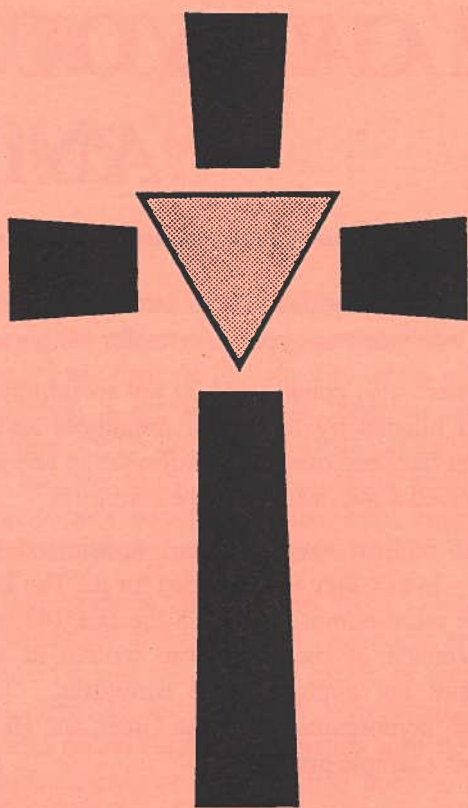




**? CAN YOU BE
GAY OR LESBIAN
AND CHRISTIAN ?**

? CAN YOU BE GAY OR LESBIAN AND CHRISTIAN ?

For many years the churches have said "NO!" to this question. However, this view point has been in error for many reasons.

The churches were also conditioned by the social norms of the times and have been blinded by their own prejudices and bigotry. The social viewpoint has been one of mis-information and social prejudice. It has also involved a mis-reading of the scriptures.

The people of biblical times did not understand the concept of homosexuality. In fact they had no word for it. The English language only coined the word homosexuality in the late 1880's. So when the King James Version of the Bible was written in 1611, the word homosexual does not appear in the scriptures. The words later translated to be "homosexual" from the Greek and Hebrew languages originally meant a temple prostitute.

Most of the references to homosexuality referred to the cultic temple worship which often involved prostitution with a man or a woman. The Hebrew people who were called to worship the One God, YAHWEH, were warned not to visit the temple and engage in cultic prostitution. Later translators then erroneously changed the reference to temple prostitution to mean homosexuality. But the Hebrew world did not understand sexual orientation, they only understood sexual activity.

Many people are quick to quote the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in their condemnation of gay and lesbian persons. But a careful reading of that story in Genesis 19: 1-29 shows that the crime which was

being committed was one of in-hospitality. When living in a desert climate, it was a great crime not to welcome strangers into your home and protect them from dangers and severity of the climate. All later references to Sodom in the Bible (look them up yourself at Isaiah 13:11-19; Jeremiah 49:15-18; Ezekiel 16:48-50 and Luke 10:10-13) never refer to homosexuality but rather speak about the sin of in-hospitality. In today's society who has been inhospitable to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons?

Some people are quick to quote verses from Leviticus, the list of cultural practices of the Hebrew people. Leviticus is often called the Holiness Code and it was intended as a means of keeping the Hebrew people distinct, separate and protected from cultural influences. It was like the rules of the early 1900's which forbade working on the sabbath, alcohol, dancing or card playing, because it might lead to "trouble" - whatever that meant.

The Holiness Code in the Book of Leviticus includes a long list of "no no's" like:

do not eat pork (11:7)

do not eat shellfish (11:10)

do not wear mixed fabrics (19:19).

Anyone to point a finger at gay or lesbians persons had first check and see what "sins" they were committing!

Many people today accept that the Bible has been misinterpreted or the Bible is just wrong in its condemnation of homosexuality. Just as

we have rejected the Biblical injunction that Slaves obey their Masters (Colossians 3:22) or that women are to be silent in church (1 Corinthians 14:34), so also we reject the interpretation that the Bible rightly condemns homosexuality.

We need to read the Bible in the context of the times and to listen to the primary message of the Bible, which is one of love and acceptance. Biblical people changed their minds about many cultural things. For example Peter who was taught all through his childhood and adult life to not eat pork and shellfish was told by God in a dream to eat those very same things. Peter was sick to his stomach at the thought! However, he listened to God's message and changed his ways, eating with non-Jewish people which, of course, caused others to get angry at him for doing so.

So today, many churches have confessed their sins and errors in condemning gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons.

The primary message of the Bible and of The United Church of Canada is that God loves and accepts us. We are called to love and accept each other in ways that are just and caring.

The United Church of Canada voted in 1988 to be open to the gifts, insights and full participation of all persons in their midst, regardless of sexual orientation. The United Church extends full benefits for health plans and pension payments to all people. We currently (in 1998) have more than 30 openly gay or lesbian ministers serving in our congregations across Canada and many more in hospital, prison and university chaplancies, outreach missions or administrative positions.

The United Church will try to provide a place of safety for you to explore your faith, your spirituality, your commitment to justice in the world. We recognize that no place is perfect. However, we carry on the struggle and work for justice and inclusion of all persons regardless of sexual orientation.

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