

## How the Methodist Church of Southern Africa Read Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 in View of Homosexuality<sup>1</sup>

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In recent times, the texts of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 have attracted the attention of Old Testament scholars, clergy and the laity, alike. In my view, such an attention has been inspired by the readers' quest for a possible light that both biblical texts shed on the acceptance and practice of homosexuality among societies. Lately, homosexuality has been one of the topical and burning issues in the present day South Africa. Therefore it does not come as a surprise that interpreting texts such as Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 becomes pertinent in our society. This research aims to explore the inability of MCSA to provide a sound rationale to reject homosexuality. In addition, this study endeavours to establish that acceptance and or rejection of homosexuality as a love relationship cannot be based on Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Using methodologies such as the literary, textual, canonical and socio-scientific criticism, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 will be examined, particularly in light of how MCSA read and interpret these texts. This argument is intended to make a necessary contribution to African biblical hermeneutics.*

### **A INTRODUCTION**

In recent times, the texts of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 have attracted the attention of Old Testament scholars, clergy and the laity alike, inspired by their quest to eke out the possible light that the text can shed on the subject of homosexuality. The problem of accepting or rejecting homosexuality (the research problem of this article) presents itself as a subject of serious debate in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA).<sup>2</sup> Liberals and conservatives within the MCSA are at opposing poles in this regard. The literal approach to Scripture fails to recognise the historical and cultural differences that exist between the ancient biblical context and the 21<sup>st</sup> century context of the Republic of South Africa (RSA).<sup>3</sup> Differing ideological contestations within the MCSA in discussing the phenomenon, offer no substantial and sound rationale to reject homosexuality. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 have been used as bases to

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<sup>1</sup> The article has been written as part of the Master's program at the University of Pretoria under the supervision of Prof Dirk Human.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter referred to as MCSA.

<sup>3</sup> Hereafter referred to as RSA.

accept or reject homosexuality without an exegetical analysis of these texts. The hypothesis in this paper is that there is no sufficient rationale to reject homosexuality by the MCSA if such assumptions are based on the literary reading of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. This project provides an exegesis of the above passages of Scripture as a methodology<sup>4</sup> in an attempt to discuss homosexuality<sup>5</sup> in view of MCSA's use of Scripture to comment on the phenomenon.

## B CONFERENCE STATEMENTS

The 2001 MCSA conference made a commitment to being a community of love rather than rejection, while the 2005 conference invited Methodists to embrace many different and even opposing views on homosexuality. The 2007 MCSA conference took a position in resolving the debate amid tensions and differing views among the clergy and laity<sup>6</sup> in two key resolutions:<sup>7</sup>

- (a) that the grace, affirmation of diversity, and commitment to the unity of the church central to the same-sex resolutions of the 2001 and the 2005 conferences be re-affirmed;
- (b) recognising the authority of Scripture, and noting that in our quest for understanding, we realise that there is no one monolithic and incontrovertible in interpreting it; we acknowledge that there will never be unanimity on certain issues within the church, upon which we must "agree to differ" without reducing our respect for, and trust of, one another; the conference recognised that any decision and subsequent action by the civil unions regarding same-sex partners must await the outcome of the ongoing process of engagement as specified by the 2005 MCSA conference;<sup>7</sup> in the interim, the MCSA would expect Methodist ministers to continue offering pastoral care to homosexual individuals as to all others.

The statement made in the first resolution is biased, because it only advocates for the *acceptance* of homosexuals, though the word "grace" redresses the punitive reception of people in this institution. Grace by definition means "undeserved love" and is mostly regarded as an attribute of God. To be gracious

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<sup>4</sup> Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are examined using literary, textual, canonical and socio-scientific criticism.

<sup>5</sup> In this article, homosexuality in the current period will be defined as a sexual orientation in contrast to the perception of homosexuality as a sexual act in the Ancient Near Eastern context that gave birth to the Old Testament.

<sup>6</sup> These deliberations are my interpretation of the conference proceeding as I have recorded them.

<sup>7</sup> Methodist Church of Southern Africa constructed these resolutions in the spirit of celebrating diversity. Cf. Methodist Church of Southern Africa. *2006 Yearbook* (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 2006), 45.

<sup>7</sup> Methodist Church of Southern Africa. *2006 Yearbook*, 75.

means to love all people, including homosexual persons. The phrase “affirmation of diversity” opens the doors for differing views. The phrase used here extends to behaviour and orientation while simultaneously supposes the acceptance of people in their uniqueness. The statement on the commitment to the unity of the church focuses the decision-making process on possible divisions rather than solely on righteousness, wrongness, acceptance or rejection of homosexual orientation.

The second resolution is commendable. However, the opening statement referring to the authority of Scripture is questionable, because it ignores the fact that there are irresponsible interpretations and approaches to Scripture. The phrase *agree to differ* in the second statement, is equally problematic. The phrase closes doors for a possible consensus that could be conceived by responsible interpretation of Scripture and approach to the debate. The concepts of upholding solid moral fibre, the themes of holiness and consecration, are not alluded to in the resolution. The resolutions that form the major component in terms of the policies of the MCSA, as they stand, are silent on components that form basis for the rejection of homosexuality.

