

OUTSIDE THE CITY GATE:
A BIBLE STUDY

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These studies are presented by Friends of Unity as a study resource for greater church inclusivity. They were written by Welwood L. Anderson B. Th (Hons), B. Ed., B. A., Dip. T., who is a member of the Friends of Unity Executive Committee.

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*Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate
in order to sanctify the people by his own blood.
(Hebrews 13:12)*

*But God, who is rich in mercy,
out of the great love with which he loved us
even when we were dead through our trespasses,
made us alive together with Christ --
by grace you have been saved.
(Ephesians 2: 4-5)*

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OUTSIDE THE CITY GATE: A BIBLE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Outside the City Gate: A Bible Study*. You are beginning a journey of discovery to places that may be new to you or very familiar. It will take you into new ways of thinking about Scripture and human relationships as you walk a pathway towards greater Christian inclusivity. Often the pathway will be well trodden and well known. The views of Christian life and faith that you will see may remind you of your own or of those close to you. You may also enter strange, hard, rocky places that may be tough going. There will be an occasional stumbling block and barriers to cross, as you will be walking the path of gay and lesbian Christians who have come this way before you. Take courage, for according to Scripture, Jesus trod this way well ahead of us all, seeing the same stumbling blocks, confronting the same barriers and finding His final place *Outside the City Gate*.

For the purposes of study and instruction, gates in the city wall form a significant religious metaphor: outside the city gate is the place where outcasts and strangers stand waiting to be admitted inside the city wall. The city or the place within the wall and its gates being a double metaphor for acceptance and for a place of safety for the church. Gates are barriers that either shut people in or shut people out. They act to separate and to create a division. Gates provide a point of entry and imply a right of passage. The gate needs to be opened. It is the experience of many gay and lesbian Christians that they are forced into a place of denial outside of the church. The gate is shut on them, barring their participation as equals with their heterosexual brothers and sisters in Christ. Fortunately gates may be opened or passed through so that the barrier is removed, and that is the aim of this study: to show traditions of inclusivity, from within the Canon, that put aside or overcome the restrictive practices that erect barriers of distinction, lest gay and lesbian Christians continue to find themselves suffering “outside the gate” (Hebrews 13:12-13). Ironically, this is also the very place where Jesus found himself in solidarity with “sinners” and “outcasts” and the imagery is that of the Cross and of a powerful invitation to deep and profound change.

Since the 8th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, held in Perth during July 1997, the Church has continued to wrestle with questions relating to the membership and participation of its homosexual members. All processes engaged since the 1997 Assembly have ended without changes being made, with of the 10th Assembly reinforcing the status quo concerning membership and ministry.¹ The Church officially remains open in its attitude, and espouses continuing openness, dialogue and sensitive pastoral care under the rubric, “living with diversity”. Homosexuality is not seen as a necessary bar to membership, participation or leadership. The Church community is a very broadly based one and differences in attitude exist from parish to parish and across Presbyteries and Synods. Several openly homosexual persons have held or continue to hold positions as ordained ministers or deacons and as Elders and other lay positions of leadership. In spite of this, most homosexual Christians find their life in the Church difficult. Opinions of individual Church members, congregations and groups within the Church remain divided regarding the participation and leadership of homosexual persons within the life of the church. Views and practices range from categorical rejection, through indifference, conditional acceptance and marginal tolerance, to unconditional acceptance and celebration of the life, relationships and faith of homosexual persons.

Much of the discrimination is dressed in terms of biblical sanction and Biblical “text-proofing” from Genesis, Leviticus and the letters of Paul. Other inclusive teaching is ignored. Be aware; selective use of the Bible in support of absolute positions is dangerous! The Bible preserves many differing opinions and traditions, especially with regard to inclusivity. The answers are often contradictory when we turn to it and ask, “who exactly does make up the people of God?” A case in point is the example of Ezra 9:1, which opposes the marriage of Israelites to foreigners, including Moabites. Yet the story of Ruth shows God at work through such a marriage, the marriage of the Moabite Ruth to the Israelite Boaz, the great-grandfather of David. Interestingly, Boaz’ ancestor, Perez, was conceived by Tamar by Judah, in direct conflict with Leviticus 18:10 that prohibits such a union of daughter-in-law with father-in-law. In another example, Acts 15:7-11 presents us with teaching attributed to Peter, that through faith important barriers of distinction under the Levitical Law are removed.

Those codes and practices that are found in the Book of Leviticus and throughout the Deuteronomic History, served to isolate and to protect under a series of covenanted obligations and curses (see Leviticus 26). They established restrictive practices and codes of law that we now have put aside. We no longer offer burnt offerings, effectively putting aside all of Leviticus 1-7. Similarly, we no longer regard the hare and the pig as “unclean” and not to be eaten or touched (Leviticus 11:6-8; 19:6 & 7). We no longer only eat sea foods that have scales and fins (Lev.11:9-12). We no longer regard women as ceremonially “unclean” after childbirth or during menstruation (Lev. 12; 15:19-24) or go to visit a priest and carry out the prescribed rituals when we have a skin rash (Lev. 13 & 14) or refrain from wearing clothes of mixed fibres or, contrary to Leviticus 19:19, expect farmers to stop raising hybrids and to stop planting different crops side by side. We ignore the law to kill children who curse their parents (Leviticus 20:9) and no longer execute adulterers (Leviticus 19:20, 20:10). We do not stop eunuchs from entering places of worship (Deuteronomy 23:1) or bar eunuchs, dwarfs and those with physical impairment from presenting offerings or serving (Leviticus 21:17-20). We no longer keep slaves, even if we could purchase them from neighbouring nations (Leviticus 25:44) and selling our daughters into slavery is not practiced, even though Leviticus 21:7 sanctions it. We have an understanding of the human condition that puts aside such practices, even though they are very much of the law of Moses.

In a similar way, a modern understanding of homosexuality, as a human, psycho-sexual orientation, would seem to demand a similar putting aside of the Mosaic code where it *may* apply to homosexuality. Yet, strangely, some modern Christians would have us still practice the Levitical codes relating to laying “with a male as with a woman” (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13) and to temple prostitutes (the *kadeshim*, ‘holy ones’ of Deuteronomy 23:17-18 and 1Kings 14:24) by applying those passages of Scripture to homosexual persons. In fact, some English translations of the Deuteronomic codes replace the word *kadesh* and its plural, *kadeshim*, with the word ‘sodomite’, in order to conflate the Deuteronomic and Levitical texts and to apply them to homosexual persons. There is in place, an active discrimination against homosexual persons through the application of Scripture. Like the *kadeshim* and Gentiles of a former time, homosexual persons have been made to be the despised ones and separated under a code of otherness, as persons under a curse. The gate is shut to them becoming full participators in the church and would remain shut if many conservative, evangelical persons have their way.

Close to the same time in history that the Levitical codes were compiled, other traditions promoted an inclusive and less stringent covenant, free of curses. Gentiles and eunuchs were seen as significant bearers of faith (Isaiah 56:1-8; Jer. 3:15; Jonah) and as servants of the people of God (Isaiah 60:4; Jer. 38:7ff., Daniel). In fact, the Book of Jonah contains a stinging rebuke

against assumptions of self-righteousness through special status and sitting in judgment, like Jonah in his bower, outside the city walls (Jonah 4).

In these studies we examine other inclusive Biblical traditions that may move us all to affirm the lives, faith, relationships and ministry of homosexual persons among us and to turn aside any barriers of distinction that are thought to apply. The studies draw upon prophetic, apostolic and early church traditions that are relevant when we ask questions regarding who is able to join and participate within the church community. Each has its own historical context and reveals ways of forming a greater inclusivity than is permitted under the Levitical Law and the covenants of the Deuteronomic history. For example, Isaiah 56 relates to the returning exiles (after 550 BCE) and the rebuilding of the temple cult in Jerusalem in the 6th century BCE. Hence the study begins *Within My Walls*, with the text of Isaiah 56, which preserves an inclusive covenant that was largely buried in Israel's subsequent history as a wall was built around the people and the Law. It is ironic that the inclusivity in Isaiah 56 finds an expression outside the city wall as we join Philip and the Eunuch in the wilderness reflecting on the way of Jesus.

The Galatians and Acts readings draw on decisions of the Council of Jerusalem in 48 CE, the very first ecumenical council, that considered questions relating to bringing Gentiles into the mission and service of the church. At that council, Paul won recognition as an "Apostle to the Gentiles" and Peter and James, the "brother" of Jesus, were leaders in opening pathways to a greater inclusivity. Strict adherence to Levitical Law was put aside. Their decisions stood against those of the "Judaizers" of the time, who pressed for a restrictive approach, by erecting barriers of distinction, to limit the participation of Gentiles, the "uncircumcised", as prescribed by the Law:

Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."
(Acts 15:1b.)

Certain individuals in our own time also engaged the Law, citing similar barriers of distinction to prohibit participation of homosexual persons in the life and leadership of the church. These biblically based opinions are promoted as though the Bible is silent with respect to marks of distinction. The truth is that a considerable body of biblical teaching removes such barriers. The early church's considerations over Gentile participation and the Law are a guide to making decisions relating to issues of inclusivity in our own time. The question as to whether Gentiles had to become Jews first, through circumcision, following the Law and renouncing their Gentile life finds a modern parallel in similar arguments that require homosexual people of faith to also follow Levitical Law and renounce their homosexual life style in order to become participating members the life and leadership of the church. As it was for the Gentiles in the first century, so it is for gay and lesbian persons in our time. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit that removes all barriers of distinction, for all are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16).

The Matthean texts show Scriptural examples in which sexuality is an aspect of the story. These are presented as key examples of radical inclusivity. They show Jewish sensitivities to Gentile participation being overturned and faith being upheld over any distinctive human condition that would or could act as a barrier. In these stories we see Gentiles as living persons, not as a class under prohibition but as people with the same human needs as the rest of us. Their faith is shown in crossing boundaries of distinction in approaching Jesus. Gay and lesbian people of faith act similarly today and cross similar boundaries. As you read these stories and the commentaries on them, the possibility of living with diversity beyond the barriers is brought before you.

The exhortations in Hebrews 13:12-16 and the parable in Matthew 13:27-30, of the wheat and the tares, show paths of action in facing diversity, yet each one is different in scope and approach. By presenting them side by side they become an invitation to undertake similar action, to choose one of two approaches that will enable those with doubts or concerns about homosexual Christian participation to move beyond barriers of distinction and to work for a Church united in faith within an expression of diversity. For those whose doubts are removed, the call is to a place of solidarity *Outside the City Gate*. The parable of the wheat and the tares provides us with another way ahead.² Allow all that is sown to grow together, trusting the outcome to a future in God. To do that will require sacrificing all of our reservations, fears and prejudices and to begin to share and to build good relationships in and through Christ, in the hope of new life beyond the suffering.

The study is in eight parts, with a brief introduction and a commentary for parts 1 to 7. At the end of each commentary there are focusing questions aimed at integrating the studies. Part 8 is a summary and a call to making choices. You are invited to approach the studies prayerfully, with an open mind. Each study involves a passage of Scripture. For the sake of consistency it is recommended that you read that passage from the New Revised Standard Version (from which quotations of Scripture in this publication are taken). Other English translations recommended for consultation include the New King James Version, the Jerusalem Bible, the New English Bible or the New International Version. Today's English Version (the "Good News" Bible) and the Living Bible are not recommended for study, as these are paraphrased Bibles and not translations from the ancient texts. Comparing the different version of each passage is encouraged. Where the translators of the Bible into English have varied from the text of the original languages, the commentaries themselves will highlight those differences, giving the original wording and a translation. Where difficulties in translation exist, those problems are discussed.

These studies may be undertaken by individuals reading alone. However, they may also be used as an eight part series of studies taken in the manner of Lenten Bible Studies. A Leaders Guide is provided as a appendix to the studies, to assist with group participation. This also provides useful, background material for the individual reader.

Confront us, O Christ,
 with the hidden prejudices and fears
 which deny and betray our prayer.
 Enable us to see the causes of strife;
 remove us from all false sense of superiority.
 teach us to grow in unity with all God's children.
 Unto your hands, O Lord,
 We commend all for whom we pray,
 trusting in your mercy now and forever. Amen.

From *Uniting in Worship, People's Book, Treasury of Prayers*,
 World Council of Churches 6th Assembly, 1983, Vancouver.

Part 1 - WITHIN MY WALLS

Introduction

In this study we explore approaches to inclusivity that put aside strict application of the Levitical Law in deciding who comprises the people of God. Isaiah 56 addresses part of the concern of the 6th Century BCE regarding the Exile, temple worship and related issues of purity, cultural diversity and religious practice. After the Restoration (around 538 BCE) a strict Torah-based approach developed that drew barriers of distinction based on purity or “Holiness” codes. Foreigners and eunuchs were excluded from the temple worship and those restrictions found expression in the Levitical Law and the covenants of the Deuteronomic history. Isaiah preserves a less rigid and more inclusive covenant.

COMMENTARY

The legal codes of the Torah considered many groups or classes of people to be outcasts. Among these were sexual minorities. Yet in Isaiah we read a contrary tradition that was less stringent in policies of exclusion. In Deuteronomy 23:1-2, two sexual minorities, eunuchs and illegitimate children,³ are defined as being excluded from the assembly of the Lord. Regarding the exclusion of eunuchs, similar laws are found in Leviticus 21:17-21; 22:22-24, where sexual blemishes are seen as an indication of impurity and marks the person unacceptable to God. Eunuchs were cut off (Heb. *'karath'*)⁴ from benefits of cult and family life. In this regard they were like childless widows and stand outside the usual patterns of procreation and the blessings of prosperity that came from that.⁵ They are seen as being cursed by God. For example, Isaiah understands eunuchs to be barren, without off-spring and therefore "cut-off" from society and a generative future in the land. They are people under a curse and without power. To some modern Christians, childless, homosexual people stand in the same situation.

The Hebrew word for eunuch, *'saris'* (plural, *'sarisim'*), appears seventeen times in the Hebrew books of the bible. Its usage refers to a wide class of persons, including castrated men, court officials, keepers of the harem, shamans, sages and wise men. Generally, as a class, "eunuchs" serve as subversive elements in the palaces of Israel's enemies. The role of Ebed-melech, the Cushite eunuch who acts to rescue Jeremiah from the cistern (Jer.38:7-13), is such an example.⁶

The Bible speaks of different types of "eunuch". In the NRSV commentary on Jeremiah 38:7, we are told that not all eunuchs were "physical",⁷ however, they do not give any further information. Interestingly, Matthew 19:12 speaks of three classes of eunuch,

“... for there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.” (Matt. 19:12).

