

# Not in my Name!

*Dr Busangokwakhe Dlamini<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

Two important events have taken place in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal relating to the lives of the LGBTIQ. One was a conference on **homophobia and the churches in Africa** held in Pietermaritzburg in April 2016 whose sub-theme was **Churches don't hate**. The second event has been **The 21st International AIDS Conference** held in Durban in the month of July 2016. The significance of the second one in the lives of the LGBTIQ was the emphasis that they do fall among the hard hit population groups that have been left behind and almost forgotten along the journey of eliminating the pandemic. This paper probes into the contribution of religion in this, leaving behind and near-forgetting of the LGBTIQ. It will seek to achieve this by interrogating what transpired at the workshops run by Siyakhana – Ecumenical Community of the Paraclete in June last year. The workshops sought to dialogue with, and engage community on LGBTI and human rights, on theologies of human sexuality, and on Bible studies and theology. This is in line with the focus area number two in the Constitution of Siyakhana – Ecumenical Community of the Paraclete, which is **Community Education**. It was thus in meeting this mandate that the organisation sought to conduct these dialogues and workshops, to educate the public about violence directed at LGBTIQ communities. So, these were held in June, known as the youth month. These workshops are also known as community dialogues on sexuality. We managed to run just three. The first was meant to address the question of LGBTIQ and human rights.

## LGBTIQ and human rights

The workshop was opened with a reading from the Bible, the twelfth chapter of the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians. In that reading, the church is understood and portrayed by Paul to be the body of Christ. Christ is presented as a corporate figure with many diverse members. Through baptism in the one Spirit Christians have become one, without social distinctions. Individual members in this corporate body have their own proper place and functions which are not interchangeable with others. Just as the different members of the body are interdependent and need each other, so also do Christians. That same reading speaks of gifts, and stipulates that nobody is left without gifts of God, and that everybody receives their own given charism, “for the benefit and general good of the community” (v.7) and that the relative value of the various gifts is to be estimated by their usefulness to the church.

Nobody picked on any of the elements presented in the reading during the discussion. One prominent member dominated the discussion and become almost the co-facilitator, coming out with own readings that he deemed to be stipulating clearly that we should not even be talking about such matters as Christians, since such people - the Queer people - are already condemned and do not belong to the body of Christ.

An attempt was made to round off the discussion and invite concrete suggestions to the way forward. The same prominent member still wanted to preach about repentance and salvation, not taking any of the points presented in the reading into account. Incidentally, the prominent member was requested to close in prayer. He closed the prayer with the words “in Jesus’ name.”

It is in Jesus’ name that some Christian leaders perceive others to be of not worth much consideration. Many, in the workshops conducted in Sankontshe, had an opinion that it is proper to speak of LGBTI

---

<sup>1</sup> Siyakhana – Ecumenical Community of the Paraclete

rights in political discussions, but not in church, as Christians. The name of Jesus, and the discussion of queer people as having a share in human rights, just do not come together.

### **Theologies of human sexuality**

Theologies of human sexuality was the topic for the second workshop.

The workshop was opened with a reading from the Bible, the fifteenth chapter of the first letter of Paul to the Romans. In that reading, members of the Christian community are mainly urged to be accepting of one another. The seventh verse is particularly explicit in stating this. Participants, however felt that all the preceding verses need to be read, so as to establish context. And this was done.

The purpose of the reading was to prepare participants for the differing views and voices in theology regarding human sexuality. The topic of homophobia which had been introduced by the facilitator in the previous, first workshop, was taken up and continued. The facilitator, however, could not methodically present the input prepared. There was already discussion, as if the participants knew where the facilitator was heading to. This, in fact, meant that the facilitator did not need to invite the participants to start a discussion, nor were they discussing the reading, at the least. No, they had started their own discussion. Even the establishment of context for the stated reading did not help. Nobody picked on any of the points presented in the reading. The same prominent member, again, dominated the discussion and become almost the co-facilitator, dwelling on the first chapter of the Romans, which he deemed to be stipulating clearly that we should not even be talking about such people as Christians, since they are already condemned and deserve no acceptance in the Christian community. Yet, initially, the acceptance reading was not meant to be advocacy for the LGBTI. It was meant to be introducing divergent views on theology regarding human sexuality, and that there would be need to hear them properly in order for dialogue to take place. We ended up discussing the acceptance of gays, and I mean, not lesbians or any other queers, but just men. The discussion again shifted to focus on culture, customs and mores of the society around, which do not permit love relationships between two men, let alone the Christian community which should know what an abomination this is in the sight of God. No text was used in discussing this abomination.

People had been slowly dribbling in during the discussion. One tavern owner came in. His voice had to be heard too. He picked on the abomination, without using any text. His abomination, however, was on when one begins to imagine what two men can do together in bed. He did not seem to think they could forge relationships that are beneficial and healthy for themselves and for community. Their union is perceived as restricted to sexual activities in bed. The tavern owner accused the facilitator of not having the interest of the community at heart by bringing about such discussion. In fact, he explicitly stated that the intention is to destroy the community. He did not stop to think that running a tavern could be an abomination and a destruction. Dialoguing about human sexuality is deemed more destructive than selling alcohol to old and young indiscriminately.

Discussion was interrupted by lunch at 13h00. We went back at 14h00. Not much was achieved in the discussion after lunch. It was the same wrangling that had marked the session before lunch. We closed with prayer at 15h00. Participants again requested the prominent member to close in prayer. He ended his prayer with the words "in Jesus' name."

It is in Jesus' name that divergent views on theology regarding human sexuality cannot be allowed space to be heard. It is in Jesus' name that there would be no need to hear properly other voices in order for dialogue to take place. It is in Jesus' name that gay clergy was to be ordered to step down and leave the pulpit.

