



A Psychotherapist's Reflections on Same-Sex Relationships

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As a minister and a psychotherapist, I wish to contribute to the debate about same sex relationships. From the perspective of a scientific study of human nature, development, personality and behaviour I am very conscious of the complexities of the issue. Every person is the product of processes that are biological (including genetic), environmental (within the womb as well as after birth), social (relational), cultural and experiential.

We recognise that human sexuality is a very powerful phenomenon that extends well beyond the purposes of procreation. Human beings do not have a mating season and sexual activity enriches many relationships when there is no possibility of conception and pregnancy. There is a wide variation in sexual drive among people, both male and female. Where a person experiences a lack of sexual satisfaction within marriage or a similarly committed relationship, he or she may seek other outlets such as masturbation or the use of "sexual services". Tragically, a significant number of people (mainly males) resort to incest and other types of child sexual abuse. The greatest amount of sexual activity of all kinds is heterosexual behaviour.

It has often been stated that what is natural equates to the will of God. Therefore, some assert, homosexuality must be contrary to the will of God because it is "unnatural". It is obvious that a same sex relationship will never produce children, and yet a proportion of heterosexual couples are incapable of producing children. A fulfilling relationship, whether heterosexual or homosexual, can be emotionally, spiritually and physically satisfying in the absence of sexual intercourse.

If what is natural equates to the state of a person when he or she is born, then we have to recognise the fact that some boys and girls are 'different' from others of the same gender. Just as some people are naturally left-handed, so others have preferences and mannerisms that are apparent from a young age.

According to the Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry (Third Edition 1996) in a chapter on 'Problems of Sexuality and Gender Identity', homosexuality is no longer considered as a disorder. It states: 'People cannot be divided sharply into those who are homosexual and those who are heterosexual: there is a continuum, with exclusively heterosexual people at one end and exclusively homosexual people at the other and between these extremes are people who engage in varying degrees of both homosexual and heterosexual behaviour and relationships. The bisexual potential is greater in adolescence than in adult life, and homosexual behaviour is more likely to be expressed when heterosexual behaviour is unavailable, for example, in prisons.'

The fact is that a very small percentage of the population is exclusively homosexual by nature and that a larger percentage exhibits some degree of bisexuality. Human difference has generally been viewed with suspicion and often with outright hostility and rejection. There was a time when left-handedness was not acceptable and regarded as something to be eradicated. It is therefore to be expected that some passages of Holy Scripture express the view that a different sexual orientation is contrary to God's will.

Nevertheless, there is also some recognition of the complexity of human relationships. For example, in the first book of Samuel, chapter 18, verses 1, 3-4 (GNB): 'Saul's son Jonathan was deeply attracted to David and came to love him as much as he loved himself. Jonathan swore eternal friendship with David because of his deep affection for him. He took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, together with his armour also his sword, bow, and belt.' When Saul threatens David's life, Jonathan does everything in his power to protect him, and when he finds David again in his hiding-place there is a very emotional reunion. 'Both he (David) and Jonathan were crying as they kissed each other; David's grief was even greater than Jonathan's.' (Chapter 20:41) I think that it is very possible that Jonathan was homosexual and that David was bisexual.

In the Gospels Jesus is not recorded as saying anything explicitly about homosexuality. What is contained in Matthew, chapter 19, verse 12, is relevant and intriguing. In the GNB version it reads: '[Jesus answered] there are different reasons why men cannot marry: some, because they were born that way; others, because men made them that way; and others do not marry for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven.' Strictly, the original Greek refers to eunuchs with the implication that such men are unable to live in the married state.

As I stated earlier, human sexuality is determined by a number of factors. I have no doubt that some people have a homosexual orientation from birth, whilst others are 'made that way' by what happens to them through childhood, adolescence and even later. For example, some children are sexualized by abusing adults to the extent that they are incapable of a successful heterosexual relationship.

One of the marks of Jesus' ministry was his inclusiveness of those on the margins of Jewish society. He did not shame people by telling them that their very nature was wrong. He affirmed that they too were the children of their heavenly Father and heirs to his Kingdom.

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