The term "eunuch" is ambiguous, meaning either castrati or simply men “incapable of marriage” (Gk. *eunochoi*) without a specific incapacity being identified. Such incapacity may be inherent, imposed or voluntary. Self-emasculation or castration was a symbolic act of dedication to the deity in some ancient cults, the cult of Attis being one. Symbolically, self-emasculation characterises a gender role as one foregoing marriage and sexual activity in the service of the god or goddess. To keepers of the Law, this would seem like idolatry and the prohibitions in Deuteronomy 23:1 and Leviticus 21:17-21; 22:22-24 would apply. Yet it is this very image that Matthew's Jesus invokes in describing those who would devote themselves to the cause of the kingdom⁸ of God. In the context of speaking of marriage and divorce, Jesus transforms the

common understanding concerning eunuchs, to promote a standard that is outside of Israel's custom.⁹

In fact, there may have been fear and ridicule of such custom in Graeco-Roman communities in which the phenomenon of devotional self-emasculation occurred, which makes Jesus' teaching subversive in Matthew's community. An interesting quote from Hippolytus, that sounds very much like Paul's list of outcasts in 1 Corinthians 6:9, supports this view. It reads:

A prostitute, a profligate, a eunuch or anyone else who does things of which it is a shame to speak, let them be rejected.¹⁰

Like Matthew 19:12, it suggests that the class of eunuchs is a broad one, open to the possibility of shame and rejection. As 'eunuch' may refer to a man who finds married life unsuitable or impossible, gay men may be covered by the term, not through shame and rejection but rather that their condition outside of any heterosexual role type resembles that of eunuchs.¹¹ What is certain is that in some cases the eunuchs are to be understood as a class of men who are socially emasculated, *cut-off* from heterosexual social life and activity and are considered unusual in this regard- much in the same way as gay men are referred to as queer, today. Yet, through faith, these persons are exemplary of service to the kingdom and there is no word of rejection. In this, Jesus is shown as standing contrary to the Law, reversing both custom and shame. In crossing over boundaries of gender roles "for the sake of the kingdom," barriers and limits are broken and eunuchs and Jesus become our queer friends. This transformation may be a hard task but it is open to anyone to accept, if they can break with rule and custom.

In **Isaiah 56:4-6**, we see a similar reversal of rule and custom, in which eunuchs and foreigners are given God's blessing. The curse implicit in the Levitical and Deuteronomic codes, is overturned, in that the excluded ones are counted among the included ones. In fact, Isaiah 56:4-6 contains a new, conditional covenant, in which God will give a multiple blessing of inclusivity, of power or place¹² ("in my house and within my walls")¹³ and of prosperity and honour ("an everlasting name that will not be cut off"). Significantly, there are no curses, as in other covenant expressions. The conditions of the covenant blessings are three-fold, "to the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant" (Isa. 56:4). Thus, while "cut-off" from eternal life through bearing of children, it is through their faith and obedience that eunuchs are given an honourable, everlasting name that is better than progeny.

The same blessings are also extended to foreigners (Isa. 56:6), who are included under seven conditions, namely to "join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast (God's) covenant (Isa. 56:6). Thus Isaiah 56:1-6 contains ten provisions (three blessings and seven conditions) in parallel to the decalogue.¹⁴ This stands in contrast to the barrier of distinction and strict applications of gender related prohibitions under the Levitical codes. Eunuchs and foreigners serve as examples for our times, in which barriers of distinction are removed.

In the word of inclusivity in Isaiah 56, removing prohibitions to participation, and overcoming gender and sexuality distinctions, strengthens the community rather than weakens it. When read with Matthew 19:12, it can be seen that ignoring the provisions of the Torah (Deut. 23:2; Leviticus 21:17-21; 22:22-24) broadens the community also. Inclusivity permits gender roles other than those of marriage and patriarchal society in promoting the kingdom of God. Patriarchal society is thus transformed and the indication is that the Early Christian community did not reject people who did not follow the patriarchal mode of relationship.

RESPONDING TO THE COMMENTARY

1. **Decide** the nature of the issues of the time and how that relates to present day issues regarding barriers of distinction based on sexuality.
2. **Identify** the requirements for inclusivity or “membership rules” taught by the prophet in Isaiah 56.
3. **Consider:** What is the good news for today’s people from this traditions?
4. How do we today, engage the Isaiah 56 vision to inform the debate over glbt inclusion and participation? How do we overcome the barriers of distinction based on patriarchal models and Levitical Law that divide Christian communities?
5. For whom does your Christian community set limits to participation?
6. What reasons do you identify for any limitations or barriers of exclusion that may apply?
7. What does the spirit of Isaiah 56 say in regard to those limits?
8. If your community has no limits to participation, how is equity maintained?

It is suggested at this point that the reader / participant consult the entries relating to ‘Law’ and ‘Law and Gospel’, in John Macquarrie and James Childress, *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*. (SCM Press, 1986) pp.342 - 347.

The right relationship between God’s love and God’s Law is briefly discussed.

The Assembly Task Group on Sexuality presents an excellent overview of the concept of “right relationship”, which is highly recommended reading. See The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly Task Group on Sexuality, *Uniting Sexuality and Faith*. (The Joint Board of Christian Education, Collingwood, Melbourne, 1997.) Chapter 4.

Part 2 - THE LAW OR THE SPIRIT?

Introduction

Galatians and Acts 15 concern issues of purity and Torah observance raised by the inclusion of Gentiles within the early church communities of the 1st Century CE. These issues were brought to the Council of Jerusalem, in 48 CE, the first ecumenical council of the church, at which James and the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem decided to admit Paul as an Apostle to the Gentiles and decided upon limits to diversity and expected obligations in participation. At issue were questions of Gentile circumcision, diet and Torah observances. The issue with Peter (Cephas) in Antioch (Gal. 2:11-16) represents an attempt to turn back the decision of James and the Jerusalem Council and to erect barriers of distinction. There are implications here for those who would still apply similar aspects of Levitical Law in our times. In Isaiah 56:1-8 we saw an inclusive covenant, with ten conditions, that was less strict than the Law. In Acts 15 even those requirements are removed so that all that remains is faith and practice of "the way" of Jesus. While Galatians 2: 10 stresses that only one thing is asked, to act with love, the epitome of the way of Jesus.

COMMENTARY

In Galatians (written about 53 CE), Paul recalls his version of his encounter with James and the "leaders" in Jerusalem. The decision of the Jerusalem Council was not followed by all "missionaries" to the Gentiles and the issue of Torah observances was still around in Luke's time, twenty years later. Thus in Acts 15:1-21 and 21:25 we have Luke's version of the Jerusalem decisions. That version of the ruling reflects the concerns of the situation after 70 CE, when temple worship had ceased (see Acts 15:16) and Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Roman General Titus. The issues of Gentile involvement were still alive in the synagogues throughout the Roman Empire (see Acts 15:21). Pressure was from both inside Christianity, from Jewish Christians and "Judaizers" who saw Gentile inclusion as a threat to the distinctive Jewish traditions, and from outside the church, from re-forming, early, Rabbinic Judaism. Where distinctive, Jewish traditions were held as normative and nominal, Gentile participation was a point at issue.

Acts 15:12-21 gives the account of James' ruling on the requirements for Gentile participation. James begins by acknowledging "how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name" (Acts 15:14). Notice how the wording in this verse recalls the understanding of Isaiah 56:4-8, in which it is acknowledged that God names those whom he calls servants. In fact, much of James' speech that follows draws upon Amos 9:11-12; Jeremiah 12:15 and Isaiah 45:21 and recalls God's action at the time of the Restoration. Thus James acknowledges that similar divine action is being witnessed in the inclusion of Gentiles among the people of God. Admission to the community is through faith (being "named by God"), and not through Torah observance.

James applies some restrictions, in insisting that the Gentile Christians practice abstinence "from things polluted by idols and from fornication (*porneia*) and from whatever has been strangled and from blood." (Acts 15:20) These conditions related to issues of idolatry, in terms of sexual relationships and Jewish dietary laws, and represent an affirmation of traditions relating to things forbidden of Noah's sons and hence of all human kind. All the restrictions particularly relate to idolatry, including the restriction on fornication. The Greek word, *porneia*, refers to prostitution associated with some Graeco-Roman pagan religions. Those customs held particular concern for

Jews, reflecting theological attitudes and beliefs regarding *the kadeshim* or so-called male “cultic prostitutes”.¹⁵

In references to *kadeshim* in Hebrew Scriptures it is not at all clear that those references are to male prostitutes.¹⁶ That association has been made because *kadesha* (the female form of *kadesh*) are listed in some texts in parallel with *zona*, prostitutes (see Gen. 38:21-22; Deut. 23:19; Hos. 4:14). Providing a same-sex service, or other illicit sexual duties undertaken in devotion to the deity, is read into the text. Thus, where Deuteronomy 23:17-18 and 1Kings 14:24; 22:47 contains prohibitions against *kadeshim*, translators have assumed that male, cultic prostitution is involved. Recent commentaries dispute this rendering, with Phyllis A. Bird arguing that the *kadeshim* were a literary creation of the Deuteronomic writers.¹⁷ The original intent was to highlight and speak against evils of false worship and cultic practices. There was no specification of what those practices were.

Historically, the *kadeshim* have been interpreted to include men engaging same-sex acts. This was the case at the time of the translation of the Hebrew of the Deuteronomic texts into the Greek Septuagint (LXX), in the third century BCE. At that time ‘*kadeshim*’ was extended to include men in pederastic relationships and that understanding was carried into the LXX, then into the Latin Vulgate then into English translations. The KJV and ASV translate ‘*kadeshim*’ as ‘sodomite’, introducing a meaning that is not carried by the original Hebrew. The NRSV carries the rendering, ‘male prostitutes’.

The original prohibition concerns cultic purity, as elsewhere in the Deuteronomic History, and the provision of a homosexual service by the male *kadeshim* is not necessarily implied.¹⁸ That understanding is not lost when the concern is expressed in Greek as ‘*porneia*’, referring to fornication with prostitutes and illicit sex in general. It is not appropriate to apply these prohibitions to modern gay and lesbian sexual practices. However, that does not deter some people, who import different meanings into the text, drawing from their own cultural bias and understanding of human sexuality. The cultural inapplicability of this modernisation is grossly apparent to the gay/lesbian victims of such discrimination. Something of the Israelite contempt for dogs and a loathing for cultic prostitutes is carried over into the application of these texts to homosexual persons when “sodomite” is used to translate *kadesh*. Such usage has served to generate loathing and foster hatred.

Any appeal to distinctive “family values” and insistence on heterosexual traditions as normative and nominal, parallels the hard-liners of the 6th century BCE and goes against the spirit of the prophets of inclusivity. It was the followers of the hard-line that built the purity codes and erected barriers of distinction. It was to those barriers that the “Judaisers” of the 1st Century made their appeal when speaking against Gentile inclusion in the church. Those appeals were put aside by the Jerusalem Council of 48 CE! Turning to Leviticus for support, appealing to distinctive “life-styles”, promoting idealised “family values” to exempt glbt people from a place of service in the church, revisits those same purity codes. We now can speak of a greater inclusivity that overcomes distinctions built on sexuality, for like the foreigners and eunuchs, and the Gentile Christians, it is faith that makes us all one in Christ. For...

we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. (Gal. 2:16)

The New Testament shows the ministry of Jesus and the mission of the early church reaching out to outcast people of the time. The movement broke with prevailing social norms and embraced those on the margins of society such as Gentiles, ‘sinners’, lepers, cripples, the blind, women, children, adulterous women, heretics, foreigners, Samaritans, tax collectors and slaves. For Jewish Christians, the issue of Gentile participation confronted the Torah traditions that banned their participation. Issues were hotly debated concerning circumcision (a strange custom for both Romans and Greeks), dietary customs, strict Torah observances, idolatry and the presence of women (Jewish prejudice regarded Gentile women as “menstruates from birth” and their presence was seen as a threat to ritual purity). Within the Letters of Paul, the Gospels and Acts the *halakah* of Jesus is shown as being more concerned with the heart of the Torah, rather than the letter. Instead of being objective, restrictive or regulatory, it is reforming, productive and life-giving. In one word, the way of Jesus is love. Jesus does not use Scripture conservatively, to justify contemporary religious practice, but radically, returning to the roots of tradition that uncover the grace of God. Interpreting Jesus anew, Peter and Paul, affirmed that those outside the norm have also received the Spirit in faith, and they welcome them as brothers and sisters.¹⁹

In new situations such as when faith brings into the community of the people of God those whom the Law has excluded, the Gospel is seen as subverting the Law. It acts in grace through love, mercy, and forgiveness to accept people as they are. In this is the grace which announces the Good News of “justification by grace alone without works of the Law” (Rom. 1:16-17; Eph. 2:8-10) and upon which love the Protestant principle of “justification by faith alone” rests. Such an understanding allows the Christian to meet the neighbour’s needs in new, contextual ethics that are at once aware of the old law and open to new possibilities under grace.²⁰ In moving in this way, we participate in the reconciling act of God in Christ breaking through prior ordering of justice to counter the Law.²¹

RESPONDING TO THE COMMENTARY

1. Language can be used prejudicially, as outlined above, in considering who were the “*kadeshim*”? In our time, words such as ‘homosexuals’, ‘sodomite’, and ‘against nature’ encode similar judgmental attitudes. How is such language used in your Christian community?
2. Can we remain faithful to the lessons of history and assert the claim that homosexual Christians can only have the Spirit of God if they become like heterosexual Christians?
3. Can we, in love, cast aside barriers of distinction so that together we may all get on with the tasks to which God has called us?
4. How does your community define the “task to which God has called us”?
5. How do you interpret Jesus as “friend of sinners”, in our time?
6. When mercy, grace and forgiveness take central stage, how do you understand being followers of the Law or the Spirit and embracing inclusivity?
7. In what way does the Gospel redeem the Law?

It may be useful at this point to read Ephesians 2:1-10.

Part 3 - A FAITH GREATER THAN ALL ISRAEL

Introduction

In this study we look at the first of two interpretations of *Matthew* that uncover significant questions of inclusivity. The approach applies historical-critical, social and literary criticism to Scripture. It makes appeal to the original Greek text of the Gospel, to recover ancient nuances that relate to the present. For in attending to the Greek text, we are able to recover lost nuances regarding the inclusion of those whom strict applications of Levitical law would exclude.