### **Bible Studies and Theology**

The topic for the third workshop was **Bible Studies and Theology**. The objective was to **develop theologies of care, towards a model of a caring community**.

The workshop was opened with a reading from the Bible, the seventh chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. The following reflection was then offered by the facilitator: The reading is in two parts: the first is verses 1-12, and the second is verses 13-29. In the whole of that reading, members of the Christian community are mainly urged to demonstrate their accepting of one another by not judging the other. Verses 1-5 are particularly explicit in stating this. By commanding his disciples not to judge, Jesus is not asking them to suspend their faculty of discernment. He is concerned with how their judgement may be exercised in relation to the judgement of God. In this readings he warns against hypocrisy. The hypocrite is an actor who wears the mask which depicts the role they are playing. They are not real. A hypocrite acts a role in life (cf. Mt. 23:25, 27; Lk. 11:39-40). Only an ethic which reaches to what is within - heart and mind – is the fit standard of the kingdom (cf. Mt. 5:20; Lk. 16:15). The greatest delusion is thinking that one can solve the moral problems of life by creating a righteous exterior. This type of person is contemptuously referred to as dog and swine in verse 6. In verse 12 is the 'Golden Rule,' intended to dispel the hypocrisy and govern genuine interactions among the disciples. Following the golden rule will bring the perspective of the merciful Father. In the OT this 'golden rule' was expressed negatively: not to do to others what one would not want done to oneself. By putting it positively, Jesus makes it more demanding for his followers. In the second part, Jesus urges his disciples to be on guard against false prophets who will distort his message. The core, and the key tenet of this message is love. This distortion is easily demonstrated by words like 'love the sinner, hate sin' which are not authenticated by deeds of charity towards queer people. Jesus alludes to the 'narrow gate' saying. The allusion is to the search for a city-gate where no tax collectors would be waiting to exact their tolls. There is escape in the narrow gate – no time wasted on trivialities, and more time for deeds, for doing the will of the father, in verse 21. This is in line with an IsiZulu saying, *Wande ngomlomo okwesiqabetho* = with a wide mouth like a basket of some sort. This refers to a person who is good in words, but lacking in deeds. Deeds, too, must be a testimony and witness to the commitment to Jesus, not just magic religiosity of the use of the name of Jesus while practising hatred towards some of the children of God. 'Not in my name,' Jesus seems to be saying. In his name, however, he urges his followers to be builders of a stable community not founded on words only but supported with poles well set in works of charity and love towards others. The reading ends with urging followers of Jesus not to act, behave, and do like power-hungry fools who think they can build their success by trampling upon others, instead of placing hope and trust in God.

'**Not in my name,**' Jesus seems to be saying.

The topic of homophobia which had been introduced by the facilitator in the previous workshops, was taken up and continued, without much reference to the reading and the reflection offered above. The purpose of the reading was to prepare participants in some form of exegesis. To a degree, participants seemed to be receptive of the facilitator's input. The infamous prominent member was not present in this workshop. There was less resistance in this workshop than the two previous ones, even though we did not delve much into exegesis. The level of education of the participants did not make this very easy.

Many of the participants in these workshop have not achieved anything beyond grade 10, and yet they are leaders in their respective churches. They lay claim to the words of Paul, “by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15:10a), even though their claim does not include the rest of that verse, nor does it seem to bear the context of the entire chapter in mind. A close look at the chapter points to the contrary.

Paul opens the chapter by reminding the Corinthian Church of the gospel he preached to them. The foundation, centre and apex of the dynamic power of that gospel is the explicit declaration: In Jesus Christ who was born, died, and rose again from the dead salvation is offered to everyone as the gift of the grace and mercy of God (cf. Eph. 2:8). In the rest of verse 10 Paul states that the grace and mercy he has received has not been ineffective, for he has toiled harder for this salvation offered to everyone, in comparison to the others.

Verses 20 – 23 of the fifteenth chapter of the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians speak of Christ as the “first fruits” of those who have fallen asleep. This is one of the passages/phrases that have inspired the African Christology where Christ is seen as the proto-Ancestor. Among the ancestors he is the first who arose and who can now give life to all; he is the new Adam, the real ancestor and source of life to all ethnicities and nations. Even if he died a violent death at a young age, was not married, was childless, he is the one who opened the eyes of the blind, cured the sick and gives his disciples life in full (Lk. 7:22).

Paul positively develops what the resurrection of Christ means for all Christians – the building of the kingdom. When the building of the kingdom is complete, when all the enemies of Christ are overcome, then he will hand his kingdom to the Father. The everlasting kingdom of God will then begin (v.28).

Halfway to the end of the chapter, Paul invites Christians to keep their eyes fixed on heaven where true life is. In verse 34 Paul offers a challenge to sober thinking, a command to holiness, and a plea to recognise false teaching. Paul is warning the Corinthians about the abysmal ignorance on the part of those who have infiltrated their church and are upsetting their faith. He also invites them to work, to commit themselves to a role in this world, in the certainty that all the good they perform and the love they spread will not be lost. The crucified and risen Jesus is presented as the image of Christian faith. The way of life of Christians is distinct from that of their contemporaries so that cultural beliefs, customs and mores of the society around should not be allowed to hinder the spreading of that love.