## **C THE MCSA POLICY**

### **1 Office of Christian Ministry**

The MCSA’s doctrine as reflected in paragraph 1.20 and 1.9.5<sup>8</sup> is convinced of the universal conviction of the Methodist believers. The MCSA believes that the office of the Christian Ministry depends upon the call of God who bestows the gifts of the Spirit.<sup>9</sup> Yet according to the conference statements made, the MCSA objects to the ministry of the homosexual.<sup>10</sup>

### **2 Witness of the Church**

The rejection of homosexuality can be based on the traditional witness of the Church as reflected on the statement “to ensure the continued witness of the church to the realities of the Christian experience of salvation.”<sup>11</sup> It presupposes that the historical witness of the church – as embedded in Scripture – is not dynamic and cannot be re-shaped by the changing experiences of Christians. The witness of the church should nonetheless be applied to the realities of Christian experiences. The interpretation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 seems to

<sup>8</sup> Methodist Church of Southern Africa. *Laws & Disciplines*. 11th ed. (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> See MCSA, *Laws & Disciplines*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Methodist Church of Southern Africa. *2006 Yearbook*, 75

<sup>11</sup> See MCSA, *Laws & Disciplines*, 15. The MCSA does not explicitly base the rejection of homosexuality on the traditional witness of the Church.

be used to ensure continued witness of the church.<sup>12</sup> Scripture should be adequately explored before it can be deemed to be absolute and utilised to uphold the construed tradition of the Church in rejecting homosexuality.

### 3 Membership

According to MCSA stipulations, all people are welcomed as members of the MCSA.<sup>13</sup> The condition for membership is the willingness to be saved from their sins through faith in Jesus Christ and to show their acceptance of salvation in their conduct in everyday life. It follows, therefore, that willingness to seek communion with Christ is considered a vital component for membership. Sexual orientation is not a determinative factor for membership in the MCSA. Based on this assumption, it cannot be argued that homosexual persons should not be members. The incongruity, as mentioned, is that in the MCSA homosexuals are accepted as members of the church, but they cannot assume leadership positions.

## 4 Wesleyan Quadrilateral<sup>14</sup> in the discussion document

### 4a Scripture

The Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee of the Methodist Church of South Africa (DEWCOM) points out that one of the approaches to interpreting Scripture is reading the text literally.<sup>15</sup> In this paradigm one focuses on what is deemed as explicitly stated in the Scripture about homosexuality and then perceives it to be absolute. Leviticus 18:22; 20:13 and Romans 1:26–27 are deemed clear in their unequivocal condemnation of homosexual behaviour. However, the literal approach fails to recognise and to be aware of the historical and cultural distance between the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the time of the production of these texts.<sup>16</sup> In a literal approach no historical and literary

<sup>12</sup> Raymond V. Alistoun, "Scripture and Same Sex relations," n.p. [Cited 12 April 2010]. Online: <http://www.spirituality.org.za/files/DEWCOM/SCRIPTURE%20AND%20SAME%20SEX%20RELATIONS.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> MCSA, *Laws & Discipline*, 25

<sup>14</sup> Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee. *Methodist discussion document on Same-Sex relationship and Christianity* (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 2003). Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a methodology used for theological reflection in the MCSA, which focuses on Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience. In coming to a theological conclusion, the Bible (Scripture), the history of the Christian Church (Tradition), rational thinking (Reason) and the experiences of Christians (Experience) are explored.

<sup>15</sup> DEWCOM, *Methodist discussion document*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> DEWCOM, *Methodist discussion document*, 3. The document assumes that the biblical writer's conclusions about homosexual behaviour are directly translatable into our modern context. On the contrary, it can be concluded that if historical and cultural differences between the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the time of text production are taken into ac-

investigation or their contribution to the study of biblical texts is taken into account nor recommended in the DEWCOM document.

#### 4b Tradition

Contemporary church denominations have different views on homosexuality. These views range from the condemnation of homosexuality as a manifestation of a depraved nature and a perversion of divine principles; to a conditional acceptance of homosexual people as long as they do not engage in homosexual acts; to a further conditional acceptance of homosexual people as long as they do not take leadership positions; to a full acceptance of homosexuality as part of the diversity of God's good creation, including the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of homosexuals.<sup>17</sup>

DEWCOM recorded the United Methodist Church's Social Principles<sup>18</sup> on human sexuality which affirm the worth of the homosexual and the availability of God's grace to all.<sup>19</sup> Yet it does not condone the practice of homosexuality. DEWCOM further makes the assertions on homosexual people:

Homosexual persons are no less than heterosexual persons to be perceived as individuals of sacred worth. All persons need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfilment. Humanity needs the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others and with self. Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching,<sup>20</sup> we affirm that God's grace is available to all. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.<sup>21</sup>

The Methodist Church, globally, is not objecting to homosexuality, while various denominations within ecumenical circles do embrace the latter.<sup>22</sup>

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count it cannot simply be assumed that the biblical references condemning homosexual behaviour can be directly translated to and applied in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context. Moreover, the range of biblical authority and relevancy is not put on the table.

<sup>17</sup> DEWCOM, *Methodist discussion document*, 15. However, DEWCOM does not explicitly mention the denominations individually according to their positions.

<sup>18</sup> DEWCOM, *Methodist discussion document*, 16.