The stories in *Matthew* are open to multi-layered interpretation. The stories carry specific nuances that unveil multiple or varied meanings, each of which was intended to be heard by the original readers or listeners of *Matthew*. Some of those nuances have been lost, ignored, or subverted, during subsequent transmission and interpretation of the text over centuries. The probability is that the text has been heard and interpreted differently by each community that has used the Gospel. From our historically and culturally remote position, we may recover some of the nuances or meanings heard in the first century, by close reading of the text and historical-critical analysis.

In this story we hear the voice of Jewish Christianity. In portraying Jesus healing the excluded ones, the ambiguous and marginal relationship of Gentiles to both Matthew's Jesus and the Matthean group of Jewish-Christians, is shown. The structure, setting and the specific portrayal of faithful, Gentile recognition of Jesus, indicates that Matthew is signalling the importance of Gentiles to the mission, and, perhaps, to the survival of the early church for whom he writes.

When read with Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Mt.1:1-16), the story of the Magi (Mt. 2:1-12) and the witness of the centurion and guards at the crucifixion (Mt.27:54), the stories of the Centurion and of the Canaanite woman point to the possibility of the inclusive role of outsiders (Gentiles and women) as significant bearers of faith and of the kingdom. They are exemplars of the faith required of true disciples of Jesus. The texts represent critical concern for bringing in the outsider, the excluded and the rejected ones. Matthew challenges those who would apply strict observances of Levitical law to determine the participation conditions for Gentile Christians. In this regard, they are significant texts of gay and lesbian inclusivity among the faithful, questioning Levitical Law as applied to restrict their participation in the life and ministry of the church.

COMMENTARY

Mt. 8:5-13 has a parallel in Luke 7:1-10, which derives from a common or similar "Q" tradition.²² A significant difference between the Matthean and Lukan texts is Matthew's use of the word, *pais*, meaning 'son'²³, 'serving boy' or 'servant', compared to Luke's use of *doulos*, meaning 'slave', to refer to the centurion's serving boy. *Pais*, is the derivative noun in, *paidika*, used to refer to the beloved youth in pederastic relationships. Hence the interpretation that the centurion's serving boy is his catamite slave, the "beloved youth" in a pederastic relationship, here euphemistically called his 'son'. Significantly, Luke's version of the story makes specific reference to the centurion's affection for the boy (Luke 7:2b), something that the Matthean text does not require, for that understanding is already carried in the use of the word *pais*. Matthew uses the same word elsewhere in the Gospel, at Matthew 12:18, to carry the double nuance of 'servant' and 'son', and that is consistent with the interpretation given here. Luz identifies this word as one of the redactive, key words in Matthew.²⁴

The use of *pais*, meaning 'son', is found in other literature of the period.²⁵ By using common Greek usage of the time and Luke's text to inform the Matthean text, we may take the word *pais* to imply that the boy is the centurion's catamite slave or serving boy. The text allows the assumption of a pederastic relationship between the Centurion and the boy. Thus the person making an approach to Jesus is a rank outsider, a Gentile and keeper of a relationship proscribed by Levitical law.

Further, the translation, *son*, is reinforced by the rhetorical use of the word in the passage, where the *pais*, who is understood as the *paidika* or beloved "son" of the centurion, is paralysed and contrasts rhetorically to the unfaithful "sons of the kingdom," who are God's "beloved ones," but whose lack of faith is also a form of paralysis- an inability to act as "true sons". Thus the word *pais*, provides the key to interpreting the text.

Using *pais*, in a series of catchwords, Matthew works a literary device in which the paralysed son of the centurion, prefigures the distressed sons of the kingdom in verse 12, by constructive use of the words 'son', 'slave', 'sons of the kingdom' and 'son', to form a chiasmus that contrasts the centurion's paralysed son with the actively, obedient servant and the faithless ones. The rhetorical use of *pais*, the son who is really not a son and who is paralysed, alternating with the word, *doulos*, the servant who is faithfully obedient but is not called a son, sets the interpretation of the *sons of the kingdom*, who are true sons but of too little faith to be obedient servants of the kingdom. Their little faith is to be understood as a type of paralysis. The curing of the Centurion's son, through the faith of another, hints at the possibility of a similar cure for the sons of the kingdom.

In this way the story is a marvelous scandal. The marvel is not that the Centurion, in great faith, has approached Jesus on behalf of his son, his serving boy. Rather, it is his faith, which is pronounced greater than the faith of the sons of the kingdom, but who do not faithfully respond to the Son of God, that exposes their little faith as shamefully scandalous. As Gerd Theissen comments:

"Taking up the positive example of this one Gentile, it promises the Gentiles entry into the kingdom of God and it threatens the "heirs of the kingdom" with exclusion. In this way Matthew's Gospel warns both Jews and Christians, who are also "children of the kingdom" (Mt 13:38) and whose entry into the rule of God is uncertain (Mt 7:21-23)."²⁶

In the curing of the paralytic son, Matthew points beyond Jesus and his own disrupted ministry among the Jews of Capernaum, to the kingdom coming into active force among other Jews and people of faith. Matthew also points beyond his own community, the followers of Jesus who are similarly constrained in their mission among the other Jews, to the possibility of a mission to the Gentiles. The interpretation is ambiguous, for the shaming may be intended to effect a change of faith on two fronts, Jewish and Gentile.

The story of Jesus healing the centurion's boy dates from traditions as early as 40CE. It comes from the Q source, in which positive descriptions of Gentiles are part of an important argument for a Gentile mission.²⁷ Matthew has reworked the Q material so that it conveys more than a miracle story affirming Jesus' authority as being greater than military or state conferred power. For the story also delivers a reproach, least some people apply barriers of distinction to limit participation according to restrictive practices under-pinned by Levitical Law.

To whom this reproach is addressed remains ambiguous. It could be to the Jewish-Christians who are too timid to undertake a Gentile mission. It could be a universal call to repentance, shaming Jewish Christians into action by the extreme example of an outsider's faith, or it could be a polemic against Jews who have not accepted Jesus as Messiah. One thing is certain, it teaches that faith is the key to participation and not status. In this, it speaks loudly to those among Christians in our time who construct barriers of distinction to proscribe the participation of gay and lesbian Christians within the church. It shows a biblical tradition of inclusivity that runs contrary to that of the hard-line that would exclude or control participation by strict application of Levitical Law, from the Mosaic codes.

Regarding the eschatological gathering of peoples into the kingdom, Matthew 8:11-12, names the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and identifies Israel as the sons of the kingdom. None of those figures has a connection with the Mosaic covenant, the temple or the priesthood. It also states that many of those who *eat with the patriarchs* are not Jews (v.11). This recalls imagery of Isaiah 60, in which the returning exiles are carried on the hips of Gentiles, who bring the dispersed Israelites with them, as a gift. Similarly, in the vision of the prophet in Isaiah 56, foreigners and eunuchs, as outcasts, have a place in the restored nation.

The words of Matthew's Jesus, in vv. 11-12, speak of such an in-gathering, whereby the faith of outcasts makes possible the in-coming of Israel and Gentiles into the kingdom. Salvation is signified by being close to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in faith and obedience, and that faith enables the crossing of boundaries so that Jewish-Gentile divisions are overcome. This is radical inclusivity through faith, which Matthew places within the context of the eschatological banquet or festival of in-gathering, and against the belief that being a child of Abraham is a guarantee of salvation (Mt 3:9). This is a stinging reminder, or even a sharp rebuke, to those who construct limits. For through faith those least expected are participants at the banquet.

I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith." And the servant was healed in that hour. (Matt.8:11-13 NRSV)

RESPONDING TO THE COMMENTARY

1. **Identify** the reversals of expectations in this story.

Put that reversal into your own words.

Can we allow Matthew 8:11-12 to speak to us today, regarding the rejected ones of our time, who stand as outcasts under the new nomism of conservative, evangelical factions?

2. What parallels do you see between Gentiles of the First Century and gay and lesbian people today?

List the parallels in terms of prejudice or misunderstanding and proscription under Levitical Law.

3. How does the knowledge that key words in Matthew, such as *pais*, uncover nuances of same-gender relationships in the New Testament, influence your interpretation?
4. What significance is there in the fact that Jesus mentions traditions that are not connected to the Mosaic covenant? (Verses 11-12)

How does this emphasise faith and not strict observances of the Mosaic Law (*Torah*)?

5. Who do you think are those who expect to be “heirs of the kingdom”?

What prophesy did Jesus tell his followers concerning the kingdom?

6. What are the implications of Matthew 8:11-12, for Christian unity?
7. Is there a timely reminder here, that those who seek to set limits may be acting contrary to the movement of the Spirit in our times?
8. What is the cautionary teaching attributed to Jesus in this text?
9. How does this inform the debate over glbt inclusion and participation?

Prayer

Merciful God,
 Help us not to judge others who are different to us,
 whose relationships are different or threatening to our comfort zones.
 Help us embrace the unlikely ones with love and compassion,
 to welcome strangers, foreigners, queers,
 as we welcome those who are like us.
 Help them to cross barriers of distinction,
 even those of our own making.
 Help us to see your children among all people,
 regardless of status or condition,
 That we may all be heirs to the kingdom.

Let us continually pray together in love.
 Loving God, teach us to live anew;
 bring us from separation into greater union
 with you and each other
 that we may affirm the stranger,
 forgive those who have harmed us,
 and seek to live in peace,
 with grace and humility.

Amen.

Part 4 - LORD, HAVE MERCY

Introduction

In this study we present an exegesis of Matthew 15:21-28 to uncover significant aspects of the text that speak of relationships and of inclusivity. It also speaks of crossing boundaries of exclusion, of prejudice and of injustice and of Jesus reversing the expected norms. Matthew 15:21-28 has a parallel in Mark 7:24-30, upon which Matthew's redaction draws. However, Matthew's redaction highlights the tension in his community over the participation of Gentiles in their religious life. This takes place in a dialogue between the woman and Jesus, into which the disciples bring a significant voice of dismissal.

COMMENTARY

After locating the story in Tyre and Sidon, which narratively signals Jesus' entry into Gentile territory, and thus the crossing of boundaries is signalled, the woman approaches Jesus. She is identified as "Canaanite," a people and religion to be avoided by the Israelites (eg. Gen 24:3; Ex 23:23; Deut 20:17), which suggests that the boundary that separates Jews and Canaanites is at issue here. The literary associates, woman, Canaan, demon, reinforce the separation from Jesus, the woman being unclean on three counts, as a woman, as a Canaanite and by association with a demon. The woman's very manner, in shouting, suggests that she may be possessed, too. From this extremely disadvantaged position, she makes a petition on her own behalf, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon."

Jesus ignores her. His actions reinforce the presence of boundaries of race, gender, status and custom. Before she can even reach Jesus, she must overcome this remarkable separation.²⁸ Yet, immediately she is given a second rebuff by the disciples, which stresses her predicament and heightens our sensitivity to her cause. Interestingly, the disciples recommend sending the woman away but their very words, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us", forms a second petition on her behalf! In the action and words of the disciples we may see reflected the vacillating actions or experiences of Matthew's own community. Are women and Gentiles to be rejected or involved out of compassion? As Matthew follows the double rebuff with Jesus' words, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel", the woman and her plight is contrasted with that of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." By looking closely at the woman, we may uncover more regarding "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" and their concerns.

The woman is alone. She is outside of the home, which is a significant Matthean redaction of the Markan text. She is a lone woman, boldly confronting a man in the street, suggesting that the woman may be "suspect" on other grounds. Her behaviour is typical of prostitutes, a female group that also crosses the boundaries of male-female relationships and approaches a social position a little more equal to that of men.²⁹ In this she is an extreme example of those who may seek to enter the community of faith, if the attention of that community is directed from within its own household boundaries to the open fields of the public domain. The woman's petitioning of Jesus is a sign of seeking to share the blessings and promises of the kingdom. She represents both the potential for the entry of outsiders into the kingdom and the risks involved.³⁰

The woman's address to Jesus, *Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David*, carries a significant liturgical connotation, with clear references to Jewish traditions and to Scripture. She has also taken the initiative, crossing power boundaries and demonstrating the power of crossing those

boundaries, for Jesus eventually answers her. In this way the issues of women's power and participation are raised as significant issues for Matthew's community.

From verse 25 to 27, the theme of separation is maintained. The woman adopts a submissive, dog-like role and "kneels" before Jesus, repeating her liturgical cry, "Lord, help me." Jesus replies with a distancing, wise saying, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." The women's quick rejoinder picks up the nuances of the bread, as crumbs that fall from the masters' table, and so persists in including herself in the eschatological banquet (or the Lord's Supper), signs of being included in the kingdom. Her faith gains both Jesus' recognition and her request: her daughter is healed immediately.

With the story of the Canaanite woman, Matthew's concern goes beyond validating his community's mission among Gentiles, to include a legitimisation of women's roles in liturgy, theological reflection and leadership.³¹ The Canaanite woman's story tells of a lone woman crossing the barriers of gender, race, ethnicity, religion and social status, to approach, confront and engage Jesus in an attempt to enter into the blessings that she perceives as being available to her. In this, she becomes the paradigmatic mother of all outsiders who seek a place within the grace and mercy of the kingdom of God. With the Centurion in Matthew 8, she stands as an exemplar of the faith required of true disciples of Jesus. It is her faith that matters, and neither her condition nor the Levitical Laws and custom that prescribe her condition delimit her place at the table or the banquet. Speculation about her condition or "life-style" was put aside and her faith was given recognition.

To Jewish ears, the suggestion of the inclusion of women and Gentiles was shocking. Just how shocking cannot be overstated, for prejudice and discrimination was severe, on both sides. This story points to overcoming the prevailing sanctions and regulation through religious rule and culture. It shows prejudice being overcome. It is a further example of the radical inclusivity through faith upon which early Gentile participation was built. It is the same principle that was upheld in the Reformed tradition as justification by faith, alone; it is the same principle by which gay and lesbian Christians claim their place in the Church, without conditional barriers of distinction.

Where it is difficult for outsiders to gain access, either from prejudice, cultural differences, institutional rules or for theological differences, the faithful cry, "Lord have mercy," can still be heard. Indeed, the "lost sheep of Israel" of whom Jesus spoke may well include those who fail to create an open community.