In the workshops the participants also called for the stepping down of all gay clergy from the pulpit. Yet this seems to be contrary to the way of life of Christians. The way of life of Christians, as already suggested above, is distinguished by the Golden Rule: “So whatever you wish that people do to you, do so to them.” Or “Do to others whatever you would have them do to you” (Lk. 6:31 and Mt. 7:12). This means what is hateful and hurtful to you, do not do to anyone else. The Golden Rule commands us to do for others the good that we wish for ourselves, quite apart from the behaviour that we expect or experience from them. Following the Golden Rule brings the perspective of the merciful Father to a world marked by the principle of retaliation. Luke, in particular, writes the ‘Gospel of Mercy’ or the ‘Gospel of Great Pardons.’ Jesus’ disciples will not condemn or judge, but give and forgive. Even the balanced justice of only “measure for measure” is exceeded by the image of overflowing generosity. Those who lack in this generosity, therefore cannot, rightfully, claim to be doing anything in the name of Jesus.

In the Old Testament this ‘golden rule’ was expressed negatively: not to do to others what one would not want done to oneself. By putting it positively Jesus makes it more demanding for his followers. Queer people have positively captured this demand in the slogan: “Make love, not war.”

Yet fierce war is declared upon them. And the war is “in Jesus’ name.” His own deeds, and teachings, however, do not seem to lend support to this type of war fought in his name. He points his followers to a different type of war.

### **A war for justice and truth**

The type of war that Jesus points his followers to is also alluded to in the Old Testament. There are some Old Testament texts which caution against harming the neighbour. Psalm 15 is clear in this:

Lord, who shall dwell / live on your holy mountain?

He who walks without fault;

He who acts with justice

And speaks the truth from his heart;

He who does not slander with his tongue, and does no evil to his friend, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbour

He who does no wrong to his brother,

Who casts no discredit / slur on his neighbour ...”

The Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary offers various definitions for justice. Of interest in this context is the very first offer, which refers to “fairness in the way people are dealt with.”

Slander is defined by the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary as “to damage someone’s reputation by making a false spoken statement about them.”

Slur is defined by the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary as “a remark that criticizes someone which is likely to have a harmful effect on their reputation.”

There is clearly no fairness in the manner queer people are dealt with. There is a lot of untruth circulated about queer individuals. There is a lot of slandering of queer people. They are wronged and robbed almost daily. They are actually not considered to have any reputation, let alone a thought about what harm may be caused to it.

There are numerous text in the Bible that capture the pain akin to that experienced by queer people:

Psalm 41 is one:

Happy those concerned for the lowly and the poor / happy the man who cares for the poor and the weak ...

My enemies say the worst of me / say of me in malice: “When will he die and his name perish? / When will that one die and be forgotten?” ...

And when one comes to see me, he utters empty words, while his heart gathers mischief / They visit me, their hearts full of spite / their hearts store up malice, they leave and spread their vicious lies

All who hate me / my foes all whisper against me; they imagine the worst about me

Even my bosom friend / closest and most trusted friend / friend who had my trust, who shared my table, has scorned me / has rebelled against me / has lifted / raised his heel against me.

Proverbs 3:27-34 is clear in cautioning against inflicting such pain:

“Do not plot harm against your neighbour  
as he lives unsuspecting next door.  
Do not pick a groundless quarrel with a man  
who has done you no harm.  
Do not emulate a man of violence,  
never model your conduct on his;  
for the wilful wrong-doer is abhorrent to the Lord,  
who confides only in honest men.”

Many remember that ‘lying with a man as with a woman’ is abhorrent to the Lord. Few, however, would recall that ‘wilful wrong-doing’ to the neighbour is abhorrent to the Lord. Jesus concerned himself with the latter.

Jesus was concerned with the wrongs done to others. When different schools of scribes were squabbling about which was the greatest commandment of the Law, Jesus affirmed (Mk. 12:29-31) that the first was to love God, and the second to love our neighbour. He added that there was no greater commandment than these two. He himself taught, “Love one another. As I have loved you, so also you should love one another. By this love you have for one another, all will know that you are my disciples” (Jn. 13:34-35). He further emphasises this law as the very life of God in chapter 15, when saying, “This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you” (Jn. 15:12). This love refers to what is actually done to show it. It is not enough to say, “Lord, Lord,” the will of the Father must be done (Mat. 7:21), and humans will be judged on what they have done or neglected to do to their neighbour (Mat. 25).

Who is My Neighbour?

While it can be said that ‘fate’ determines whom one comes into contact with, Christians in South Africa often go further and maintain that our neighbour is the person whom we accidentally meet, De Fleuriot (1981) asserts. And yet all too often, one finds that such an assertion merely disguised our choice of neighbour, a choice which is made in accordance with our taste, culture, and socio-economic background. An example of this selection process is the archaic and now defunct, Group Areas Act which has seen to it that our neighbours have the same skin-colour and the same cultural background as we. Under these conditions, to love one’s neighbour is hardly a challenge. Actually the Gospel shows a different picture. When asked, “Who is my neighbour?” Jesus illustrated his reply with a story in which the neighbour was a despised stranger, who had been robbed, stripped naked and beaten (Lk. 10:29-37). Three people came across this man by accident, a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan. But only the Samaritan chose this victimised man as a neighbour. In the same way we are called in to choose our neighbour. But our choice must be that of the Gospel.

My Neighbour has Aspirations and Needs

God has put in the heart of humans aspirations and needs. Humans feel the need to feed themselves, clothe themselves, find shelter, to rejoice, relax, to communicate, and the aspire to better themselves and their life styles. In mysterious wisdom, God distributed talents unevenly so that humans should help their fellow humans to fulfil mutual needs and aspirations.

In this endeavour, two goals are sought: human's needs must be fulfilled and the human race must be linked together. In God's plan the best in humans is brought about as each grows in unselfish love for one's neighbour. This is made obvious in time of calamity, but the reality is much the same whenever Christians help their fellow humans.

### My Neighbour is Important

Like myself, my neighbour is a human being created by God and redeemed by Jesus Christ. In the eyes of God my neighbour is not important he is rich, powerful, learned, good looking, or because he is a politician, an ominous policeman or a great leader. Whether he is black, white, yellow, Catholic, dirty or virtuous does not matter. My neighbour is important because he or she is Son or Daughter of God.