<sup>19</sup> DEWCOM, *Methodist discussion document*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> This position seems to be formulated in the context of the interpretation of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 as rejecting homosexuality as well as the perception of homosexuality as a sexual orientation. In contemporary society homosexuality is perceived as a sexual orientation as opposed to the perception of homosexuality as an act in the biblical text.

<sup>21</sup> DEWCOM, *Methodist discussion document*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> DEWCOM, *Methodist discussion document*, 20.

Contrary to the Methodist Church, globally, the MCSA embraces homosexual people but rejects their ministry and therefore does not affirm homosexuality. It seems that the position of the MCSA at present is formulated independently of the Methodist Church on global level as well as ecumenical level. In consultation with the global Methodist Church and the other churches on ecumenical level, the MCSA does not engage and use traditions and trajectories of the wider church community. In the light of the Methodist Church on global level, the MCSA cannot base the rejection of homosexuality on Church tradition.

#### 4c Reason

In employing reason, DEWCOM emphasises Natural Law and the scientific age as major influences on moral theological thought.<sup>23</sup> Stoic philosophy envisages the Natural Law of the cosmos, which teaches that there is a purpose behind everything created.<sup>24</sup> In the case of sexuality, the purpose of sex is procreation. It is on these grounds that sexual intentions that are contrary to the purpose of procreation are deemed unnatural and therefore unacceptable. But in contemporary society sexual intercourse not only fulfils the purpose of procreation but also serves to enhance intimacy,<sup>25</sup> turning any rejection of homosexuality on the basis of procreation void.

The scientific age presents a new dimension that was unknown to the ancient biblical world: the concept of human sexual orientation. DEWCOM in engaging the subject of natural and social sciences is led to the following conclusions:

The ways in which the complex reality of human sexuality is understood and described are constantly evolving; while the exact process whereby a person's sexual orientation is formed is unknown, the evidence suggests that a person's sexual orientation is in place relatively early in life; sexual orientation is something over which people have little choice and they do not choose to be heterosexual or homosexual; and as with heterosexual practices, homosexual practice is not uniform and varieties<sup>26</sup> of homosexual expression exist.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> DEWCOM, *Methodist discussion document*, 10.

<sup>24</sup> DEWCOM focuses on the creation of human beings in this discussion.

<sup>25</sup> Ken Stone, "The hermeneutics of abomination: On gay men, Canaanite and Biblical interpretation," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27 (1998): 39. Stone argues for an alternative approach, which is gay-affirmative and avoids historical and ideological problems. He notes that biblical thoughts and language have been shaped decisively by ancient constructs of male and female and that a modern construction of sexuality and gender ideologies is critical and of utmost necessity.

<sup>26</sup> See DEWCOM, *Methodist discussion document*, 13. DEWCOM notes varieties of homosexual expression which includes *Pseudo-homosexuality* (sexual activity in

Based on the rational thinking in the contemporary society and scientific age, rejection of homosexuality is void.

#### 4d Experience

The intention of the dimension of experience is to relate people's experiences regarding homosexuality to Scripture, tradition and reason in discussing it. Reflections on experiences depict that a homosexual orientation is not chosen but discovered. On this ground, DEWCOM argues that any suggestion – that a homosexual orientation is wilfully chosen – is inconsistent with the weight of experience of homosexual people.<sup>28</sup> On the one hand homosexuals within the church have felt discriminated against; that Christian faith has caused an intense captivity rather than bringing liberation; and that they are treated as if they are abnormal.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand testimonies from converts from homosexuality to heterosexuality revealed that a homosexual orientation can be wilfully chosen. Such a conversion is thought to demonstrate a sense of non-fulfilment in homosexuality as well as a negative experience within a same-sex relationship. Moreover, it appears that some converts were influenced into such relationships by an experience of being hurt by the opposite sex whereas others were influenced by the environment<sup>30</sup> in which they found themselves.

The experiences of non-hygienic practices that are related to same-sex sexual intercourse trigger reluctance towards accepting homosexuality. The question I pose in this article is that, if homosexuality is argued to be normal and life affirming, why are so many illnesses only associated with sexual intercourse between same-sex partners?<sup>31</sup> Even though this view could be valid, it

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which people of the same-sex reflect issues of dependence-independence and or power-powerlessness rather than sexual desire); *Situational homosexuality* (same-sex practice where people are isolated from people of the opposite sex, as in prisons); *exploitative homosexuality* (complementary sexual activities in which a less powerful individual is exploited by a more powerful individual); *variational homosexuality* (prostitution); *bisexuality* (in which a homosexual person continues to have heterosexual relations); *ambisexuality* (a smaller group of people who experience equal sexual pleasure and performance with either sex) and *preferential homosexuality* (adults whose preference is for emotional and physical intimacy with persons of the same-sex).

<sup>27</sup> DEWCOM, *Methodist discussion document*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> DEWCOM, *Methodist discussion document*, 21.

<sup>29</sup> DEWCOM, *Methodist discussion document*, 21–24

<sup>30</sup> This environment includes that of a prison, single sex parented households and single sex schools.

<sup>31</sup> John R. Diggs, "The health risks of gay sex," n.p. [Cited 12 April 2010]. Online: <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/homosexuality/ho0075.html>. Diggs alludes

does not take into consideration the fact that there are also illnesses associated with heterosexual intercourse. Arguments emanating from the experience of people depict both sentiments for accepting and rejecting homosexuality.