RESPONDING TO THE COMMENTARY

1. Like the story of the Centurion, this is a story with marked role reversals. Who takes the initiative to challenge and seek change?
2. Describe What role do the disciples play in the story?
3. In being confronted by the Canaanite woman, Jesus' own boundaries were challenged. List what you understand those boundaries to be. What similarities do you see within the boundaries around entry into your community? How do lesbian and gay Christians challenge or cross those boundaries?

4. In what way does the writer of Matthew describe Jesus a model for Christian inclusivity?
 - (1) How does Jesus respond to the person?
 - (2) How does Jesus respond to the Law?
 - (3) How does Jesus involve the example of the “outsider” as a lesson for the “insiders”?
5. What is the standard of inclusivity in your own Christian community? To what extent is it an open one, with people encouraging one another, celebrating each person’s life with dignity so that no one is lost? How does this story challenge inclusivity in your community?
6. In order to find an unrestricted place in your church community, for gay and lesbian Christians, what barriers have to be crossed, what boundaries have to be softened? What role do the disciples play in the story?
7. How does the Protestant Principle, “Justification by faith alone” stand in relation to this story? How does it stand in relation to gay and lesbian participation?

It may be useful at this point to read Hebrews 2:10-13.

Prayer

Merciful God,
 Help us to embrace others whom Jesus has called into his family,
 even those who are different or threatening to our comfort zones.
 Help us welcome the unlikely ones with God’s hospitality,
 accepting them as they are,
 to share their humanity, as our family,
 and to give praises for their lives.
 Help us to build bridges through reconciliation,
 even to cross ravines of our own making.
 So that we may welcome and give ministry,
 and be open to receiving ministry from others,
 That we may all be one family in Christ.

Let us continually pray together in love.
 Loving God, teach us to live anew;
 bring us from separation into greater union
 with you and each other
 that we may affirm the stranger,
 forgive those who have harmed us,
 and seek to live in peace,
 with grace and humility.

Amen.

Part 5 - *INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS*

Introduction

In this part we consider a commentary on Parts 3 and 4 that speak of relationships, faith and of the kingdom of God. You are invited to read and respond to the Commentary and to reflect upon your journeying so far as you consider your thoughts and insights. You are provided with some important aspects of hermeneutics, the art of interpretation of meaning, that may be applied to questions of inclusivity.

COMMENTARY

It is significant that the two stories of Gentile faith in Jesus that we have studied in Matthew, are not the only two incidents that present such examples. Significant bearers of faith are shown in the faith of the women in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:1-16), in the witness of the Magi (Matt. 2:1-12) and in the faith of the guards at the crucifixion (Matt.27:54). Together with the stories of healing other ritually, unclean "outsiders", such as the leper (Matt. 8:2-3) and Peter's mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14-17), the texts can be understood as raising the consciousness of Matthew's Jewish-Christian community regarding the manner of approach to outsiders. In presenting Jesus as a model of how to deal with rank outsiders, Matthew paves the way for addressing four, hermeneutical issues that seem to be present in his community. These relate to what it means to be "insiders" or participators in the kingdom of God.

The first question, raises the issue of universality or the openness of the kingdom's blessings and promises to all people, regardless of ethnic, religious, gender and social status or barrier of distinction. Initially this is a concern for Gentiles and their eventual participation within the religious life of the community. In this, Matthew recognises the significance of relational questions that are raised for Jewish Christians, in embracing Gentiles within the kingdom of God. Matthew identifies faith and recognition of Jesus' status and authority as Lord, as points of contact from which the possibility of inclusion may follow. As neither the Centurion nor the Canaanite woman are shown as becoming disciples or further followers of Jesus, beyond their one encounter, Matthew leaves the possibility of Gentile inclusivity within the people of God as an open challenge to discipleship. To accept Gentiles as an integral part of the kingdom of God, leads to questions of overcoming the inner stumbling blocks of the community itself, in overcoming its own prejudices and restrictive practices.

This leads us to the second hermeneutical issue, concerning relationships within the community of faith. Matthew 8:5-13 clearly warns against assumptions regarding the children of God according to social status or being on one particular side of barriers of distinction. It presents a case for inclusivity that has no point of contact with the Levitical codes of Law and distinctiveness. In this, Matthew 8:5-13 has much in common with the traditions of Isaiah 56, Galatians 2 and Acts 15 that we saw in the first two studies. Relationships are to be built upon faith, alone, and not upon Law observances or other marks of distinction, so that "outsiders" may become "insiders". In this way, the evangelical teaching puts aside considerations of ethnicity, gender, sexuality and social status to build a community of faith.

Matthew 15:21-28 focuses issues regarding the relational place of "outsiders who may become insiders" within the role of women in the religious life of the community within which the gospel took shape. Traditional boundaries are crossed with such audacity, that the story confronts the

patriarchal structures contained within the gospel and its community of origin. Questions are raised concerning women acting alone, outside of the family structures and without a male agent, as well as concerns for women acting in liturgical leadership and engaging in critical dialogue with men. Jesus is shown putting aside those concerns in response to the Canaanite woman's faith.

The third question is familial. It relates to interpreting the role of household or family within the inclusive vision of the rule of God that the gospel proposes. In the broader sense it concerns *koinonia*³² or fellowship. The status of women, children, slaves, prostitutes and catamites is raised in relation to traditional notions of the patriarchal family. These stories signal that there are familial relationships, other than those of tradition, within which there are liberating expressions of love, mercy and faith that are life-giving and creative. This is actually among the first issues confronted in the Gospel of Matthew, specifically within the genealogy and introduction to the birth narrative in Matthew 1. It is as important now as it was in the first-century, to recognise that people of faith are to be found in familial relationships that differ from the expected norm or dominant tradition.

Fourthly, in 8:5-13 and 15:21-28, Matthew presents extreme views of Gentiles and women, to focus the most severe prejudices of the Jewish Christians (and of some Jews of the day) regarding questions of inclusivity. Faith, hope and mercy become the standards for radical inclusivity of Gentiles and women, which overcome the boundaries of the purity codes and Jewish, nomistic concerns. In this way, the texts served to instruct Matthew's own community, perhaps also attempting to shame them to greater faith and into doing Jesus' will (Mt 7:21-23). They speak similarly to Christian communities today, least they also erect barriers of distinction that subvert grace and inhibit the flow of mercy, hope and faith.

Through stories of approach and the giving of grace to outsiders, those who stand rejected or on the outside can hear words of acceptance and grace and experience the Gospel at its heart. Everything is changed, re-imaged as a transformation of status under grace: such grace overcomes sin, and makes possible the reclaiming of place and of fellowship formerly denied. In this way, the stories of the centurion and his serving boy and of the Canaanite woman and her daughter are radical texts of liberation for marginalised persons of faith, today, especially of two groups, homosexual persons and women. As these people wrestle with what it means to be gay and Christian, or woman and Christian (or both), they also cross boundaries and create new visions of inclusivity within the rule of God. In this they confront dominant and oppressive structures and cry for freedom, applying Matthew's stories as part of their inclusive hermeneutic. That hermeneutic is open, relational, familial and inclusive. In this they also stand as inheritors of the questioning tradition that is contained in the early voice of Jewish Christianity, as, together they ask, "Who are my brothers and sisters?"

This question is as important to us today, as it was in Matthew's time and for his community. While the social contexts have changed, the question remains. In place of Gentiles we have other people who may seem different to ourselves and the Christian community wrestles with issues of spirituality, gender, sexuality and social condition. The Matthean hermeneutics, as identified above, concerning openness, relationships, fellowship and inclusivity, invoke questions of participation as well as association. We have seen how barriers of distinction were confronted and overcome. How do we apply those Gospel lessons today? With whom do we participate to build the kingdom of God?

Being open so that the stranger may come in, is only the first step. Relationships must be build so that there is an authentic fellowship of the family of God. Such familial and inclusive relationships

require that all experience a *koinonia* that is accepting, affirming and celebratory. There can be no statement, “thus far but no further,” granting entry under a guise of acceptance that re-imposes boundaries from within. Entry through faith alone means membership and participation. How will we make that a reality for all people of faith?

RESPONDING TO THE COMMENTARY

1. Faith is a gift from God. The Uniting Church *Basis of Union* says, that the “Spirit has endowed the members of Christ's Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ.” (*Basis* Para. 13) How will we make that a reality for all people of faith?
2. Radical inclusivity, such as the examples seen in Matthew 8:5-13, Isaiah 56, Galatians 2 and Acts 15, has no point of contact with the Levitical codes of Law and distinctiveness. What, then, are the discerning factors for inclusion in Christian community?

Uniting Church participators in this study may wish to consider the *Basis of Union*, Paragraphs 12 and 13.

3. If barriers are removed from the point of entry, is it appropriate to erect them within the community? In other words, is there a “this far but no further” provision to membership?
4. How does one move from the edges to the centre, the very heart of the community of faith, free of barriers of distinction?
5. How would you evaluate relationships in terms of openness, fellowship and inclusivity in your community?
6. What barriers remain for you to cross and overcome in order to build an inclusive church that brings in “outsiders”?
7. What calls you beyond your limits? How do you face those barriers?
8. How do you understand the call of Jesus and the Gospel in terms of moving beyond barriers? Or, How would you answer the question, "Who are my brothers and sisters?"

It may be useful at this point to read Romans 8:28-39.

Prayer

Merciful God,

Help us to be come more than conquerors,
to overcome death by denial
and the imposition of rules for others
beyond those we ask for ourselves.

Help us embrace all of creation, all of humanity,
to bring all into the love of Christ,
unconditionally, unreservedly and with mercy.

Show us that nothing separates us from the love of God,
that we may overcome distinctions of our own making.

Forgive us for erecting barriers where you have removed them;
for making unclean those whom You have made clean,
through Jesus Christ,
That nothing may separate anyone from the love of God.

Let us continually pray together in love.
Loving God, teach us to live anew;
bring us from separation into greater union
with you and each other
that we may affirm the stranger,
forgive those who have harmed us,
and seek to live in peace,
with grace and humility.

Amen.

Part 6 - PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Introduction

One boundary to be considered in Christian communities is Baptism- the sacramental point of entry and the visible sign of grace. In this part we meet Philip on the wilderness road as he encounters a most unlikely person contemplating life as a disciple of Christ. In the encounter we discover insights into the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the faithful, of radical inclusivity and of the way of discipleship guided by the Holy Spirit.

COMMENTARY

Acts 8:27-39 contains the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch who met on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. This man was both a foreigner and a eunuch. He was a believer, for he had been to Jerusalem to worship. His encounter with Philip ends with his baptism. Close reading of the story contains some instructive insights. The eunuch is an extraordinary fellow of quite exotic connections. He is the court official to Queen Candace, of Ethiopia. We are told that he went to Jerusalem to worship. While that would be against Levitical and Deuteronomic law, Luke makes it clear that he is a believer. What sort of believer was he? If we follow Josephus (Ant. 4:29-91) and strict application of the Law, he could not have been a Jewish proselyte.³³ Perhaps he was a Christian believer, for when Philip meets up with him we find that this royal eunuch is reading a passage from the prophet Isaiah (from Isaiah 53:7-8, regarding the "suffering servant"). This text is identified closely with Jesus, and states:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.
(Isaiah 53:7-8.)

For the eunuch to be reading this passage may have been a surprise to Philip or seen as an anomaly. He questions the eunuch's understanding of what he is reading. In this, Philip applies a text of orthodoxy, "Do you understand what you are reading?" In reply, he gets an orthodox answer, "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

Philip at this point is acting like a faithful servant of Christ, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. He *hears* the words of Scripture, he *goes* to the reader and *joins* him. His actions are an example of obedient discipleship, in hearing, going and joining. He acts with inclusivity, and finds mutual acceptance before the Word that is held by this unlikely person. In this, Philip is a Christian role model.

The eunuch offers Philip the hospitality of his chariot and the two men discuss the Scripture. There is a double irony about this eunuch, for he has power, as a royal official, yet he is powerless in the sexual, procreative sense because he is a eunuch. He is also reading about one who is

powerless before a greater power, taken like a sheep to the slaughter, or like a lamb to be shorn before his life is cut off. The one in the text from Isaiah is like a eunuch, "his life taken away from the earth", he is *cut off*, without generation. He has no off-spring, no continuing name in the land and therefore is as one under a curse. The suffering servant appears like a eunuch, with a functional similarity, if not a physical likeness. Certainly there is, in this person in Isaiah, a figure with whom the eunuch can identify.³⁴

The eunuch questions Philip as to the identity of this enigmatic figure in Isaiah. He asks, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" In reply, Philip uses the text to preach about the good news of Jesus, whom we understand as being something like a eunuch, cut off in His prime and His life taken away from the earth, for Jesus was, presumably, without heirs- at least in the physical sense. He was a functional eunuch, yet His life, crucifixion and resurrection redefine for the early, emerging Christians the way in which one achieves eternal life. It is no longer an eternal life that is achieved through the bearing of children but through one's personal identification with the risen Christ. This understanding is very similar to that found in Isaiah 56:4-8 (studied in the first part of this series), which is a text close to the one that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when Philip approached him! It is the very text (Isaiah 53:7-8) that deals with the fate of the Suffering Servant, whom Christians identify with Jesus, the Messiah. All of Philip's instruction (teaching) is about Jesus Christ, as interpreted through the image in Isaiah of the Suffering Servant. Thus faith and servanthood (service) are inseparable parts of this story.

When the eunuch asks Philip if there is any barrier to him being baptised, he is testing the good news. Is it really inclusive? Is he counted among the people for whom the Unknown One *was cut off from the land of the living*? Can a eunuch be baptised? For the term "*cut-off*" is a reference to the curse that was placed on anyone who was exiled, executed by capital punishment, or did not reproduce. It recalls the prohibitions such as those in Deuteronomy 23:1-2 and Leviticus 21:17-21; 22:22-24. He is asking about the possibility of his own inclusion within the community of Christ. He was counted as an outcast on two accounts under Jewish Law, both as a Gentile and as a eunuch. No wonder he is suspicious! Can he take these Christians at their word?

The eunuch seems to answer his own question. In fact, he takes the initiative in the story. He commands the charioteer to stop the chariot and both Philip and the eunuch enter the water. Philip does not answer the eunuch's questions with words but with actions. He baptises him. Philip's silent action recalls the silence of the Suffering Servant and the traditions associated with Jesus' death. Through faith in Christ's death and resurrection we all have access to new life- for that is the meaning of baptism. Through faith we enter into servanthood, as disciples of Jesus.