Therefore, this odd looking teenage black knocking on my door looking for work is a Son of God... This arrogant white, protected by his official desk, is a Son of God... This tramp begging for food... all Sons and Daughters of God, belonging to one family with one Father.

### My Neighbour has Rights

My neighbour has a right to be fully human. This is what he is called to be by God who wants people to be perfect (Mat. 5:48). Thus humans have a right to find shelter, a right to assistance in time of sickness, accident and old age. These, and a few more, are fundamental rights. Nobody, neither Church nor State, has the power to alienate any of these rights. When my neighbour's rights are alienated, an injustice is committed. Many, in the workshops conducted in Sankontshe, had an opinion that it is proper to speak of LGBTI rights in political discussions, but not in church, as Christians.

### Christian vs Injustice

A Christian cannot ignore injustice, nor can he remain indifferent and pass the situation by, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Should he do so, argues De Fluieriot, (1981), he renounces his standing as a follower of Christ. On judgement-day, he will risk eternal punishment because he neglected to help the least among the children of God. This, therefore, is a clear renunciation of standing as a follower of Christ, being involved in same-sex relationship is not.

This need to fight for justice has been emphasised by most Christian Churches. The Catholic Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome in 1971 proclaimed that –

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world, appears to us as an essential dimension in the preaching of the Gospel. Or, in other words, an essential dimension of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation ... The Church firmly believes that the promotion of human rights is a requirement of the Gospel and as such must occupy a special position in its ministry (Justice in the World, 6).

### To Fight Injustice – A Christian Challenge

Injustice is brought about when some people ignore the rights of others. It is brought by greed, by selfishness of individuals, of classes. As Christians, we are all challenged by these injustices. The call now is to fight the injustices that we have created. This needs that we open our eyes and hearts to the sufferings of others. Those on the receiving end of injustice have a duty to organise themselves to eradicate its causes. None is called by God to suffer injustice. We are rather called by Jesus to "hunger and thirst for justice" and we shall then be satisfied (Mat. 5:6).

All Christians are called by Christ to work for justice and truth. And all have a duty to answer that call. The same is a call to compassion.

## **A call to compassion**

One remarkable day a student came to my office, as lecturer in the University of KwaZulu-Natal. It was a male student. In the course of the discussion I happened to say something about 'compassion.' At the mention of the word this young man stared at me, and subsequently remarked, "I never knew that men can be compassionate. In the township where I come from, a man is supposed to demonstrate manhood by uncaring and toughness. Now you talk to me about compassion. Is it for males as well?"

There was not much time to give the student a well-reasoned answer. It was a bit of a shock to hear him say that. Upon reflection, however, I realised what could have been of much assistance to the young man. In the Bible there is just so much a depiction of God as male. The same male God is equally depicted as compassionate, particularly in the Old Testament patriarchal system:

Merciful and compassionate is the Lord, your God (2 Chr. 30:9).

You shall not retain anything that is doomed, that the blazing wrath of the Lord may die down and he may show you mercy / From what is thus banned you may keep nothing back, so that Yahweh may turn from the ferocity of his anger and show you mercy, and have pity on you / None of the devoted things shall cleave to your hand; that the Lord may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and show you mercy, and have compassion on you (Deut. 13:17/18).

Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; he refrained his anger often, and did not stir up all his wrath / Compassionately, however, he forgave their guilt instead of killing them, repeatedly repressing his anger, instead of rousing his full wrath / But God is merciful and forgave their sin; he did not utterly destroy them. Time and again he turned back his anger, unwilling to unleash all his rage (Ps. 78:38).

You, Lord, are a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, most loving and true / Lord God, you who are always merciful and tender-hearted, slow to anger, always loving, always loyal / But thou O Lord, art a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Ps. 86:15).

You won renown for your wonderful deeds; gracious and merciful is the Lord / He allows us to commemorate his marvels. Yahweh is merciful and tender hearted / He has caused his wonderful work to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and merciful (Ps. 111:4).

They shine through the darkness, a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful, and just / For the upright he shines like a lamp in the dark, he is merciful, tender hearted, virtuous / Light rises in the darkness for the upright; the Lord is gracious, merciful, and righteous (Ps. 112:4).

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in (steadfast) love / He, Yahweh, is merciful, tender hearted, slow to anger, very loving, and universally kind (Ps. 145:8).

The Lord is good to all, compassionate to every creature/ Yahweh's tenderness embraces all his creatures / and his compassion is over all that he has made (Ps. 145:9).

The same compassion is depicted of Jesus, in the new dispensation of the New Testament:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Mat. 9:36).

As he went ashore he saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick (Mat. 14:14).

As he went ashore he saw a great throng, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things (Mk. 6:34).

Were you not bound, then, to have pity (compassion) on your fellow servant just as I had pity (compassion) on you? (Mat. 18:33).

Moved with compassion, or moved with pity, or feeling sorry for him, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, ... (Mk. 1:41).

Taking their cue from the Master, the apostles and disciples also talked about and taught this compassion:

Finally, all of you, be of one mind, sympathetic, loving towards one another, compassionate, humble / you should agree among yourselves and be sympathetic; love the brothers, have compassion and be self-effacing / have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind (1 Pet. 3:8).

If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him / a man who was rich enough in this world's goods saw that one of his brothers was in need, but closed his heart to him, how could the love of God be living in him / But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? (1 Jn. 3:17).