## 5 Contributions from Methodist clergy

Several members of the clergy discussed the “Methodist Document on Same-Sex Relationship and Christianity.” Dave Morgan declares that, “it (his article) is written on behalf of people concerned with the direction that the Church is taking in many parts of the ‘liberated’ world in denying the plain and clear Word of God in favor of socially-acceptable stands on key issues of morality and faith.”<sup>32</sup> He interprets Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 as rejecting homosexuality. The rejection is suggested without an in depth exegetical analysis of the text. Contrary to Morgan’s interpretation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Sjadu Nkomonde provides an African perspective, contending that the concept of ubuntu, “humanity” is a dimension in African spirituality that directs people to belong to each other.<sup>33</sup> But Nkomonde fails to mention, and that is the other side of the coin, is that if *ubuntu* concerns collectiveness and belonging to one another, the implication is that social values are collectively constructed by the community. It would mean an individual is expected to subscribe to these values. Social values regarding purity, moral fibre, ancestors, marriage and reproduction can be regarded as normative and as a basis for objecting to homosexual behaviour. Hence homosexuality in African cultures is deemed as unnatural, an illegitimate sexual relationship and corrupting the moral fibre of the society.<sup>34</sup> Bearing in mind that the policy of the MCSA regards Holy Scripture as the supreme rule of faith and practice, Alistoun claims that where the Bible (Lev 18:22 and 20:13) mentions homosexual behaviour at all, it clearly con-

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to Sexual Transmitted Infection (STI) and the high risk of HIV and AIDS as illnesses associated with sexual intercourse between same-sex partners.

<sup>32</sup> Dave Morgan, “Christian and Same-Sex relationships. An alternative view to the Discussion Guide,” n.p. [Cited 12 April 2010]. Online: <http://www.spirituality.org.za/files/DEWCOM/christians%20and%20same-sex%20relationships%20-%20conference%202003.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> Sjadu Nkomonde, “African culture and Homosexual relationships,” n.p. Cited 12 April 2010. Online: <http://www.spirituality.org.za/files/DEWCOM/AFRICAN%20SEXUALITY.pdf>. Nkomonde approaches the subject of homosexuality from an African cultural perspective with specific reference to the Xhosa culture. He also adds that people belong to the soil, and that people belong to one another, as do people and the ancestors.

<sup>34</sup> Madge Karecki, *Intercultural Christian communication* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2000), 45. Karecki contends for an interpretation of Scripture that is mindful of an African context. Nkomonde does not explicitly relate African culture to Christian faith principle and, alternatively, values.

demns it.<sup>35</sup> Andrews presents an opposing voice which embraces homosexuality. He remarks that the second creation story recounted in Genesis 2:24 lays more emphasis on the companionship between Adam and Eve than on the procreative imperative.<sup>36</sup> Andrews further regards the recognition of same-sex relationships as a matter of love and justice, which is underpinned in conventional Christian theology's emphasis on Jesus' command to love God and one's neighbour.<sup>37</sup> An understanding of love and justice, which is based on Scripture, forms the basis to argue in favour of the acceptance of homosexuality.

## 6 Conclusion

The MCSA in her adopted conference resolutions and position, whilst rejecting the ministry of homosexual persons, advocates for the acceptance of homosexual oriented people. Rejection of homosexuality cannot be persuasively argued based on the MCSA policy. In the Wesley Quadrilateral, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 have been quoted to accept and or reject homosexuality without an exegetical analysis of these texts. Because of the fact that the Methodist Church, globally, is not objecting to homosexuality the rejection of homosexuality cannot be based on the tradition of the MCSA. Reason and experiences of the members of the Methodist tradition do not provide firm foundation to argue for the rejection of homosexuality. Arguments for the acceptance of homosexuality

<sup>35</sup> Raymond V. Alistoun, "Scripture and Same Sex relations," n.p. [Cited 12 April 2010]. Online: <http://www.spirituality.org.za/files/DEWCOM/SCRIPTURE%20AND%20SAME%20SEX%20RELATIONS.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Greg Andrews, "Holding hands is Not for Sissies," n.p. [Cited 12 April 2010]. Online: <http://www.spirituality.org.za/files/DEWCOM/HOLDING%20HANDS.pdf>. Dan O. Via & Robert A. J. Gagnon, J. B. Wells and Charles D. Myers all agree that homosexuality is unconditionally condemned in Scripture. A point of difference among these scholars is that Gagnon maintains that Scripture is clear on the matter and that should not be overridden whilst Via contends that homosexuality is not to be regarded as sin. See Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 115-17; J. B. Wells, "Homosexuality And the Bible: two views," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28 (2004): 173-174. Charles Myers, "What the Bible really says about homosexuality," *Amina* 19 (1992): 48. On the other hand, Stott affirms that based on the authority of Scripture same-sex marriage is not an option for Christians. See John R. Stott, "Homosexual marriage: why same sex partnerships are not a Christian option," *Christian Today* 29 (1985/17): 22.