In this story, the Eunuch is a role model for gay and lesbian Christians and other marginalised persons who, in identifying with Jesus, ask, "Am I included too?" Like the Eunuch, their faith has already answered the question for them. They may follow his example, take the initiative and press the point of inclusivity through faith and identity with Jesus Christ.

Radical inclusivity is demonstrated in the story in two ways. When both the eunuch and Philip enter the water and Philip baptises him, entering the water becomes a symbol of inclusivity and the act of baptism affirms it. The eunuch and Philip act as though both have made the same point of recognition. That is, that Isaiah speaks of people like the eunuch and that, in unity with Christ Jesus, all people of faith are included in the kingdom of God in the manner of the prophet's vision. The prophecy of Isaiah 56, that God's house will become a "house of prayer for all people", is fulfilled in this story.

There is another significant aspect to this story from Acts, that in verse 36 we have the description of Philip and the eunuch "*going along the road.*" They were journeying together and we now understand that journeying to be a journey into the way of Christ, the way of servanthood and discipleship- even unto suffering. Philip was encountering the eunuch as a fellow traveller in the faith. He learns from words of the prophet of Isaiah 53, that Jesus is like this eunuch and that the way of Christ is inclusive. The eunuch continues "*on his way*" (v. 39), as Philip is snatched away by the Spirit.

We can well ponder the lesson that Philip has learnt in his encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch: in the way of Christ Jesus there are no marks of distinction. All people of faith are included in the "way". Those marks of distinction that were considered curses from God and cause people to be "*cut-off*" are removed or overcome. In fact, Jesus Himself bears those marks of distinction (re-read Isaiah 53:7-8, printed above, thinking also of the crucifixion story).

Philip was silent before the faith of the eunuch because there was nothing more to say but to act in faith. Nothing prevented the eunuch from being baptised so that he could go on his way rejoicing. The great grace of the "Way" is shown as being greater than the covenant grace of Isaiah 56, for it is without conditions.

In this way, the New testament shows sexual minorities included in the kingdom of God. Conditions of the old covenant laws do not apply any longer and are not part of the Way of Christ. Jesus stands in solidarity with eunuchs and other outcasts. He became one of them on the Cross. He bore the curse of ostracism, cut-off from ordinary patterns of family and procreation, with no future in the land. He was made like a "eunuch", as one under a curse and forsaken. He was stricken for the transgressions of his people so that they may have life. However, His life, crucifixion and resurrection redefine for us the way in which one achieves eternal life. It is no longer an eternal life that is achieved through the bearing of children but through one's personal identification with the risen Christ.

Jesus in our time stands in solidarity with those deemed to have impaired sexual status. Among those treated like the "eunuchs" and outcasts of old, are the gay and lesbian Christians who are denied full participation and status within the church. They hear the Ethiopian eunuch's cry, "Look, here is water!" It is the water of hope, the water of inclusivity, given for us all in the way of Jesus Christ. Water is but the "visible sign of invisible grace" already given for all persons. Yet for some people it is their sexuality that is taken as a "visible sign" of either acceptance, and hence to participation and power, or of their rejection, and hence to a relegated place of denial, powerlessness and isolation.

RESPONDING TO THE COMMENTARY

1. Why do you think some gay men and lesbian women identify closely with the biblical stories of eunuchs?
2. Why is that that the Eunuch could have doubts about inclusivity?

List the "strikes against him under levitical law and Jewish custom.

In what way is this relevant to questions of gay and lesbian membership and participation?

3. Where baptism is the visible sign of grace in your Christian community, is such grace sufficient for full, unrestricted participation according to the gifts and talents of the individual person? Are all recognised equally or do some still ask, “Am I included, too?”
4. In the story of the Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, an Angel of the Lord and the Holy Spirit play a significant part (see Acts 8:26, 29, & 39). Philip is acting under the evangelical direction of the Holy Spirit in crossing boundaries of the Holiness Code. Describe Philip’s evangelical response in your own words.
5. Baptism and the “water of hope” are significant parts of Philip’s response. Is this sufficient for a principle of entry into membership and participation within the Church, today?
6. All of Philip’s instruction (teaching) is about Jesus Christ, as interpreted through the image in Isaiah of the Suffering Servant. How do you understand faith and servanthood to be inseparable in this story? Is this a sufficient, evangelical model for the Church, with respect to faith, membership and participation?

It may be useful at this point to read Isaiah 53:7-12.

Prayer

Let us pray for those of faith who still ask, “Am I included, too?”

Where silence prevails, O God,
let us be voices for inclusion,
so that no person of faith is excluded because others prejudice
or appeal to barriers of exclusion.

Show us the way of the Spirit active in Your people,
so that in Baptism we may see all things made new,
in a rebirthing that makes all acceptable, unconditionally,
through a sacrament of grace.

O God, help us in our journeying as people of The Way,
affirming our own baptism,
as we affirm that of strangers,
that we may become disciples and servants of Christ.

Let us continually pray together in love.

Loving God, teach us to live anew;
bring us from separation into greater union
with you and each other
that we may affirm the stranger,
forgive those who have harmed us,
and seek to live in peace,
with grace and humility.

Amen.

Part 7 - OUTSIDE THE CITY GATE

Introduction

We begin this study with another reference that appeals to grace and to putting aside provisions of the Levitical Law. The motif of the city returns us to the one at the beginning of the studies, of the holy place as one of restoration, re-building Jerusalem and the community following the Exile (Isaiah 56). In this case, the safe city, bounded by walls of Law and custom, is replaced by a vision of a “city to come”, as an abiding, eschatological hope. It is appropriate to link the two here, as many glbt people and their friends and supporters in our time, experience the church from a position of exile or estrangement. Where the church is divided over issues of faith, sexuality, membership and participation, it stands in need of re-building. In this part we consider the sacrificial model of standing with the outcasts and sinners, as a call to the way of the cross as presented in Hebrews 13:13, in which the safe city, the city of denial, is vacated as the faithful are invited to a place “outside the city gate”.

COMMENTARY

Read Hebrews 13:8-16.

The writer of Hebrews addresses those who experienced rejection and suffering (Heb. 10:32-34; 12:4) and the message is particularly meaningful for those who are caught between conflicting demands of dominant culture, custom and tradition and their own experience and faith convictions. In the first-century community behind the Hebrews text, the polarities were between following the legal demands of Jewish tradition and custom and the new Christian way in Rome. Suffering persecution, oppression, exclusion and isolation brought them to the point of losing confidence and giving up all together (Heb. 10:35). They were shown Jesus in a new, yet familiar way: He is the one who suffered “outside the city gate” in the place of solidarity with all those who are oppressed.

Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. (Heb. 13:12-13)

The imagery is provocative. It identifies Jesus with both the Levitical practice of burning the sin offering for the assembly outside the camp (Lev. 4:21) and of sending the scapegoat out into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement,³⁵ bearing the sins of the people (Lev. 16:8-19) and invites the people to join him! The city gate literally represents the place of closure in the wall that is built to exclude others or to protect the faithful. Gates form barriers to either shut in or to shut out, serving to separate and to create a division. They provide a point of entry and imply a right of passage. The gate must to be opened to gain entry or to exit the city or the fold. Sometimes a password is invoked or some other signal of acceptance and of belonging is demanded before entrance to the city is allowed. City gates in ancient times were guarded by sentinels or watch dogs, set to protect those within the city and to keep an eye on the outsiders. It is risky being outside the gate, yet Hebrews calls the people into the place of risk and of suffering and sacrifice.

The writer of Hebrews leaves no doubt as to what to expect in moving beyond the comfort zone set by the walls of tradition or former custom and Law. The words speak of suffering, isolation, abuse and endurance and even the language of sanctification is sacrificial. However, the words quickly move to express eschatological hope:

For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. (Heb. 13:14)

Jesus found no place in the old city, with its closed gates and protective walls of isolation. His enforced place was outside of the city gates in the place of crucifixion- the ultimate place of denial imposed by the closed city. The gathered community of the safe city, with its wall around the people and their custom and Law, is invited to the new way of sacrifice with Christ:

Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (Heb. 13:15-16)

It is the experience of many gay and lesbian Christians that by denial they are forced into a place outside of the church. The gate is shut on them, barring their participation as equals with their heterosexual brothers and sisters in Christ. In faith, they know Jesus is the one who shares their experience of exclusion with them. More than that, Jesus shares the same flesh and blood and is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.” (Hebrews 2:11)

Many friends and supporters of gay and lesbian Christians have already embraced homosexual Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ. It remains for the rest of the church to see if it can do likewise, so that together we may experience a shared life in goodness of right relation in Christ and with each other. The focus then becomes one of our identity as Christians and our resonance with the new community in Christ. We leave behind the wall all fears of differences of gender identity, sexuality and social status.

In consequence, questions about participation and ordination of homosexual persons or the role of gay leaders in the Church cease, as we consider how we work together within the Body of Christ in ethical relationships of the Christian life to bring hope and justice for all. There are no new conditions imposed. There are no limiting factors; no barriers that say ‘thus far but no further’, that welcome only on the condition that homosexual persons become like heterosexual ones. Each has entry and participation as brothers and sisters in Christ through faith alone. It is a question of Christian unity and love: or, as the Eighth Assembly of the Uniting Church termed it, committing “to live with diversity”. This was upheld at the Tenth Assembly. We ought not to allow one group of Christians to continually denigrate or deny the participation of another. For in doing so, they deny the very Christ who is in others. As we saw in Acts 8:27-39 there is the danger of allowing sexuality to be the sacramental standard of entry and participation and not the water of faith.

RESPONDING TO THE COMMENTARY

1. **Decide** for whom Jesus has suffered “outside the gate”. Are there any limits?
2. Is faith the sacramental standard in your community? If not, what other standards exist and why?
3. What would it mean for you to move “outside the city gate” and stand in solidarity with those who face rejection?

4. What then remains for change?
5. When faith is given central place in sacramental understandings of community, what does this say about participation?
6. The writer of Hebrews speaks of two cities; what are the characteristics of each one?
7. Why do you think that the writer of Hebrews challenged the notion of a safe place within God's walls"?
8. What does the modern Church mean when it speaks of "a safe place" and how does this differ from what a gay or lesbian person may call a "safe place"? Are they the same thing?
9. To what extent can you recognise a fellowship of difference based on a common faith in Jesus Christ?
10. "The focus then becomes one of our identity as Christians and our resonance with the new community in Christ. We leave behind the wall all fears of differences of gender identity, sexuality and social status." (See above, p. 33.)

Is this a sufficient guide to overcoming tensions caused by differences of understanding and beliefs about homosexual persons in our churches?

It may be useful at this point to read Matthew 22:34-40.

Prayer

Creator God,
 Let mutual love continue;
 as we show hospitality to strangers, to our neighbours and to friends alike.
 Remember those who are in prison and those who are being tortured.
 Let our covenanted relationships be held in honor by all,
 that we may remain faithful.
 Keep our lives free from distraction, infidelity and usury
 so we can say with confidence,
 "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.
 What can anyone do to me?"

Let us continually pray together in love.
 Loving God, teach us to live anew;
 bring us from separation into greater union
 with you and each other
 that we may affirm the stranger,
 forgive those who have harmed us,
 and seek to live in peace,
 with grace and humility.

Amen.

Part 8 - MAKING CHOICES

Change can be risky business. We all have our comfort zones outside of which we are reluctant to move. The following parable told by Soren Kierkegaard illustrates this:

A certain flock of geese lived together in a barnyard with high walls around it. Because the corn was good and the barnyard was secure, these geese would never take a risk. One day a philosopher goose came among them. He was a very good philosopher and every week they listened quietly and attentively to his learned discourses. 'My fellow travellers on the way of life,' he would say, 'can you seriously imagine that this barnyard, with great high walls around it, is all there is to existence?

'I tell you, there is another and a greater world outside, a world of which we are only dimly aware. Our forefathers knew of this outside world. For did they not stretch their wings and fly across the trackless wastes of desert and ocean, of green valley and wooded hill? But alas, here we remain in this barnyard, our wings folded and tucked into our sides, as we are content to puddle in the mud, never lifting our eyes to the heavens which should be our home.

The geese thought this was very fine lecturing. 'How poetical,' they thought. 'How profoundly existential. What a flawless summary of the mystery of existence.' Often the philosopher spoke of the advantages of flight, calling on the geese to be what they were. After all, they had wings, he pointed out. What were wings for, but to fly with? Often he reflected on the beauty and the wonder of life outside the barnyard, and the freedom of the skies.

And every week the geese were uplifted, inspired, moved by the philosopher's message. They hung on his every word. They devoted hours, weeks, months to a thoroughgoing analysis and critical evaluation of his doctrines. They produced learned treatises on the ethical and spiritual implications of flight. All this they did. But one thing they never did. They did not fly! For the corn was good, and the barnyard was secure!³⁶

Our studies have shown ways in which security or the safety of the flock was challenged when a wider world confronted the early church- indeed, as it sought to live with diversity! We began examining historical approaches to inclusivity, comparing Levitical Law with a word from the prophets. We then turned to Gospel traditions that wrestle with issues of inclusivity and confronted Early Church traditions that separated the Christian community through strict application of Levitical Law. It was shown how faith and not Torah observance was the condition of entry into the new community in Christ. Having gained entry, Gentile Christians did not have to become Jews first in order to participate. It was shown how questions of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and social custom raised by Gentile participation lead to less stringent application of Levitical Law. We saw how at various times in the history of the people of God they looked inwards, to safe limits. Attempts were made to preclude or restrict the participation of some members of the community in religious life by erecting or re-erecting barriers of distinction. Let us consider some of those restrictions again.

In the sixth century BCE, the controlling group from among the returning Exiles, sought to rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple cult, by "building a wall" around Israel, a protective barrier of laws and regulations that tried to keep the people and the religion holy and pure. Those codes and

practices are found in the Book of Leviticus and throughout the rest of the Deuteronomic history. Those codes served to isolate and to protect under a series of covenanted obligations and curses (see Leviticus 26). They established restrictive practices and codes of law that we now have put aside.