Wheatley (...) suggests that humans be warriors for the human spirit. She encourages readers to claim the role of warrior for themselves, to be people brave enough to refrain from adding to the aggression and fear of this time. She agrees that this is no easy task, not to meet aggression with aggression, to consciously choose to stay out of fear and support others to do the same, to quell the anger and anxiety that erupts so reflexively and choose for peace. Wheatley testifies to having claimed that role for herself, and to having learned that the capacities and skills humans most need – compassion, courage, discernment, effectiveness, patience – are available to those who dare see the world honestly and not flee from its harshness.

Wheatley (...) perceives compassion to be a weapon. This weapon gives warriors the energy to move forward, not to be afraid of the pain of the world. Fuelled by compassion, warriors engage with the world, step forward and act. But by itself compassion burns with too much passion and exhaust, so the second weapon is needed – insight into the interdependence of all phenomena.

Compassion, justice, love, and truth seem essential depictions of the male God of the Old Testament. This loving God is clearly depicted where God is portrayed as welcoming all people (Religions for Peace, 2013).

God is a fetcher. Chapter 30 of Deuteronomy states that God is always ready to welcome all people – a welcoming God is she: "... then the Lord, your God will change your lot; and taking pity on you ... Though you may have been driven to the farthest corner of the world, even from there will the Lord your God, gather you; even from there will he bring you back" is the rendering of the African Bible. The Jerusalem Bible reads, "...he will have pity on you and gather once again out of all the peoples... Had you wandered to the ends of the heavens, Yahweh your God would gather you even from there, would come there to reclaim you... The Oxford Bible has, "have compassion upon you. If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will fetch you..." (v4). Not just a welcoming, but a compassionately fetching God is she. Is God compassionately fetching and welcoming, without calling to repentance, people in same-sex relationships?

## **Are same-sex relationships found in the Bible?**

As can be seen from what transpired in the workshops, the general opinion is that people in same-sex relationships should repent and be converted, if they are to experience the fruits of salvation. Another opinion is that this type of relationship is alien to the Christian way of living. That is one reason whenever the subject of same-sex relationship is brought up, quick comes the question, "is it found anywhere in the Bible?" The usual answer is "no." Those who adamantly assert that same-sex relationships find no support in the Bible often rush to say that the Bible is very clear on its condemnation of homosexuality. This also seemed to be the stance shared by Nkosi (2016) in her paper presented at the UKZN HIV and AIDS Inaugural Research Indaba, held in Durban in the first week of this month. When it was pointed out, during question time, that the Bible offers no condemnation of homosexuality, there were many dissenting voices. This view however, that the Bible clearly condemns homosexuality is not an accurate one. At a number of points in the Old Testament there are beautiful affirmations of same-sex love. Two notable examples are David and Jonathan, and Ruth and Naomi. Elaborately treated, however, is the relationship of David and Jonathan.

David makes his first appearance in the Bible in chapter 16 of the First Book of Samuel. Before his appearance a background is set. The Lord is sending Samuel the prophet to go anoint a king among Jesse's sons. "I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen my king from among his sons (v. 1). The Lord instructs the frightened and hesitant Samuel what exactly to do. The Lord tells Samuel to arrange a feast, a sacrifice, and invite Jesse to thereto. Samuel is promised further instruction along the way. When Samuel enters Bethlehem, the elders of the city come trembling to meet him. Worried, they inquire about the occasion of this visit of the prophet in their territory. The prophet assures them that he brings no bad tidings but has come peaceably, to offer sacrifice, to which they are invited. "So cleanse yourselves and join me today for the banquet," or "purify yourselves" Samuel says to them (v. 5). To be able to take part in the banquet all need to cleanse themselves. The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines a banquet as "a large formal meal for many people, often followed by speeches in honour of someone." The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English defines a banquet as an "elaborate meal, usu for a special event, at which speeches are made." The invitation and the instruction to cleanse themselves included Jesse and his sons. It is notable, indeed remarkably strange, that David was not among the sons. A great feast is about to take place at his home, and he does not know. There is no attempt, either by his brothers, or his father, to include him. He is left out in the cold when the family is having a memorable visit of the prophet who throws a great party in his home. He is not to be part of the party. One wonders when does a family ever settles down to feast without a members of theirs included. The prophet Samuel senses that there is something just not coming together here, and asks Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" To this Jesse replies "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep (v. 11). Jesse's response suggests that he may as well continue doing that he is good at, keeping sheep, and have nothing to do with banquets and feasts. Yet the prophet insists that he be fetched.

It took a prophet to realise there is something amiss in the family of Jesse, namely, the alienation, the exclusion, of the one son. It is the prophet who calls for the inclusion of the one son who is deemed by the family to be worth alienating and excluding from family feasts. The prophet is clear in his instruction to have the son sent for, "we will not begin the sacrificial banquet until he arrives here," or "we will not sit down to eat until he comes" (v. 11). Arrive, the son did. The one excluded son turns out to be 'Mr Party,' who did not need to be cleansed or purified before taking his rightful place at the banquet table. A description of him / his is given.

David is described in the African Bible as “a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance.” The Jerusalem Bible says, “a boy of fresh complexion, with fine eyes and pleasant bearing,” while the Oxford Bible states that he “had beautiful eyes, and was handsome” (v12). The same chapter describes his anointing as chosen and designated by the voice of God. Upon his anointing, the spirit of the Lord is said to have “seized on David and stayed with him from that day on” or “the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward” (v. 13). To this the African Bible adds a comment: “Whenever God has to choose somebody for a great mission he seems to take pleasure at upsetting all the logical rules of common sense. God does not look at things and at people through human eyes ... If one listens to the voice of the Lord and accepts it in faith one learns to look at the world and humankind through the eyes of God.” David is deemed to be that compassionate person who, assisted by faith, has learned to look at the world and humankind through the eyes of God. This is demonstrated by his attitude to Saul, as later recorded in chapters 24 and 26 of the same book. They contain a record of two instances when David spared the life of Saul, out of mingled piety and magnanimity (Douglas, 1982).

