to homosexuality, there is nothing worth talking about some abstract concepts or theories.

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The significance of such discussions is that the issues are related to human beings, our own flesh and blood, or someone we know and appreciate. How should the church respond to the need of these people?

The moral concern of the church is not fundamentally with homosexual orientation, no matter how it develops. We do not fully understand what a sexual orientation is. However, from a moral perspective, from a Christian perspective, it may be best be understood as one among many ways in which we humans, sinful and

fallen as we are, are inclined to lean towards choices and patterns that dishonor our God. ^[10]

III. The Christian Sexual Ethics

A. The core of the Christian ethics

A Christian ethic will be a biblical ethic, responding to the will of our God as revealed in Scripture. ^[11] In order to interpret and understand who we are and what our creator expects of us, we have to turn to Scripture. We will not even begin with the same basic understandings about how this world works and the place of humanity within it without the light of Scripture. ^[12] God's special revelation of His will for our lives certainly includes some universal principles that guide our actions. The consequences of our choices and actions are relevant to our ethical choice, in particular as Christian faith informs our understanding of what is good for us and others. Christian commitment demands that we pursue the virtues represented by Jesus Christ and identified in Scripture. ^[13]

The central theological focus of Christian ethics is that Jesus Christ through His incarnation, His Spirit and future coming and consummation. He is the Word made flesh and the revealer of the Father. Through His death and resurrection new life is made available to all who are adopted into His family. The Holy Spirit continues His work to guide our understanding and bring about encouragement towards holiness, which is Christlikeness, through Scriptures. The eschatological fulfillment of the work of Christ will be when broken creation is restored and renewed at the end of time. ^[14]

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Our identity is given in both creation and Christ. The implications for our ethical conduct are great. We appeal to created human nature as well as redeemed human nature in Christ. We appeal to the world around us to recognize the damaging effect of ignoring biblical standards. General revelation dictates a degree of awareness of the wisdom of creation standards. [\[15\]](#)

Homosexual practice is wrong in a way it offends God. It is also damaging psychologically, physically and socially. Psychologically, homosexuality is not a journey into wholeness; physically, human beings do not procreate through same-sex sexual relationships; and anal intercourse can result in life-threatening diseases; and socially, homosexual practice contributes to the undermining of the moral and ethical foundation of the society. [\[16\]](#)

B. The ethical stance in the Old Testament

The redemptive work of God began through the revelation of the outlines of His moral will for our lives in the Law of the Old Testament. The moral law is comprised of the enduring moral standards that are timeless and universal. In the moral law, God began to rein in the most offensive of human perversions of His beautiful gift of sexuality. Adultery, homosexual behavior, rape, incest, bestiality were all condemned in harsh terms. [\[17\]](#)

Homosexual behavior is wrong as it was contrary to the revealed will of God as expressed in the moral law. Also, it was unnatural as it could not well serve all of the purposes for which our sexuality was given. [\[18\]](#)

C. The ethical stance in the New Testament

The problem of false worship is frequently the context of Paul's ethical discussion of homosexuality, for example, in Rom. 1:18 ff. and 1 Cor. 6:9 ff. For Paul, idolatry is the turning upside down of the created order. It is the substituting of creation over the creator. Idolatry is more serious than wrong thinking about God as it has to do with the misuse and abuse of creation. It is in this broader creation context that the biblical condemnation of homosexuality takes place. The acts that go against the way in which we are created are sinful. In 1 Cor. 6, Paul mentions two types of homosexual partners that include the male prostitutes and homosexual offenders. Paul claims that both passive and active homosexual behavior and relationship are contrary to nature. [\[19\]](#)

If we want to see what it is like to be human, we look at the man Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ exemplified human perfection as well as full divinity. "He is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), unlike the imperfect image found in fallen humanity. He perfectly mirrors God and is the second Adam. [\[20\]](#) The process of a new believer to have changes in the life is that of being transformed into His likeness and being renewed in His image (2 Cor. 4:1-18, Rom. 12:2). The broken creation can only be restored through Him. [\[21\]](#)

In 1 Cor. 11, Paul outlines the created distinction between men and women from which he deduces that complementarity, co-equality and authority coexist within the created order. [\[22\]](#) Paul also says that God calls men and women to account on the basis first of the witness of creation; second from the voice of conscience; and third, to those with Judaeo-Christian privileges, from the teaching of Scripture (Rom. 1-3). [\[23\]](#)