We no longer offer burnt offerings, effectively putting aside all of Leviticus 1-7. Similarly, we no longer regard the hare and the pig as “unclean” and not to be eaten or touched, as required in Leviticus 11:6-8; 19:6 & 7. We no longer only eat sea foods that have scales and fins, as required in Lev. 11:9-12. We no longer regard women as ceremonially “unclean” after childbirth or during menstruation, as does Lev. 12; 15:19-24 or go to visit a priest and carry out the prescribed rituals when we have a skin rash according to Lev. 13 & 14. Neither do we refrain from wearing clothes of mixed fibres nor expect farmers to stop raising hybrids and to stop planting crops side by side, as required by Lev. 19:19. We no longer follow Lev. 19:27 and the prohibition against trimming the beard or cutting the hair at the side of one’s head. We ignore the law to kill children who curse their parents, as in Lev. 20:9 and no longer execute adulterers, according to Leviticus 19:20, 20:10 or people who consult ghosts and familiar spirits, as in Lev. 20:6-8, 27. We do not stop eunuchs from entering places of worship, as does Deuteronomy 23:1, or bar eunuchs, dwarfs and those with physical impairment from presenting offerings or serving, as does Lev. 21:17-20. We no longer keep slaves, even if we could purchase them from neighbouring nations, as required in Lev. 25:44, and selling our daughters into slavery is not practiced, even though Lev. 21:7 sanctions it. We have an understanding of the human condition that puts aside such practices, even though they are very much of the Law of Moses.

In a similar way, a modern understanding of homosexuality, as a human, psycho-sexual orientation, would seem to demand a similar putting aside of the Mosaic code where it *may* apply to homosexuality.³⁷ Yet, some modern Christians would have us still practice the Levitical codes relating to laying “with a male as with a woman” (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13) and to the *kadeshim* (the ‘holy ones’ of Deuteronomy 23:17-18 and 1Kings 14:24) by applying those passages of Scripture to homosexual persons. In fact, we saw how some English translations of the Deuteronomic codes replace the word *kadesh* and its plural, *kadeshim*, with the word ‘sodomite’, in order to conflate the Deuteronomic and Levitical texts and to apply them to homosexual persons. There is in place, an active discrimination against homosexual persons through the application of Scripture. Like the *kadeshim* and Gentiles of a former time, homosexual persons have been made to be the despised ones and separated under a code of otherness, often it is claimed, for the good of the community.

Close to the same time in history that the Levitical codes were compiled, other traditions promoted an inclusive and less stringent covenant, free of curses. Gentiles and eunuchs were seen as significant bearers of faith (Isaiah 56:1-8; Jer. 3:15; Jonah) and as servants of the people of God (Isaiah 60:4; Jer. 38:7ff., Daniel). In fact, the Book of Jonah contains a stinging rebuke against assumptions of self-righteousness through special status and sitting in judgment, like Jonah in his bower, outside the city walls (Jonah 4). What one biblical community sought to exclude, for its own good, other biblical communities saw as essential for the well being of the community, indeed, necessary for its very survival.

The promise in Isaiah 56:5-6, with which we started this study, envisaged a place within God’s walls as a place of promise and hope. Applications of strict legal and social codes did not and does not realise that vision. In Matthew and Acts we saw how bringing the Gospel to Gentiles necessitated reconsideration of the Law as it applied to circumcision, dietary custom, Torah observances, gender and sexual minorities. We saw how faith was the key to entry and

participation and not any other presumed status or custom. We encountered Jesus standing in the tradition of the prophets, criticising the strict legalism of his time and gathering the outcasts of Israel, in the spirit of Isaiah 56.

Finally we saw Jesus as the one “outside the city gate”, and the invitation was to join him in the place of solidarity with all those who are oppressed or rejected. The paradox is, that in joining Jesus in that place of solidarity, we remove all barriers to participation as we become united in faith with Him.

Like the inclusive “city to come” in Hebrews 13:14, a safe place “within God’s walls” is yet to be. Can we build a better place within the walls and, as God’s agents, be bearers of the promise that removes all barriers based on sexuality, gender identification and gender roles? If we choose to do that, the parable of the wheat and the tares provides us with a way ahead (Matt. 13:27-30).³⁸ The essence is this: allow all that is sown to grow together, trusting the outcome to a future in God. To do that will require sacrificing all of our reservations, fears and prejudices and to begin to share and to build good relationships in and through Christ, in the hope of new life beyond the suffering. Thus we may move ahead together recognising a *koinonia* of difference but not separation; and the harvest is left to God, so that no one is lost.

Already some church members see themselves standing with Jesus in a *koinonia* of solidarity with those who suffer exclusion and condemnation. That was the call of Hebrews 13: 9-16, a call that was set within the context of letting “mutual love continue” (Heb. 13:1, 4) and allowing God to be judge. That is close to the advice in the parable of the wheat and the tares and, for those who can stand in solidarity with glbt people, it offers another way forward.

In presenting these commentaries, Friends Of Unity has engaged advocacy on behalf of ourselves and glbt people. Our intention is to show evangelical traditions that promote or allow inclusivity and participation of all persons of faith regardless of sexuality or gender identity. At the same time we hope to show those who already stand outside the city gate that they are not alone, for Jesus stands there, too. The invitation is for you to join them, in solidarity, and perhaps to cooperate to build God’s city to come. Amen.

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Together, we pray,
 God of Grace and Mercy,
 as on the day of resurrection
 you continue to roll away the barriers in our lives,
 so that we may know you more deeply.
 Bring us to new life, now.

Help us to understand your Wisdom;
 enable us to risk solidarity with those who suffer,
 to engage those who are different,
 to welcome the isolated ones
 and those whom we wrongly judge;
 help us to step beyond the walls that we build,
 to risk meeting you outside all barriers;
 help us to forgive those who harm us
 and forgive us for causing hurt to others.

For judgment is in the hands of the Lord,
The One who befriends sinners and outcasts,
challenging the presumption of righteousness
based on notions of purity;
The One who justifies through faith,
demanding neither good works nor special status;
The One in whom all distinctions dissolve,
naming us brother, sister, Beloved;
The One who gathers in the harvest,
preparing a Table before us as a banquet,
removing all barriers
so we may love more deeply.
Amen.

Go in peace,
seek unity through faith,
to work justice with love,
so that we do not lose the Way.

May the God of peace be with you,
being ever gracious to you,
upholding you in love always.
In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

OUTSIDE THE CITY GATE: A BIBLE STUDY

A Leader's Guide

Leading these Bible Studies is to be leading thinking about the development of change in two ways, either as a process of exploration, to see what other people advocate in order to change levels of understanding, or as a process of attitudinal change, to move from an exclusive or uncertain position, to one that is welcoming and affirming of the life and participation of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Christians among us. We see this as a radical but necessary processes that enables people to be informed and to make choices. It is radical because it gets to the very root of problems concerning who it is that comprises the people of God and how we each relate, one to another. It is necessary so that we may become one in Christ, undivided by issues of gender identity and sexuality. Just as the people of God in earlier times struggled with barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, social status and gender, similar barriers of distinction are constructed in our time, to limit church membership or to place barriers to participation. The studies will look at significant, biblical accounts of removing such barriers in ways that enabled the early, Christian community to be inclusive. They are examples for modern day disciples Jesus to follow, seeking to build unity and justice in Christ.

Why “Outside the City Gate?”

Gates in the city wall form a significant religious metaphor: outside the city gate is the place where outcasts and strangers stand waiting to be admitted inside the city wall. The city or the place within the wall and its gates being a double metaphor for acceptance and for the church. Gates are barriers that either shut people in or shut people out. They act to separate and to create a division. Gates provide a point of entry and imply a right of passage. It is the experience of many gay and lesbian Christians that they are forced into a place of denial outside of the church. The gate is shut on them, barring their participation as equals with their heterosexual brothers and sisters in Christ. Fortunately gates may be opened or passed through so that the barrier is removed, and that is the aim of this study: to show traditions of inclusivity from the Canon that put aside or overcome the restrictive practices that erect barriers of distinction. We do this lest gay and lesbian Christians continue to find themselves suffering “outside the gate”. In this is the shocking paradox that they are not alone in that experience, for Jesus stood in that place before them (Hebrews 13:12-13). You are invited to go to that place, outside the gate, as the place of solidarity with those who suffer.

Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured.
(Hebrews 13:12-13 NRSV)

This series of studies will indirectly look at what it means to suffer “outside the city gate” and to bear the marks of rejection. It will explore biblical traditions of inclusivity and contrast them with restrictive ones from the same Canon. It will invite the sacrificing of restrictive practices so that a greater good may be achieved, that we may be one in Christ.

Setting up the Study

Advertise and personally invite people to the studies. Plan ahead and allow time for consideration and commitment to the studies.

Establish the location for the study groups to meet as a warm and welcoming place.

- Model good hospitality.
- Have tea and coffee making facilities available and prepared.
- Set up an environment that is comfortable, relaxed and stimulating.
- Greet people by name and have Name Tags available.
- Arrange the room so that all people can see and hear each other and any aids used. Set the chairs in a circle or square and at tables if possible.

The Bible Studies

The series is planned for eight, two and a half hour sessions.

Part 1- *WITHIN MY WALLS:*

Exploring Inclusive Traditions in Isaiah 56: 4-8 and Matthew 19:12.

Part 2 - *THE LAW OR THE SPIRIT?*

Exploring Galatians 2: 16 And Acts 15:1-21; 21:25.

Part 3 - *A FAITH GREATER THAN ALL ISRAEL:*

An Exegesis of Matthew 8:5-13.

Part 4 - *LORD HAVE MERCY:*

Exploring Inclusive Traditions in Matthew 15:21-28.

Part 5 - *OUTSIDERS AND INSIDERS:*

Commentary on Parts 3 and 4 of this Study.

Part 6 - *PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH:*

Role Models for Inclusivity in Acts 8:27-39.

Part 7 - *OUTSIDE THE CITY GATE:*

Considering Spiritual Guidelines in Hebrews 13:12-16.

Part 8 - *MAKING CHOICES:*

A summary and guide to decision-making.

Part 1 introduces prophetic and early Christian traditions that put aside barriers of distinction in relation to Gentiles. The texts deal with issues of inclusion / exclusion and ask, “who makes up the people of God?” The Isaiah text is from the third part of the Book of Isaiah and preserves an inclusive covenant that was largely buried in Israel’s subsequent history and is still buried in regard to patterns of inclusivity in today’s church. It looks at eunuchs as sexual minorities as counterpart to gay and lesbian persons who risk being cut-off from the Church in our time through the application of purity codes.

Part 2 introduces questions of Gentile participation within the early Christian communities. The focus is on the new community of the Spirit overcoming barriers to inclusivity raised by strict application of the Law. The Galatians and Acts readings draw on decisions of the Council of Jerusalem 48 CE, the very first ecumenical council, that considered including the Gentiles within the church. At that council, Paul won his stripes as an “Apostle to the Gentiles” and James and Peter were leaders in opening pathways to a greater inclusivity.

Part 3 introduces the first of two examples from The Gospel of Matthew that have implications for Christian inclusivity. Exegesis of Matthew 8:5-13 uncovers same-sex nuances within the

relationship of the centurion and his serving boy. These were sensitive issues concerning sexuality in the first century and the story shows Jesus giving due focus to the faith of the centurion and to assumptions about participation within the reign of God. Jesus remains silent on issues of same-gender sexual relationships, yet the implications for today's church are profoundly focused in this story.

Part 4 shows barriers being put aside in the case of an “unclean” Gentile women (Matthew 15:21-28). Aspects of sexuality are again part of the story and of the relationships involved. Once again, Jesus is shown giving consideration to the faith acts involved and not to the incidental facts of sexuality.

Part 5 introduces the concept of applying hermeneutics and reviews Parts 3 to 4. Hermeneutics concerns questions relating to how we interpret the Scriptures. Four hermeneutic principles are identified in Matthew's approach to questions of “outsiders” and “insiders” and relate to what is means to be "insiders" within the kingdom of God.

Part 6 demonstrates the role of the Holy Spirit in putting aside barriers of distinction, for in this part we meet Philip on the road, as he encounters a most unlikely person contemplating life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. In the encounter we discover insights into the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the faithful, of radical inclusivity and of the way of discipleship guided by the Holy Spirit.

Part 7 considers joining Jesus in a *koinonia* of solidarity with those who suffer exclusion and condemnation. It presents the voice of advocacy for radical inclusivity in Christ, “outside the city gate”, and presents an invitation to join him in the place of solidarity with all those who are oppressed or rejected. The paradox is, that in joining Jesus in that place of solidarity, we remove all barriers to participation as we become united in faith with Him.

Part 8 provides a useful summary of the arguments presented and takes note of Matt. 13:27-30, that teaches a way in which all people of faith may move ahead together recognising a *koinonia* of difference but not separation, so that no one is lost. Choices are therefore invited, with alternative positions being to choose a fellowship of solidarity or a fellowship that lives with diversity.

Leading the Studies

The studies are designed to for adult learning, with assistance from a designated facilitator.

Establish the principle that leadership is a shared responsibility of the entire group such that all participants are partners in the discussion, activities and decision-making that is relevant to the life of the group. A designated group leader may facilitate group function.

- An effective participator will seek to make people comfortable with themselves and their opinions, encouraging respect for those of others.
- An effective participator will recognise and respect differences in learning style.
- An effective participator will seek to guide the group's activities, with caring concern for group process, cooperation and collaboration.
- An effective participator will recognise and respect differences in levels of emotional and spiritual commitment and establish trusting and mutually supportive relationships.
- An effective participator will not do all the work but the encourage others and the sharing of feelings, needs, insights, information, questions and affirmations.

Every participant is in charge of their own level of participation and is asked to respect that of other participants by encouraging all to contribute.

Participants will learn best when they can reflect or think through their responses in the context of a responsible, supportive group.

Adult learning is enhanced when the group is interactive, sympathetic and caring, recognising

- that people learn in different ways and at different rates;
- that relationships of trust, collaboration and confidentiality engender confidence and mutual respect.

Ensure that session includes prayer time or meditation.

Plan short breaks for midway through the sessions.

Invite each participant to read the study section prior to coming to the discussion group.

- Readers may choose to mark the margins of the commentary with simple symbols to show points of interest * agreement ✓ insight → or questions ? to discuss in groups.

Begin the sessions with a welcome and a prayer.

Invite people to share their responses to the reading of the section.

- Small groups will allow for greater participation.
- Try to see that all participants have an opportunity to speak if they wish.
- Useful opening discussions may focus on the points of interest, agreement, insight or questions, in turn.
- The questions at the end of each commentary may be used as focusing questions.

Encourage people to handle disagreements with respect.

Resources

It is best if one copy of the *Outside the City Gate : A Bible Study* is available per person.

Provide prayer resources, background notes and a reading list.

Other necessary resources include Bibles, pens and paper.