David ministers to Saul. The same chapter 16 depicts what happens to a person deserted by the spirit of the Lord. It is stated there that the spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul and he was subsequently tormented by an evil spirit that led to his anxiety and depression (v14). One of the results of Saul’s rejection, therefore, was the departure of the Spirit of God from him, with a consequent depression of his own spirit, which at times seems to have approached madness (Douglas, 1982). To this the New Bible Dictionary adds a comment: “There is an awesome revelation of divine purpose in the providence by which David, who is to replace Saul in the favour and plan of God, is selected to minister to the fallen king’s melancholy” (1 Sam. 16:17-21).

David is well-qualified to serve. In chapter 17, it is stated that when David took service with Saul, Saul became very fond of him, made him his armour-bearer, and sent Jesse the message, “Allow David to remain in my service, for he meets with my approval” (v22). This was because David presented himself with the necessary qualifications to serve Saul: He is a musician who can soothe the king in moods of despondency, as stated in verses 16, 17, 18 and 23; he is also a warrior, as also stated in verses 18 and 21. This, therefore suggests that the relationship between David and Saul became very close. David is a skilled musician, and a formidable enough warrior to become the king’s armour-bearer (v. 21).

Courage, care and tenderness marked the character of David. Chapter 17, of the same book, tells that David was brought up to be a shepherd (verses 15 and 34). In this occupation he learnt the courage which was later to be evidenced in battle (v. 34) and the tenderness and care for his flock which he was later to sing of as the attributes of his God. Like Joseph, he suffered from the ill-will and jealousy of his elder brothers, perhaps because of the talents with which God had endowed him, as stipulated in verse 18 of this chapter and in verse 28 of the following one.

Jealousy changes the course of events. At first all went well. Saul was clearly pleased with David, whose musical skill was outshining, and appointed him as armour-bearer as well. Then the well-known incident involving Goliath, the Philistine champion, changed everything (1 Sam. 17). The way was clear for David to reap the reward promised by Saul – the hand of the king’s daughter in marriage, and freedom for his father’s family from taxation; but a new factor changed the course of events – the king’s jealousy of the new champion of Israel. The same jealousy that David has known from his elder brothers he now gets to experience from his close ally, King Saul.

The story of David and Jonathan is recounted more clearly from the 18<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the First Book of Samuel. The African Bible gives the start of the story the heading, “David and Jonathan: Two Bodies, One Soul.”

The same Bible goes on to state, in the first verse, "By the time David had finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan had become so fond of David as if his life depended on him; he loved him as he loved himself." The Jerusalem Bible reads, "After David had finished talking to Saul, Jonathan's soul became closely bound to David's and Jonathan came to love him as his own soul." The Oxford Bible states, "When he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." The third verse goes on to state that "Jonathan entered into a bond with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan divested himself of the mantle he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his military dress, and his sword, his bow and his belt." The Jerusalem Bible reads, "Jonathan made a pact with David to love him as his own soul..." The Oxford Bible states, "Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul." The African Bible adds a comment: "David's friendship with Jonathan is immortalized in the dirge of 2 Sam. 1:19ff. Jonathan's gift of garment and equipment (v. 4) is more than a gesture; it is a token of the covenanted friendship that now existed between them – David was Jonathan's alter ego (v. 3). The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines alter ego as a noun denoting "the part of someone's personality which is not usually seen by other people." The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English defines alter ego as "one's other self; very intimate friend." The compilers of the African Bible were not hesitant to state that there was intimacy between David and Jonathan.

Hatred and jealousy marks the person deserted by the Spirit. Clearly, Saul became jealous of the intimacy between David and Jonathan, not forgetting that he himself had enjoyed a very close relationship with David. Now, he has to watch his son Jonathan, having him instead. Saul's dealings with David declined progressively in amity. The young national hero is found escaping a savage attack on his life by the king, reduced in military honour, cheated of his promised bride and married to Saul's other daughter, Michal, after a marriage settlement which was meant to cause David's death (1 Sa. 18:25). Clearly, not only is the person deserted by the Spirit led to anxiety, depression, melancholy and madness but to hatred and jealousy as well. Thus hatred and jealousy are seen in Saul (1 Sa. 18:28), as can be seen in all people deserted by the Spirit.

Jonathan saves David. In Chapter 19 Jonathan saves David's life from the hand of Saul, first by telling the latter that his life is in danger, and by speaking well of him to his father. Speaking to Saul, his father, Jonathan says, "Let not your majesty sin against his servant David, for he has committed no offence against you, but has helped you very much by his deeds..." The Jerusalem Bible reads, "Let not the king sin against his servant David, for he has not sinned against you, and what he has done has been greatly to your advantage..." The Oxford Bible states, "...his deeds have been of good service to you..." (v4). It took a son, to caution his father, against harming a person who has been of good service to him. Sons are meant to learn from fathers, not vice versa. So, when are fathers taught by sons? Clearly only when something blinds their memory is this ever required. What is blinding the father and preventing him from seeing the most obvious?

Jealousy is blinding and distorting reality. Is King Saul not aware that David has committed no offence against him but that he has been very much of help to him? Does the king not know that everything David has done has been greatly to the advantage of the former? Is the king not aware that David has been of good service to him? King Saul is only an epitome of what goes on in society. Is this not a clear depiction of how those who wield power want to debase gays and their contribution in society? Is this not a depiction of how society want to negate the contribution that is only to their advantage, simply because it is made by gays? Yes, gays are those who sin against none but often sinned against. Is it not time to acknowledge that society is well-served by the presence of gays in their midst?