D. Human reality in the Bible

The Bible recognizes human reality in Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve are said to be made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27). It is important to appreciate that the image refers to the man and woman jointly. The context implies that to be made in the image of God includes at least further multiplication of the image of God through procreation, and domination of the world as vice-regents under God. Truly, in Gen. 2:24, it implies that the union of man and woman in marriage is primarily a social, rather than a sexual one. Woman is given to man for companionship and friendship, such intimacy within marriage is part of the created intention of human beings. [\[24\]](#) It is the purpose or function of union that appears to be most central, a God made this notion of union central to His teaching on divorce and the nature of marriage (Mt. 19). Paul speaks of this purpose of union in describing the role that Christian marriage should play in instructing the world about the nature of the relationship between Christ and His Church (Eph. 5). [\[25\]](#)

IV. Consideration of the issue

A. Within the Church: Pastoral care

Jesus Christ put much emphasis on the personal growth and spiritual life of His disciples. If we admit that God has sovereignty over all aspects of our lives, in the same way, the modification of the code of ethics should be undertaken in the truth of God. We believe that God has a particular calling to every individual. We all have inherent worth and potential as we were made in the image of God. [\[26\]](#) The church needs to develop a proper perspective on the issue. Christians have to remove their phobia and misunderstanding about homosexuality. Love and support should be given to the people who struggle with sexual orientation or are homosexual. This helps them to clarify their role of gender that further realizes the calling and mission that God gives to their lives.

Worldview is the core of culture. The change of one's worldview is the starting point of the change of life. First and foremost, it is essential to understand someone's worldview, and the obstacles that hinder they understand Christ and the messages of the Bible. This contributes to create a platform or bridge for dialogue with someone. We have to consider the readiness of this group of people open to ministry from the church as well as the kind of ministry they will accept.

For those who struggle with sexual orientation or are homosexual, they believe that their sexual orientation is an inborn tendency and developed biologically. [\[27\]](#) Some of them behave as an opposite sex is affected by genes. In addition, their first experience of same-sex attraction usually happened in childhood. Many of them believe that a change in their sexual orientation would violate their personhood and constitute a rejection of their spiritual calling. [\[28\]](#) These are the reasons why they insist that sexual orientation is inborn and cannot be changed.

For Christians who are homosexual, they suppose the identity of being a Christian and that of being a homosexual person contradict each other. They think that their belief cannot coexist with homosexuality. Homosexuality makes them to be abandoned by God and segregated from other people. [\[29\]](#) Their questions are "Does God feel ashamed about me?" "Did our creation His love towards me?" "Does God love me now?" They presume that homosexuality is a sin and as homosexual people are sinners. For the Christians who struggle with sexual orientation or are homosexual, they suppose that to be someone is not who they are before the condemnation of Jesus Christ "but your neighbor and parent" respectively. They love people with same sex only.

It would be terrible to the people who struggle with sexual orientation, understanding their needs is of the utmost importance. Ministry is essentially a provision of the needs of the people to which ministry is proposed. [\[30\]](#) We should never be too busy to judge whether people have a particular sexual orientation and urge them to change. If we make a decision for them, it will hinder their faith and hope in the process to make changes. The physical, mental and spiritual benefits they receive would make them feel depressed and hopeless. Facing them to change really leads to greater benefits. In that case, long-term understanding and mediation are necessary before we start any action. We should avoid making ourselves and others judgment, otherwise, more confusion and anxiety will be produced. Ultimately, they experience the message and power from God through the process and nothing has changed after a period of time.

For most of the people who struggle with sexual orientation, we can help them to find a way out of the plight in different ways. We can support them through prayer, nurturing spiritual life or counseling. For example, if someone was physically, mentally or morally abused by a parent of opposite sex when he or she was a child, he or she would have the sense of identity or value to be confused with the opposite sex. Consequently, he or she tends to get along with the same sex and seek the sense of identity from those individuals with the same sex. [\[31\]](#) We can help them to understand the message and power from God through the process and nothing has changed after a period of time.

B. Outside the Church: Evangelical response

C. The construction of Christian community

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V. Conclusion

References