<sup>37</sup> Andrews, "Holding hands is Not for Sissies," n.p. Andrews questions the appropriateness of some biblical texts for determining Christian norms and, with reference to Romans 1:26, argues that St Paul's selectiveness and inconsistency in using Leviticus' laws causes Romans 1:26 not to be normative. Andrews further suggests that St Paul's thinking was restricted within the confines of temple prostitution, pederasty and paedophilia. However, his claim is not substantiated. He failed to investigate the historical context of the author of Romans, making one reluctant to appreciate his interpretation and understanding of St Paul.

are soundly depicted in the contributions from the MCSA clergy and arguments for the rejection of homosexuality are not sufficiently substantiated.

## **D EXEGETICAL DISCUSSION WITH LEVITICUS 18:22 AND 20:13**

### **1 Introduction**

In the MCSA discussion, it was noted that justice has not been done to the interpretation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 regarding homosexuality. In this section, the historical and literary contexts of these texts are studied on a thematic basis with a view on shedding valuable insight on the issue of homosexuality.

### **2 Religious context**

Ukleja articulates a line of thinking and reasoning that classifies Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 as religious prohibitions rather than moral ones. According to Ukleja, this line of thinking assumes a distinction between ritual purity and moral preaching.<sup>38</sup> The implication of this distinction is that the issue at hand in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 is religious purity. A socio–scientific approach to these texts depicts a prohibition identified with the practice of alien religion within the socio–geographic parameters. It is noted that in Israelite socialisation, homosexuality was considered alien behaviour, representing the incursion of pagan civilisation into the life of Israel.<sup>39</sup> Leviticus 18:1–5 locates the law in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 in Canaanite and Egyptian religious contexts. The Israelites are forbidden to follow the statutes of Canaan and Egypt.<sup>40</sup> The laws of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are deemed to refer to male temple prostitution while this reading is situated in the context of Canaanite cults that practised male temple prostitution as reflected in Deuteronomy 23:17.<sup>41</sup>

#### **2a Worship of Molech in the Septuagint (LXX), Samaritan Pentateuch and the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS)<sup>42</sup>**

In the Septuagint (LXX),<sup>43</sup> according to the edition of Gottigen ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν (that is your god)<sup>44</sup> was added after אֲנִי יְהוָה (I am Yahweh) in Leviticus 18:5.

<sup>38</sup> Michael P. Ukleja, “Homosexuality and the Old Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (1983): 263.

<sup>39</sup> Walter Wink, *Homosexuality and Christian faith: Questions of conscience for the Churches* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 35.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Douglas, “Justice as the cornerstone: an interpretation of Leviticus 18–20,” *Interpretation* 53/4 (1999): 343. Douglas suggests that Leviticus 18 refers to the evil statutes of the foreign gods, which are to be contrasted with the good statutes of Yahweh, God of Israel.

<sup>41</sup> Douglas, “Justice as the cornerstone: an interpretation of Leviticus 18–20,” 345. Douglas adds that male–male intercourse is rejected because Israel was entering into the idolatrous cults of foreign nations.

<sup>42</sup> Hereafter referred to as BHS.

The Jews living in Alexandria wrote this Greek translation (250 B.C.E.), which presupposes that the existence of many gods and their worship is the context and background of Leviticus 18:22. לְהַעֲבִיר (to pass through) as in the BHS (Lev 18:21) is rendered as ending with יד in the Samaritan Pentateuch. Comparing the phrase (to pass through) with that which is cited in the LXX, λατρεύειν (worship or serve), captures that which is done to Molech. Leviticus 18:22 is located in a context of cultic practices to foreign gods, where Molech is worshiped.

A reference to לְמֹלֶךְ (to Molech) in Leviticus 20:2–3 is also made in Leviticus 18:21 and displays the existence of the cult and worship of gods, which defiled the nation. וּלְחַלֵּל (and to profane), which is a conjunction ו attached to a preposition ל and to a piel infinitive construct verb, is recorded in the BHS (Lev 20:3). The Samaritan Pentateuch records וְחָלַל (and profane) with the preposition ל being omitted. The preposition in the BHS is appropriate and it presents the action and the result of worshipping Molech, which is profaning the holy<sup>45</sup> name of יְהוָה.

In the BHS (Lev 20:5) the phrase אֶחָרֵי הַמִּלְךָ (harlotry with Molech) conveys immorality associated with the worship of gods. אָחִיו which is the object marker attached to a third person masculine singular suffix in the BHS (Lev 20:6) is presented in the Samaritan Pentateuch and LXX in a feminine state as אָחִי. Leviticus 20:6 displays the consequence of worshipping gods and prostitution. The LXX and the Samaritan Pentateuch feminises the people who are involved in such cultic rituals. The implication of this feminisation is that a person involved in such cultic ritual was shamed. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 do not respond to homosexuality per se but immoral act associated with the worship of gods and therefore claims on rejection of homosexuality are void.

## 2b Foreign religious cults

Leviticus 18:1–5 serves as an introduction to Leviticus 18. Verse 3 is central to the introduction and conveys a prohibition of the acts of the Canaanites and

<sup>43</sup> The Septuagint (LXX) is a Greek translation that was probably written by Jews for Jews living in Alexandria. The Pentateuch section was created at about 250 B.C.E.; the Prophets at about 200 B.C.E. and the majority of other books at about 100 B.C.E. This translation became the authoritative version for Christians.

<sup>44</sup> Hereafter the BibleWorks 4 programme is consulted in translating Greek.