Love is not jealous. The African Bible has, as heading for Chapter 20 of the First Book of Samuel has, "Friendship Stronger than Jealousy." The friendship of David and Jonathan grows in strength and they agree to protect and support each other. They continue confiding in each other in this chapter, the latter saying to the former, "I will do whatever you wish." The Oxford Bible reads, "Whatever you say, I will do for you." They bond themselves to each other by further mutual agreement, Jonathan saying to David: "if I am still alive, show me the loyal love of the Lord, that I may not die; and do not cut off your loyalty from my house for ever / And may the Lord take vengeance on David's enemies / may you show me the kindness of the Lord. But if I die, never withdraw your kindness from my house. And when the Lord exterminates all the enemies of David from the surface of the earth, the name of Jonathan must never be allowed by the family of David to die out from among you ..." Jonathan then renewed his oath to David, "And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him; because he loved him as his very self," "as his own soul" (v. 17).

Homophobia is hatred. Saul attempts to sow division and hatred between David and Jonathan. He is telling Jonathan that as long as David lives Jonathan has neither future nor kingdom to enjoy.

Homophobia apportions blame. Blame is particularly apportioned to mothers, as can be seen in 1 Sam. 20:30. This has become a popular form of cursing gays, berating their mothers, as though they particularly had anything to do with the making of a homosexual.

Homophobia is disgraceful. Jonathan escapes his father's spear (1 Sam. 20:33). Saul is enraged about the closeness of David and Jonathan, and even attempts killing his own son who questions him on his intent to kill David. Out of both anger and grief, Jonathan eats no food. He feels his father has disgraced him by his attitude to his relationship with David. He goes out to sound warning shots to David.

Love is healing. Verse 41 describes a very intimate moment between David and Jonathan. After the lad had been sent away, David rose from beside the stone heap and "they kissed with Jonathan, and wept aloud together, until David recovered himself." They then bid farewell and they parted.

Love is the supreme gift of the Spirit. In Chapter 23 Jonathan, again, seeks out David. When he finds him he, once again, strengthens his resolve in the Lord. They make a joint agreement again at Horesh, Jonathan saying to David, "You shall be king of Israel and I shall be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this" (v. 17). Love does not seek its own interests (1 Cor. 13:5).

Love is wonderful. Upon receiving the news of Jonathan's death, David lamented and wept for him in these words, "Jonathan lies slain upon thy high places. I am distressed for you my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Sam. 1:25-26).

David loved women. The second Book of Samuel, chapter 11, narrates how much David loved women, not hesitating to kill Uriah so as to acquire his wife. Yet the love he had experienced from Jonathan far surpassed that of women. There is no indication that there was genital expression in this relationship, nor is there any reason to suggest that there was none. The point is simply made that deeply and emotionally expressed love between two persons of the same-sex is affirmed. Indeed there is a suggestion that this kind of love is something of a cause for celebration.

Lamentation is short-lived. David remains committed to Jonathan. When the lamentation is over, David remembers his obligations towards Jonathan and his family. He chooses to be faithful to the commitments he made to Jonathan. He sends for the son of Jonathan, and had Meribbaal brought to him. He assures Meribbaal of the kindness and restoration awaiting him, for the sake of his father, Jonathan. The affection lingers long.

Clearly, there are traces of same-sex relationships in the Bible. They are presented as relationships that are beneficial and healthy for those involved, for their families, and for community at large. The story of David and Jonathan is a case in point for same-sex relationships between two men. So, those who discriminate against, and are disfavouredly disposed towards same-sex relationships, cannot, and may not, legitimately claim to be doing so in the name of the God of the Old Testament, nor in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

### **Concluding summary**

Coming out clearly in the first workshop was the opinion that there are Bible texts that could be deemed to be stipulating clearly that Christians should not even be talking about queer people's rights, since such people are already condemned and do not belong to the body of Christ.

Coming out in the second workshop was the opinion that same-sex relationships are destructive and do not seem to be deemed beneficial and healthy for individuals involved in them, for their families, and for community at large.

The third workshop offered a challenge to Christians who are good in words, but lacking in deeds. It came out clearly from the reading and the reflection that deeds, too, must be a testimony and witness to the commitment to Jesus, not just magic religiosity of the use of the name of Jesus while practising hatred towards some of the children of God.

Further reflection on the third workshop reveals that through Christ, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to everyone as the gift of the grace and mercy of God. This makes the way of life of Christians distinct from that of their contemporaries so that cultural beliefs, customs and mores of the society around should not be allowed to hinder the spreading of that grace and mercy.

The Golden Rule commands Christians to do for others the good that they wish for themselves, quite apart from the behaviour that they expect or experience from them. Following the Golden Rule brings the perspective of the merciful Father to a world marked by the principle of retaliation. Following the Golden Rule calls Christians to fight for justice, love, and truth.

This fight for justice, love, and truth requires of individuals and communities to open their eyes and hearts to the suffering of others, and present solutions rather than inflicting pain and causing problems to our neighbour by violating their rights.

The Christian call to work for justice, love and truth is thus, at the same time, a call to compassion, after the heavenly Father who is tender hearted, and after the compassionate Christ who is moved by ignorance and sheepishness.

Compassion is to be seen in readiness to welcome all people as they are, without expecting them to renounce who they are.

David does not need to cleanse or purify himself before settling down to the banquet that he almost missed, owing to his marginalisation by his family. He is already cleansed and purified for the feast.

Hatred and jealousy marks the person deserted by the Spirit. Welcoming the other requires the indwelling of the Spirit. Often our unwelcoming attitudes are based on lack of faith, and oftentimes looking at reality through human eyes.

Courage, care and tenderness marked the character of David. These are the same markers of the character of God the Father and Jesus the Son.

Jealousy is blinding and blurring reality and changes the course of events.