White boards and suitable pens, blackboards and chalk, and overhead projectors are recommended.

It is recommended that the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible be used. It is the English translation from which quotes are used in this study. The *Living Bible* and the “*Good News Bible*” are not recommended for study, as the text of each is a paraphrase of Scripture and not a direct translation.

Useful Books and Other Resources:

Horne, B., Lockyer, A., & Wickham, S., (eds) Singing while it is still dark... a gift book of prayers and meditations for members of the South Australian Synod 2003. A Publication of Friends of Unity, 2003.

A book of useful prayers and meditations written by glbt people and their families, friends and supporters. Creative, thoughtful and highly recommended.

Macquarrie, J., and Childress, J., (eds), *"A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics"* (London: SCM Press 1967, Westminster Press 1986)

It would be appropriate to have a copy of this book available for reading, as it has a useful section on homosexuality.

Robert Stringer, *Can the Church Listen?* A 51 minute video with Study Notes presented by Rev. Robert Stringer. Available from Uniting Justice Australia.

The video presents a series of interviews with gay and lesbian members of the Uniting Church, both ordained and lay persons, discussing issues relating to being gay and Christian. People speak of their faith and life experiences in frank and open ways, sharing thoughts about themselves and the Church. The video comes with Study Notes and is available from the social justice and responsibility units of the Uniting Church Synods. This is a recommended resource for extending the scope of *Outside the City Gate : A Bible Study*. The Assembly web site provides downloadable copies of the video transcript and the studies.

Pattenden, Rod, (ed.) *Coming Out Alive: Life Affirming Perspectives on Homosexuality, Justice and the Church*. (A Uniting Network Publication, Ensmore, NSW, 2000).

This booklet has an introduction by Justice Michael Kirby and presents stories of hope, compassionate knowledge and justice making. It is both an invitation to individuals and to the Church, to overcome hatred and misunderstanding, to celebrate the fullness of God's creativity and the richness of human diversity.

Michael Vasey, *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible*. (Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, London, 1995).

Vasey re-examines the biblical sources from an Evangelical perspective and challenges many of the myths and prejudices of that tradition, especially in relations to current trends in attitudes of exclusion and acceptance.

Heyward, Carter., *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*. (Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1989.)

Examines the theology, sociology and politics of right relation: re-imagining love and "goddling" in ways that are mutually empowering, relationally just and whole.

Mollencott, Virginia, *Sensuous Spirituality*. (Crossroads, New York, 1992.)

Mollencott presents the connection between sensuality and spirituality in ways that are self-affirming and move beyond body denial.

Pronk, Pim, trans. Vriend, John. *Against Nature? Types of Moral Argumentation Regarding Homosexuality*. (Eerdmanns, Grand Rapids, 1993.)

Questioning a singular, moral value-system in a pluralistic society, Pronk enters a critical dialogue with Christian ethicists, in terms of political and social morality.

Web Sites:

Uniting Network: <http://connect.to/unitingnetwork/>

Friends of Unity: <http://fou.uniting.com.au/>

Tehomot Publications: <http://au.geocities.com/wal4theo>

A MATTER OF TEXTUAL ORIENTATION.

It is clear that questions relating to sexuality and church participation continue to be debated strongly in the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA). The national Assembly of the UCA, its Standing Committee and other agencies have given considerable attention to issues of sexuality generally. The Assembly has ruled that all people of faith are “welcome to the Table of the Lord”, and that the criterion of sexuality “is not a barrier to ordination of itself”. Significant policies were adopted following the reception of the Assembly Task Group on Sexuality report, *Uniting Sexuality and Faith*.³⁹ However, there was much left undone and within Church practice there is widespread prejudice.

The Assembly has adopted adequate policies to protect and affirm the membership, participation and ministries of homosexual persons within the UCA. Considerable steps have been taken to prevent continuing harassment and vilification of members and their supporters. Codes of conduct for Ministers and councils of the Church have also been set in place. The 10th Assembly reinforced the status quo with the adoption of Resolution 84 (see Assembly minute 03.12.04) so that homosexuality is neither a barrier to membership nor a necessary factor to be considered in cases of candidature, ordination or placement. Cases are to be judged by Presbyteries on a case by case basis. The debate continues, with conservative evangelical elements within the Church expressing “weariness” over the process (and the topic) in an attempt to create further marginalisation for gay and lesbian Christians through innuendo, denial and moratoria on dialogue, ordination and placement.

Friends of Unity and *Uniting Network* (the national support group for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender concerns of people of the UCA) continue to be participators in the process of seeking continuing dialogue. While many persons share a fatigue of expectation, they recognize that “weariness” is a dubious theological concept that is based on a distortion of the sabbatical principle of rest - rest which comes once the work or journeying is complete. They expect the Church to act with courage and justice and to uphold gay and lesbian people in faith and love and to actively seek ways around the disunity. They live with revolutionary patience and in the hope that the Church will see a way forward in Christ to become a truly inclusive church. Through faith and a regard for God’s action in the hard places, they seek to walk with the Church in facing the issues that divide it.

There are a four, key issues publicly identified in this walk: namely, the ordination of homosexual persons, the place of homosexual persons in leadership positions, same-gender relationships and membership, inclusivity and participation in the fellowship of the church. These issues are the main points of focus of the conservative, evangelical right-wing of the Church, and represent an attempt to delimit fellowship and what it means to be Christian, in which “being Christian” equates to “being heterosexual” or appearing to be so. The specific texts examined within this study, challenge such delimiting views.

The constant denial and pressure being placed on all queer Christians, by some conservative, evangelical members of the Church, raises points of issue that go beyond questions of ordination and leadership. Foremost in importance are concerns regarding spiritual and psychological safety, and, in some cases, physical safety. The constant experience of isolation, harassment, discrimination and the denial of opportunities to serve means that most of our gay and lesbian members experience church life as marginalised and unsafe. Prior consideration needs to be given to questions of faith, inclusivity, justice, love and the quality of mercy in determining what it means to be Christian, so that all are welcome and may participate in safety.

Being Christian

As part of the new society of Jesus, the Body of Christ, Christians are held united through faith. Through our baptism we enter this new society as a new way of being in the world. It is our primary definition of who we are, through faith. We form a new community that re-images human identity as Children of God, so that our differences are transcended by our being in Christ. As our identity in Christ rises above our sexual identity, to divide Christians on the basis of their sexuality goes against the Spirit and the letter of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul taught:-

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:28)

Such is the grace of God in Christ that it does not deny our sexual body, for we are an embodied, incarnational community. It is in our selves that we bear the image of God. Our spirituality and our sexuality are integral to our life and being. We are held together by our commitment to Christ, and the love and regard for each other which we find through Him.

Yet this inclusivity is something many gay and lesbian Christians do not experience. At its best, the atmosphere created in the Church encourages a personal policy of concealment, in a “don’t tell, don’t ask” or a “lie to get by” approach. The confused state of official policies and practices in attempting to steer a path between conflicting view points adds to the climate of suspicion, denial and disunity. While we are ‘Uniting Church’ in name, the reality is one of disparate factions that often compete for endorsement and power, creating varying degrees of affirmation or denial of gay and lesbian participation. The current state of Church decisions largely reflects the endeavour of one faction, the Evangelical Members of the Uniting Church (EMU), to overturn more progressive and liberal decisions made by the Church. Where the Church speak of ethics of tolerance, social justice and inclusivity, the EMU faction and its fellow travelers speak of family values, biblical authority and moral decay. Questions of view point, interpretation and understanding lie at the heart of the conflict. How does one seek a way through differences in view point and interpretation?

The solution of the conservative, evangelical right-wing is to adhere firmly to the belief that homosexuality is inconsistent with “the” (their) biblical view of God’s Creation. They uncover meaning in terms of heterosexual constructs and the belief that homosexuality is a “chosen life-style.” This enables the belief that “homosexual persons” can be “converted” or changed to heterosexual persons through prayer or “a relationship with Christ.” People of this persuasion place the moral focus upon what people *do*. They speak of “the homosexual life-style”, “self-avowed practicing homosexuals”, “homosexual acts” and “coming out of homosexuality”, where what people *do* is the basic *textual orientation* underlying this instrumental approach.

The essential liberal persuasion can be summarised as one in which the morality of both homosexual and heterosexual relationships is assessed in terms of *agape* and *philia* love. Moral difference in what we *do* is seen in the will and not the body. The focus is on *intent*. The moral line is drawn between covenanted, mutual loving relationships and loveless, exploitative relationships. It is the liberal Christians who have sought after gaining respect and tolerance for their queer brothers and sisters. They have opened dialogue, challenged the notion of universal heterosexism and have introduced the notion of ‘tolerance’ and social justice into the debate. The plea for tolerance, of course, perpetuates the discrimination, in that tolerance is measured in terms of how far one moves (deviates) from the straight norm. The concept of tolerance both

notices and marks differences and then takes the moral higher ground in “accepting” those who are perceived as “other” or different.

Post-liberal movements, such as feminism, have demanded not tolerance but participation. Feminists have added social and theological emphasis to relational values and the concept of right relation. Respect, mutuality and reciprocity are values that interpret both action (what one does) and intent. People in other post-liberal movements, such as queer theorists, have drawn connections between gender and sexuality and have pointed out that gender is established through culture and enculturation. Thus gender, like sexuality, is something that we *express*.

In addition, gay and lesbian Christians speak of affirming “who they are.” The focus is on *identity* as persons and as Christians. In terms of spiritual identity, they speak with the same faith as other Christians. They speak of conversion experiences, the knowledge of the Holy Spirit active in their lives, and of the grace that comes through Jesus Christ. In recent years this has taken on the flavour of liberation theology for some who speak of upholding each other in love and in justice. With respect to personal identity, gay and lesbian Christians speak of “being born this way” and of “coming out” as a process of self discovery and, in some cases, as social responsibility. The focus on identity leads to talk of “pride” (in who “I am”), of “being myself” and of affirmation of “sexual orientation.”

The concept of sexual orientation or identity is the same concept that enables liberal Christians to “naturalise” homosexuality as an inherent part of the human condition, as a part of our given nature. It stands counter to conservative views that label homosexuality as “against nature”. It enables alternative practices to be visible, to “come out of the closet” and to seek liberation. It does not insist on changing anyone but seeks social justice to bring in the marginalised and outcasts ones. It says. “this is who we are: and we want to be treated justly.”

An evangelical response to the questions of identity has been the attempt to draw a distinction between *who you are* and *what you do*. Their answer is to “love the sinner and hate the sin.” This allows for some tolerance in perceiving homosexuality as a ‘given’ sexual orientation, while maintaining a focus of attention onto sexual action (what people *do*) and maintaining that normative, heterosexual, procreative sex is the God-given standard. However this only creates a further problem, for if God made some people queer through a given sexual orientation (perhaps through genetic, biological processes inherent in Creation) then to argue that God also ordained standards that preclude queer folk from responding to needs for intimacy in their God-given way or “orientation” (hence ‘natural’ way), diminishes the moral attributes of God. It makes God’s law seem manifestly bloody minded and arbitrary. G. E. Moore dismissed that form of argument long ago by pointing out the so-called “naturalistic fallacy” involved in arguing from nature by way of what *is* to what *ought be*. Arguing ethical precepts from empirical evidence it is fraught with problems, in that the description of human nature and what is ‘natural’ is itself a matter of view point and is not an independent basis from which moral judgments can be derived. Karl Barth, the prominent, early, twentieth century theologian, insisted that moral precepts cannot be known from nature (or natural theology) and that revelation in Scripture, as the Word of God, is the only source of moral and divine knowledge.

Barth’s view lends support for the evangelical position that claims to draw upon Scripture. However, they embrace a reductionism by focusing only on those aspects of Scripture that appear to support their viewpoint or allow their views to be read into the Scripture. Thus they focus on the OT Levitical purity codes and the NT reprobate lists, into which they read or project their notions of “sexual identity” and sexual actions. They ignore the sections of Canon that mitigate

strict application of Levitical Law, as for example, in Trito-Isaiah, Jonah, the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles. The Fall doctrine is also invoked as a way around the apparent arbitrary action of God in creating people “oriented” one way and to also prescribed Law against them. In this way “a homosexual orientation” is seen as originating with the Fall of human nature, and not with God. This argument seems to forget that the essential nature of the Fall applies to all humanity and not one part of it!

While use of the concepts, ‘homosexual identity’ and ‘sexual orientation’, may have enabled liberal Christians to counter the reductionist views of the conservatives, it may also have perpetuated a degree of isolation. It creates a false dichotomy of “straight” and “gay or queer”. It marginalises one group as a minority (or a majority!) defined in relation to the other. It perpetuates a dualism and systematises the notion that queers will always be against the norm. Post-modern “queer theory” suggest that queer-straight presents a false dichotomy, in that human sexuality is more diverse, flexible and less easily constrained in gender, sexual and cultural expression. Queer people are a diverse lot, including gay men, lesbians, bisexual, transgendered people and their supporters. Working in coalition for the sake of justice in Christ, they know that normative approaches fail the realities of human sexuality. They celebrate diversity: re-imagining what it means to love in Christ. Moving beyond divisions of sexual orientation, their *textual orientation* begins, abides and rests in Christ. In Him all people of faith are upheld in love through Grace. That resonates with what Paul argued when he wrote: *There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.* (Gal. 3:28) In Christ there is no other definitive identity, no false dichotomies operate and no barriers of distinction exist!

The way of Jesus, as seen in the love of the open Table, is the sufficient and acceptable measure of Grace. Love in Christ defines membership, participation and fellowship under Grace. This should be our guide in matters of inclusivity. By Grace we are justified through faith. That principle and that principle alone is the key to understanding Christian unity and participation. On that principle we stand with the evangelical members of the church, and in the reformed tradition of justification through faith, alone. Let us be truly of one body, of one fellowship and build each other up in faith, hope and love, textually oriented in Christ.