<sup>45</sup> The concept of holiness is presented from the perspective of Priestly writers: the essence of holiness is separation and this contention is based on Leviticus 19:19. See Gwen B. Saylor, “Beyond the biblical impasse: homosexuality through the lens of theological anthropology,” *Dialog* 44/1 (2005): 81. An exclusive worship of God is associated with the concept of holiness. Homosexual act is deemed to be profaning the name of God and it is on this basis that homosexuality is rejected.

Egyptians.<sup>46</sup> The repeated phrase אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם (I am Yahweh your God) in verses 2 and 4, which encircle verse 3, seems to suggest an emphasis on religious purity and exclusive worship of יְהוָה amidst the worship of other gods. The verbs דָּבַר (speak) and אָמַר (say) connect verses 1 and 2. This connection depicts the source of the law in Leviticus 18 as יְהוָה. The laws that are introduced by Leviticus 18:1–5 pertain to religious purity and exclusive worship of יְהוָה. Sexual acts attached to, and associated with, a foreign religious cult are rejected and not homosexuality. The author's objective is to urge his audience not to be culturally, social, ethically and religiously influenced by neighbouring communities.

The adverbial sentence of manner לֵאמֹר (saying) which is dependent on the statement sentence וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה (then Yahweh spoke to Moses) in Leviticus 20:1, introduces the laws in Leviticus 20. The command sentence הֲאָמַר (again, you shall say to the children of Israel) in Leviticus 20:2 is attached to the first prohibition that is concerned with the worship of Molech,<sup>47</sup> while verse 1 introduces Leviticus 20. Leviticus 20:13 seems to be a prohibition on the worship of Molech and not homosexual orientation.

### 3 Homophobic violence

Because of the relations between Leviticus 18:22, 20:13 and Genesis 19 and Judges 19 as suggested by Carden it is necessary to engage the said texts.<sup>48</sup> Stiebert and Walsh<sup>49</sup> define homosexuality as a sexual orientation and argue that the Hebrew Bible (and explicitly Genesis 19 and Judges 19) does not refer to homosexuality as an orientation and therefore cannot be used to condemn homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Genesis 19 and Judges 19 are not primarily concerned with relational sexuality either in terms of homosexuality or heterosexuality. Instead these texts focus on maleness (the social value system and conventional construction of masculinity).<sup>50</sup> The reason for arguing male-

<sup>46</sup> The question asked by Wright, namely “ [D]id the Mosaic Law reprobate behaviour simply because the Canaanites indulged in it?” can be answered in the affirmative. See David F. Wright, “Homosexuality: the relevance of the Bible,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 61 (1989): 291. On the other hand, Cohen also agrees that Leviticus 18 presents practices common in both Egypt and Canaan. See Martin S. Cohen, “The biblical prohibition of homosexual intercourse,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 19/4 (1990): 4.

<sup>47</sup> The prohibition is directed to Israelites and non-Israelites who are residing in Israel.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Carden, “Homophobia and Rape in Sodom and Gibeah: A response to Ken Stone,” *Journal for Study Old Testament* 82 (1999): 83–96.

<sup>49</sup> Johanna Stiebert & Jerome T. Walsh, “Does the Hebrew Bible have anything to say about homosexuality?” *Old Testament Essays* 14/1 (2001): 119.

<sup>50</sup> Stiebert & Walsh, “Does the Hebrew Bible have anything to say about homosexuality?” 121.

ness as focal point in the text can be found in the fact that female homosexuality (lesbianism) is not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible.

The texts of Genesis 19 and Judges 19 are also read as being concerned about maleness and specifically homophobic violence that arises from homosexual panic.<sup>51</sup> This statement is developed on the grounds of the sentiment that rape is to be understood as sexual violence grounded on issues of power and anger. Studies of Western society showing that male rapists are primarily heterosexual men<sup>52</sup> when taken into account in reading Genesis 19, Judges 19, Leviticus 18 and 19 might not be concerned with homosexuality. Sedgwick's definition of homosexual panic as the most private and psychologised form in which many men experience their vulnerability to the social pressure of homophobic blackmail<sup>53</sup> shapes Carden's argument on homophobic violence and his reading of Genesis 19 and Judges 19.

#### **4 Male same-sex intercourse signifying victory over foreign enemy**

The argument that male rape was also employed to signify victory over foreign enemies in war<sup>54</sup> supports the idea of a male person engaging in intercourse with another man. Anal penetration in Ancient Athens was treated neither as an expression of love nor as a response to beauty but as an aggressive act of demonstrating the superiority of the active to the passive partner.<sup>55</sup> The interpretation of Lot offering his daughters instead of his male guests as being a rightful act of protecting the male honour of his guests according to the law of hospitality, supports the understanding of Genesis 19 as not referring to homosexuality or homosexual orientation.<sup>56</sup> Intertextual investigation reads and appropriates this understanding into Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. On these grounds the act of sexual abuse of foreigners is condemned (Lev 18:22 and 20:13) rather

<sup>51</sup> Carden, "Homophobia and Rape in Sodom and Gibeah: A response to Ken Stone," 89.

<sup>52</sup> McMullen accounts for these studies. See Richie J. McMullen, *Male Rape: Breaking Silence on the Last Taboo* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1990), 118.

<sup>53</sup> Sedgwick agrees to the depiction of homophobic blackmail. Cf Eve K. Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 88–89.