Homophobia as hatred disgracefully apportions blame where it does not belong.

Love, as the supreme gift of the Spirit, is wonderfully and particularly healing.

Love is not short-lived

It seems almost everything that happened in the life of David has something significant to say about the position of the marginalised of society:

1. David was pushed to the margins: he is alienated, excluded, left out in the cold and darkness, and not informed on family matters.
2. His leadership gifts and accompanying talents are looked down upon. He is only seen as good for the sheep, and not for leadership position.
3. It takes a prophet to realise there is something amiss in the set-up where some member of the family does not count, and hence his potentiality trampled underfoot.
4. It takes a prophet to raise up the down-trodden and sit them in their rightful place.
5. It takes the insistence of the prophet to see that the set-up is made right.
6. In the one excluded is where the Spirit of the Lord is found to reside / finds favour.
7. Those excluded are the most compassionate of human creatures.
8. The exclusion has afforded the marginalised an opportunity to develop all their potential to the full: he comes out a skilled leader and musician.
9. The good work of the excluded is not appreciated and valued.
10. Those who have benefitted from the good work of the marginalised are their greatest persecutors instead of embracing them.

### **LGBTIQ .... unAfrican?**

The attempt to leave behind and forget about the LGBTIQ has further been witnessed in Africa in the anti-homosexuality bills. Africa has seen a few of its countries signing these anti-homosexuality bills into law (notably, Zimbabwe<sup>2</sup>, Uganda<sup>3</sup> and Nigeria<sup>4</sup>). Some people argue that in doing so, some of the presidents were simply populist notions of the public good and dancing along. He observes that the presidents' views on homosexuality kept shifting effortlessly.

In one instance the presidents' stance and views were non-discriminatory towards homosexuals. The next moment the stance had changed and the view that homosexual persons were promoting themselves and wanting to impose western values on Africans<sup>5</sup>. Kissing in public was particularly singled out as unAfrican, as such amorous acts belong strictly to the bedroom.

One wonders how many Africans have seen gays and lesbians kissing in public. Quite the contrary, heterosexuals, both married and unmarried, do this 'unAfrican' thing most of the time and almost anywhere and everywhere [important read: [\*The Spirit of Intimacy: Ancient African Teachings in the Ways of Relationships\*](#), by Sobonfu Somé].

Some are adamant that the real reason these presidents have signed anti-homosexuality bills into law is the fact that public opinion is decidedly against homosexuals. Religion has been used to influence

---

<sup>2</sup><http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/mugabe-promises-%E2%80%98hell-gays%E2%80%99-zimbabwe-if-he-wins170613/#gs.NaB8tw> [Accessed 13 January 2017].

<sup>3</sup><http://www.washingtonblade.com/2016/04/22/report-anti-lgbt-persecution-increased-under-uganda-law/> [Accessed 13 January 2017].

<sup>4</sup><https://76crimes.com/2016/10/25/nigerias-anti-gay-law-boosts-anti-lgbt-extortion-violence/> [Accessed 13 January 2017].

<sup>5</sup><https://grahamghana.wordpress.com/2011/10/20/africas-challenge-to-western-homosexuality/> [Accessed 12 January 2017].

the public opinion. Like many public debates imploring religion, the debate on homosexuality has been shrouded in hyperbole, misinformation, and sentimentalism. The discussion is lacking in empirical facts and rational analysis. This also applies to the moral debate around homosexuality. The debate hinges on the notion that homosexuality is ungodly. Yet, undoubtedly, not all the inhabitants of the countries that have sought to criminalise homosexuality believe in God. Some of the inhabitants are atheists. Others are traditionalists who frown at 'foreign religions.'

The second lever for the debate is cultural. This refers to the notion that homosexuality is unAfrican. Yet, not all the countries that have sought to criminalise homosexuality are inhabited by Africans only. Some inhabitants are of Asian descent, some from the Arab world, and others from Europe.

Gays and lesbians, on the other hand have demonstrated strides in brevity as they respond to the rising tide of homophobia across the continent. They also highlight four general features of contemporary life for the LGBTIQ in Africa. First, it is that homophobia in the continent is a result of both African and international dynamics, including attempts at Christian and Muslim proselytising. Second, human rights approaches to LGBTIQ liberation coexist and compete with local notions of gender and sexual identity affirmation. Third, homophobia is congruent with the broader dynamics of nationalism and sexism across Africa.

The challenges are many. Hegemonic assumptions about sexuality or about the protection of LGBTIQ Africans often fail to clarify challenges such persons face. One of those challenges is the difference in the perception of LGBTIQ matters between Africa and the West.

## References

Cruden, A. 1969. *Cruden's Complete Concordance to the Old & New Testaments* (Revised Edition). London: Lutterworth.

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed). Cambridge

Dlamini, BD. 1992. *Ministry of Pastoral Counselling with Gays in Black Society Today in the Context of Pietermaritzburg and Surroundings*. Unpublished Masters Dissertation. University of KwaZulu-Natal: Pietermaritzburg.

Dlamini, BD. 2005. *Contextual and Theological Factors Influencing the Practice of Pastoral Counselling with Families of Gays, with Special Reference to South Africa*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. University of KwaZulu-Natal: Pietermaritzburg.

Douglas, JD. 1973. *New Bible Dictionary*, (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press.

De Fleuriot, G. 1981. *Church and Human Relations in Industry: Introduction to the Teachings of the Church on Labour and Related Matters*. Bangalore: Theological Publications.

Hornby, A. S. 1978. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford University Press.

Nkosi,

South African Council of Churches. 2015. *Proposed 2016 Action Plan: The South Africa We Pray For*. Johannesburg.

The African Bible

The Jerusalem Bible

The Oxford Annotated Bible