GLOSSARY

- catamite: < L. *catamitus*, a male sex slave; passive partner in a pederastic relationship between a Roman free man and a slave. The term probably is an alteration of the Gk. *Ganymedes*, the youth carried to Olympus by Zeus to be his “cup bearer”.
- CE & BCE: Abbreviations for **Common Era** and **Before the Common Era**. These are accepted terms that replace the usage of AD and BC in dating historical events.
- centurion: A Roman or Herodian military officer in charge of a hundred men.
- chiasmus: < Gk. *chiasmōs* < *chiazein*, cross-wise mark; in rhetoric, a construction that makes a cross-over of semantics or a contrasting parallelism of meaning in reverse order.
- Deuteronomic History: The history found in the Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings; the view of the Deuteronomic redactor.
- eschatology: The study of the “end-times”; of final things.
- eschatological: adj. pertaining to “the-end times”.
- gay: An adjective describing the homosexual condition or person, used by some homosexual men to describe themselves. It can also be an inclusive term denoting homosexuality or homosexual persons of any gender.
- Gentile: A non-Jewish person; the uncircumcised; a foreigner to Israel.
- glbt: An abbreviation for “gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered” people. Also written as ‘lgbt’.
- Halakah*: Hebrew term for “the way” of a notable Rabbi or Prophet; *the way* implicit in a body of teaching. The *halakah* of Jesus was called, The Way.
- heterosexual: An adjective describing a person who is attracted to persons of the opposite sex.
- heterosexism: The belief that heterosexual relationships are normative and superior, and that the only appropriate sexual expression is within heterosexual relationships of marriage.
- Holiness Codes: The legal codes forming Leviticus 17-26, a Priestly Law Code.
- homophobia: The irrational fear of homosexuality and homosexual people, including fear of one's own attraction to those of the same sex. Homophobia leads to prejudice and discrimination against homosexual persons, sometimes involving violence, vilification and harassment.

- homosexual: An adjective describing a person who is attracted to persons of the same sex. It can be used to describe same sex-acts, but such usage is regarded as inappropriate. It is inappropriate to use the word as a noun.
- Jerusalem Council, The: Conference held in 49 CE, between delegates from the churches of Antioch and of Jerusalem to settle a dispute over whether circumcision for Gentile converts was required. Paul and Barnabas were among the representatives from Antioch and James and Peter were among the Jerusalem delegates. This was the first ecumenical conference.
- Judea: An alternative spelling of 'Judaea' (NRSV).
- kadesh*: Heb. fem. n., pl., 'holy ones' or 'consecrated ones'; persons consecrated to the service of the deity; trans. as 'temple prostitutes'. The sexual nature of their function is conjecture based on textual parallelism with *zona*, 'prostitutes'. See Gen. 38:21-22; Deut. 23:19; Hos. 4:14.
- kadesh*: Heb. masc. n., 'holy one', pl. *kadeshim*; persons of ambiguous function in temple worship. According to the Deuteronomistic History, *kadeshim* were targeted by successive religious reforms of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:24), Asa (1 Kings 15:12), Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:47) and Josiah (2 Kings 23:7). In many commentaries '*kadesh / kadeshim*' are assumed to be male prostitutes and the words are often mistranslated as 'sodomite' / 'sodomites' and so canonise prejudice towards homosexual men. Martti Nissinen, in *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, pp. 37- 44, provides a recent analysis of the term and concludes that its precise meaning is lost and cites opinion that the *kadesh / kadeshim* may be a literary creation peculiar to Deuteronomistic polemics against idolatry.
- koinonia* Gk., fellowship, communion, in close relationship; used of the fellowship of the faithful; the Christian fellowship.
- lesbian: A word used by homosexual women to describe themselves. The term is also used by some feminists as a coalitional and transgressive term, with gender and not connotations of sexuality.
- Levitical Law: The Law as outlined in the Book of Leviticus; the Law of Moses (See *Torah*).
- Law, The Strictly, the *Torah*, the Law taught in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible; in practice it includes Levitical Law and oral traditions. The Decalogue.
- law: primarily the directive or guide to human actions; specifically the necessary, directive judgment of lawmakers; secondarily the order perceived in natural phenomena, as in the laws of science. See Law, s.v., John Macquarrie & James Childress, *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, p.342ff., for a discussion of law, Law, and Law and Gospel.
- nomism: < Gk. *nomos*, law; n., adhering to strict religious or moral law or perceived order;

nomistic, adj. pertaining to a moral emphasis on law.

patriarchy: Literally, 'rule of the fathers'; the social system where the male person is dominant and seen as superior and holds the power to determine the structure and ordering of society, politically, economically and culturally.

pederastic: adjective, relating to pederasty.

pederasty: An expression of sexuality and relationships practiced in ancient Graeco-Roman times, in which an adult male (the *erastes*, the 'lover') befriended a youth (the *eromenos*, the 'beloved', or *paidika*, 'youth' or *pais*, 'boy') in a same-sex relationship. Plato advocated such relationships as part of the educative process of youths. Such relationships were a normal part of the life among upper and military class Greeks. Pederasty among Romans differed in that slaves usually formed the passive partner and not free men. The Stoics of the time of Paul were critical of persons engaging in pederasty because of the pleasure involved. Some Jewish authorities rejected the practice as an helenisation of their culture. For a discussion of pederasty, see Nissinen, M., *Homoeroticism in the Roman World: an Historical Perspective*. (Fortress press, Minneapolis, 1998).

Pentateuch [> Gk., 'five-volumed'] the first five books of the Old Testament.

praxis: Praxis is the continual interchange of theory and action in every moment of our lives. Christian praxis functions in the realms of experience, action and reflection and theologically grounds what we think and what we do.

Q Source: a collection of non-extant teachings and sayings of Jesus that predate the Gospels and forms source material for them; probably dating from about 50CE. The Q is one of the sources identified in Source Criticism.

queer: This adjective is used as a coalitional term for lesbian women, gay men, bisexual, transgendered sexual minorities, and is inclusive of heterosexual activists who have appropriated it for themselves. It designates socio-political dissidence, transgression, and coalitional diversity.

Restoration: The historical period after 538 BCE, when former Exiles and their supporters re-established a Davidic kingdom in Jerusalem under Zerubbabel. Rebuilding the temple and the temple cult began during this time.

Septuagint: The Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures ("Old Testament"); translation began with the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Jewish Scriptures, prior to 200BCE, and other books were added between 200 and 100 BCE. Known as the LXX, in reference to the tradition that seventy scholars of Israel made the translation of the Pentateuch from the Hebrew into Greek, in Alexandria. The LXX was in use in Paul's time, and by the early church. It remains the official version of the Greek Orthodox Church today.

sexuality (n.) The experience of being in the world as embodied selves, male and female.

tares: Gk lit. *dzizania*; a type of darnel, a grass that resembles wheat but has small, hard,

black grains; present as undesirable grains in a wheat harvest.

Torah: [*< Hebrew, torah, an instruction.*] The Mosaic books of the Law (the Pentateuch: the first five books of the Bible); the Law itself.

Other definitions

The Basis of Union is the formative, foundational document of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Friends of Unity is a support group for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons and their families and friends within the Uniting Church in Australia. It presents a website at <http://fou.uniting.com.au/>

Resolution 84 (also known as “proposal 84”) refers to a decision of the Tenth Assembly, 2003, of the Uniting Church in Australia, as recorded in Assembly minute 03.12.04 and amended by the Assembly Standing Committee minute 03.96. It stated the position of the Church in relation to faith, sexuality and membership, and recognised that current Church polity and policy placed no barriers of distinction on membership and participation of homosexual persons in the Church (including ordained ministries). It called for “living with diversity” on issues of Biblical interpretation and understanding of ethical opinions relating to sexuality.

R84 speaks in terms of grace and faith and of Christ the justifier, and of the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture guided by the Protestant principle of justification through faith, alone. No wedge is driven between the person and sexual practice. Presbyteries still have to consider every applicant and placement on an individual basis, and must take into account a wide variety of factors including how a person expresses their sexuality. This decision is wholly consistent with previous determinations, dating from 1982, namely those of the Assembly Standing Committee recorded as minutes 82.12, 87.46 and 94.78.3 and later ratified by the 8th Assembly, in resolution 97.31.15(e).

The remaining contentious issues are now, as they were immediately following the 8th Assembly, those that relate to faith, sexuality and same sex relationships. Gone is confusion about what the Church says about membership, for now it is reiterated clearly that homosexual members have the same status, function and responsibilities as heterosexual members. Sexuality is named as God's good gift; judgmentalism stands rejected; sexual ethics are spoken of in terms of grace, joys and responsibilities, and human relationships that are not exploitative or demeaning. There is a commitment to diversity in human relationships, with different Biblical, theological, ethical and cultural responses to those relationships being acknowledged. It remains now for the Church to find a way of celebrating all human relationships without subsuming them all to a presumed heterosexuality, so that the theological diversity that admits people into fellowship through faith, also expresses itself in diverse forms of celebration. Gay and lesbian members of the Church need to have their relationships celebrated in love, equally as their heterosexual brothers and sisters enjoy. Some conservative, evangelical persons and groups within the UCA challenge R84 and seek to change it.

June, 2004.

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NOTES

¹ This decision is found in Assembly minute 03.12.04, as modified by ASC minute 03.96, and is commonly known as “resolution 84”. The proposal that was presented for adoption at the Assembly was named “proposal 84”.

Details of the decision and commentaries on it may be found at <http://fou.uniting.com.au/>

² Jeffrey S. Siker, “Gentile Wheat and Homosexual Christians: New Testament Directions for the Heterosexual Church” in Robert L. Brawley (ed.), *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*. (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 1996) p.150. See this article for an expansion of the discussion and position taken here.

³ Meaning those born outside of a recognised marriage; illegitimate progeny; bastards- the harsher term conveys some of the social stigma attached to such status in this biblical context.

⁴ Strong's Greek and Hebrew Lexicon also gives the meaning 'covenanted', as from 'to cut-off a covenant', thus the Isaiah 56 usage relates to covenanting as well as to the nuances of castration and being 'cut-off' from social and family life. In Ancient Near Eastern usage one 'cuts' a covenant.

⁵ Nancy Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 123.

⁶ Other examples are found in The Book of Esther (Hegai, Shaashgaz) and The Book of Daniel (Ashpenaz,).

⁷ NRSV footnote, 38;1-13, p.1020.

⁸ Gk. *basileia*, nf; reign, dominion, rule, royal power; usually translated 'kingdom' and that custom is followed in the NRSV. In the NT the usage of *basileia* is not to be confused with an actual kingdom but rather the right to rule. Strong's Gk and Heb. Lexicon, s.v. "kingdom".

⁹ There is no ascetic ideal of priestly celibacy and sexual abstinence here, for that is a later development.

¹⁰ G. J. Cumming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students*. (Grove Books, Bramcote, Nottingham, U.K., 1987.) as quoted by Nancy Wilson, op. cit., p.290, note 6.

¹¹ Nancy Wilson, op. cit. pp.120 - 132; Wilson quotes a French source, B. Botte, "A Propos de la tradition apostolique," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 33 (1966) p. 37, note 7, who quotes Hippolytus as including homosexual men under the term 'eunuch'. Also see Nancy Wilson, *ibid.* p.290, note 6. Also, Tom Horner, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times*. (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1978) pp. 101, 124, says that 'eunuchs' may have included gay men.

¹² In Isa. 56:5, the word rendered as "monument" in the NRSV is in Hebrew, *yod*, meaning 'hand'; *yod* can also be translated as 'power', or 'place' and is a euphemism for 'penis'.

¹³ The reference here is to the dwelling place of God, the temple upon the holy mountain.

¹⁴ The Ten Commandments (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4;13; 10:4).

¹⁵ Heb. masc. pl. *kadeshim*, sg., *kadesh*; lit. 'sacred', 'holy'; perhaps referring to sacred, pagan, temple prostitutes. See Deut.23:17-18. Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, pp. 37- 44, provides a recent analysis of the term and concludes that its precise meaning is lost and cites opinion that the *kadesh / kadeshim* may be a literary creation peculiar to Deuteronomistic polemics against idolatry.

¹⁶ Nissinen, Martti, *ibid.* pp. 39-43; also Goss, Robert. *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*. (HarperCollins, New York, 1993.) p.92.

¹⁷ Nissinen, Martti, op. cit., p. 40, who cites Bird. P. A., “The End of the Male Cult Prostitute: A Literary-Historical and Sociological Analysis of Hebrew *qades-qadesim*” in Emerson. J. A., ed., *Congress Volume Cambridge 1995*. Supplements to *Vens Testamentum* 66. Leiden, New York and Cologne, 1997, pp. 37-80.

¹⁸ Boswell, John, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1980) pp.98-99. See also Nissinen, Martti, op. cit. p. 40.

¹⁹ Jeffrey S. Siker, in Robert L. Brawley (ed.), op. cit. p.150. See this article for an expansion of the discussion and position taken here.

²⁰ Macquarrie & Childress, *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, p. 345. In essence, this sentence from Macquarrie and Childress defines a contextual ethic.

²¹ Ephesians 2:1-10.

²² Luz, *ibid.* p82 - 83; Gundry, *Matthew*, p. 141; Kloppenborg, *Q Parallels*, p.48.

²³ The gender specific terms, *son*, *boy*, are used here, instead of the gender inclusive terms that are used in the NRSV, because the gender specific term, *son*, is relevant to the exegesis and development of this commentary. Note: Kloppenborg, in *Q Parallels*, pp.48-51, also renders *pais*, as *son* and as *servant boy*, and assigns it to Q. The rendering 'slave' has removed the 'servant boy' nuance from English versions.

²⁴ Luz, *Matthew 1-7*. p.64.

²⁵ As for example, in Appian, *Iber.* 27 §107, with reference to Scipio's groom; Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 4, 5, where it carries a pederastic nuance, *Moralia* 65c; and Josephus, *Antiquities* 18, 192, *Vitae* 223.

²⁶ Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, p.45.

²⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 226-227.

²⁸ Wainwright, *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 230. The only other similar phrase relates to Jesus' silence before Pilate!

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 225.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 245.

³² *Koinonia*: Gk. 'fellowship', 'brotherhood', 'close relationship'; 'brothers and sisters in Christ' being a familial expression of *koinonia*.

³³ Nancy Wilson, op. cit., p.130.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ The imagery is that of the Day of Atonement. See Lev. 4:21; 16:21-28 and Heb. 13:11.

³⁶ Athol Gill, *Fringes of Freedom: Following Jesus, Living Together, Working for Justice*. (Lancer, Homebush West, NSW, 1990) pp. 30f.

³⁷ For a discussion of the application of the Mosaic Code to homosexuality, see Nissinen, M., op. cit., pp. 37- 36; 56.

³⁸ Jeffrey S. Siker, in Robert L. Brawley (ed.), op. cit. pp. 149 -150.

³⁹ *Uniting Sexuality and faith*: Assembly Task Group on Sexuality. Uniting Church in Australia, Melbourne, 1997. Received at the 8th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, 1997.