<sup>54</sup> Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1978), 104. Dover deduces this argument from a study on the historical and social context of Judges 19.

<sup>55</sup> Dover's contribution is also noted by Carden, "Homophobia and Rape in Sodom and Gibeah: A response to Ken Stone," 95.

<sup>56</sup> Carden, "Homophobia and Rape in Sodom and Gibeah: A response to Ken Stone," 93.

than homosexuality. Prohomosexual interpretation fails to find homosexuality in Scripture.<sup>57</sup>

## 5 Hospitality and power relations

Offering hospitality is connected to and associated with honour (power); undermining it displayed that the citizens were not in control of their space.<sup>58</sup> The behaviour of the Sodomites in Genesis 19 is also interpreted as their attempt to challenge Lot's honour by questioning his control over his household and threatening to penetrate both his house and his guests.<sup>59</sup> The literary context of Genesis 19 depicts instances of hospitality,<sup>60</sup> therefore, this context supports the association of Genesis 19 with hospitality. Genesis 19 and Judges 19 are both preceded by stories of hospitality,<sup>61</sup> namely Abraham's generosity towards the visitors in Genesis 18 and the hospitality of the father of the concubines in Judges 19:3–10.<sup>62</sup> The literary contexts of Genesis 19 and Judges 19 presuppose that the issues in these texts are hospitality and the humiliation of foreign men by placing them in the position of being a sexual object, rather than that of homosexuality.

Genesis 19 is a narrative about heterosexual men's intent on humiliating strangers by treating them like women and demasculinising them in the process. In the context of war in the story world, the men of Sodom became suspi-

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<sup>57</sup> De Young claims that texts referring to homosexuality are irrelevant to Christians today, because they concern a form of homosexuality and not sexual orientation. See James B. De-Young, "A critique of prohomosexual interpretations of the Old Testament apocrypha and pseudepigrapha," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990): 353. Cohen also shares the same sentiments in saying the Torah pays no attention to the question of sexual orientation and the text is not concerned with orientation. See Cohen, "The biblical prohibition of homosexual intercourse," 4.

<sup>58</sup> Leland J. White, "Does the Bible speak about gays or same-sex orientation? A test case in Biblical ethics: Part 1," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 25/1 (1995): 20.

<sup>59</sup> White, "Does the Bible speak about gays or same-sex orientation? Part 1," 20. White adds that Lot shamed the Sodomites by doing what they were supposed to do in maintaining the city's honour.

<sup>60</sup> Genesis 18 displays Abraham's hospitality to the divine visitors; Genesis 20 shows King Abimelech's realisation of his duty of hospitality to Abraham.

<sup>61</sup> Jerome Walsh advances the suggestion of the hospitality image that precedes Gen 19 and the image that preceded Judges 19 as pointed out by Nissinen Martti, *Homosexuality in the Biblical World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998). See also Walsh, "Leviticus 18: 22 and 20: 13: who is doing what to whom?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120/2 (2001): 201–209. These observations stem from the depicted thematic style that is underscored by verbal and structural parallels.

<sup>62</sup> Stiebert & Walsh. "Does the Hebrew Bible have anything to say about homosexuality?" 133.

cious and wanted to display their power to the intruders,<sup>63</sup> by penetrating and therefore humiliating them. Similarly, with regard to Lev 18:22 and 20:13 and in relation to Genesis 19, the issue is not homosexuality but a question of male pride or power. Moreover, Matthew 10:14–15 seems to be interpreting Genesis 19 as being concerned with hospitality. Mackenzie labels the attempt of the men in Sodom to engage in sexual intercourse with Lot's visitors as an intention to assault the strangers.<sup>64</sup> It is thus inappropriate to use Matthew 10:14–15 and Genesis 19 with regard to the issue of homosexuality.

## 6 Same-sex intercourse as unnatural and shameless

Romans 1:27 depicts the rejection of a man committing a shameless act with another man. Paul's usage of the word "shameless" reflects the Mediterranean preoccupation with honour and shame.<sup>65</sup> Mackenzie notes that St Paul's denunciation of homosexual acts as being unnatural for heterosexuals follows a reference to non-Christian worship and raises the possibility that Romans 1:26–27 was meant to condemn sexual practices associated with non-Christian religion.<sup>66</sup> *Natural* alludes to nature and nature refers to a predetermined biological or social behavioural pattern believed to constitute normality. St Paul argues that people with a heterosexual orientation should practise natural sexual intercourse. *Unnatural* (Rom 1:26) seems to be understood as being a denial of the procreative complementarity of male and female.<sup>67</sup> At one level, the word "natural" implies the insertion of a penis into a vagina, while mutual and pleasurable stimulation are deemed unnatural. Snyman further remarks that sexual acts that are unnatural may also refer to sexual acts that are not destined for procreation.<sup>68</sup> Paul's theology of same-sex intercourse seems to be shaped by Genesis 1 and 2 with its understanding in terms of procreation and in terms of the legislation in Leviticus 20:13. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are more concerned with procreation than a sexual orientation.

<sup>63</sup> Gerrie Snyman, "Homosexuality – to bear the marks of a heterosexual reading" (Lecture presented at UNISA., 2008).

<sup>64</sup> Tessa Mackenzie, "A Brief Survey and Theological Study of the Biblical Passages relevant to Homosexuality," *The Pacific Journal Theology* 36 (2006): 135.

<sup>65</sup> White, "Does the Bible speak about gays or same-sex orientation? Part 1," 16.

<sup>66</sup> Mackenzie, "Biblical Passages relevant to Homosexuality," 137. There is insufficient evidence supporting Mackenzie's argument. He argues that Romans 1:18–3:20 is concerned with activities which contrast the sinfulness of non-Christians in the Greek and Roman society with behaviours expected of Christians.

<sup>67</sup> Snyman, "Homosexuality."

<sup>68</sup> Snyman, "Homosexuality."

## 7 Honour and shame theory

In the honour–shame model and theory, it is presupposed that biblical texts are shaped by their social and cultural context.<sup>69</sup> The underlying system of social values within which Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 must be construed, is the gender construction of maleness in a society where honour and shame are fundamental social values.<sup>70</sup> The honour and shame theory is based on a differentiation between masculinity and femininity. From the Mediterranean cultural point of view, masculinity is superior to femininity. In fact, it was regarded shameful and unholy for a man to act like a woman. Accordingly, a heterosexual male is defined as being the penetrator while the homosexual male is defined as being the penetrated one.<sup>71</sup> However, this line of thought contradicts the understanding of sexuality in terms of orientation.

Correspondingly, male rape served as a punitive form in the context of the Ancient Middle East.<sup>72</sup> Men who are penetrated during sexual intercourse are dishonoured. They are associated with women and transgendered to be equivalent to women, while they ceased to enjoy their rightful place in the society.<sup>73</sup> Scholars accept that honour indicated a social standing and a rightful place in ancient Near Eastern society, since values are culturally created.<sup>74</sup> The anthropological literature on Mediterranean and Middle Eastern honour and shame can be used to<sup>75</sup> to construct a social framework that depicts the

<sup>69</sup> Jennifer E. Robertson subscribes to Stiebert and Walsh's contention departing from the anthropological reading. See Jennifer E. Robertson, *Same-sex cultures and sexualities: an anthropological reader* (Blackwell: Malden, 2005), 17; Stiebert & Walsh, "Does the Hebrew Bible have anything to say about homosexuality?" 123.

<sup>70</sup> Stiebert & Walsh, "Does the Hebrew Bible have anything to say about homosexuality?" 145.

<sup>71</sup> Carden, "Homophobia and Rape in Sodom and Gibeah: A response to Ken Stone," 87

<sup>72</sup> David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 20; Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 1.

<sup>73</sup> See Arno Schmitt, "Different approaches to Male-male Sexuality/Eroticism from Morocco to Uzbekistan," in *Sexuality and Eroticism among Males in Moslem Societies* (eds. Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer, New York: Harrington Part Press, 1992), 7; Jehoeda Sofer, "Testimonies from the Holy land: Israeli and Palestinian Men Talk About their Sexual Encounters," in Schmitt and Sofer, 119; Unni Wikan, "Man Becomes Woman: Transsexualism in Oman as a Key to Gender Roles," *Man (New Series)* 12 (1977): 304–19; Philip P. Jenson, "Graduated Holiness," *Journal for the Study of Old Testament* 106 (Sheffield: JOST Press, 1992):83-91

<sup>74</sup> White, "Does the Bible speak about gays or same-sex orientation? A test case in Biblical ethics: Part 1," 16.

<sup>75</sup> Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, "Honour and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal values of the Mediterranean World," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. Jerome H. Neyrey, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 26.

homosexual act and rape as a process by which a male subject threatens the masculinity and honour of another male.<sup>76</sup>

Therefore it can be concluded that the texts of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 find their contexts in the religious landscape. The worship of Molech and foreign religious cults are behind the issues that are rejected in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The association of Romans 1:26–27 with Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 creates an allusion to unnatural and shameless acts and same–sex intercourse that is being objected to. Elements of homophobic violence and demonstration of victory over foreign enemies are foregrounded in the analysis of Genesis 19 and Judges 19 in relation to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. However, it is the lack of hospitality depicted in terms of male same–sex intercourse that is being objected to. Demonstration of power that is embedded in the honour and shame theory as the underlying factor in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, is rejected. In the light of the arguments raised, homosexuality as a love relationship is not rejected in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

## E CONCLUSION

The historical and cultural distance between the 21<sup>st</sup> century South African context and the times of ancient text production do not play a significant role in the MCSA's discussion of homosexuality and Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. As explored earlier on, differing ideological contestations in the MCSA discussions offer no substantial and sound rationale to reject homosexuality. But homosexuality as a love relationship is not a factor that the author of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 was concerned about either. The lack of reference to homosexuality as a sexual orientation and a love relationship in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 presents a major obstacle in accepting Scripture as normative in the discussion of homosexuality. In light of these findings, it seems the MCSA lacks a sound rationale in their rejection of homosexuality. In any case, acceptance or rejection of homosexuality as a love relationship cannot be based on Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

However, regarding homosexuality further intensive study on Africanisation and inculturation is seriously needed, as it concerns the matter of being context–oriented which is quite relevant for the discussion of homosexuality, especially in an African context. It is not a question of what is right or wrong, nor of what is normative, or what comprises the supreme rule of faith

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<sup>76</sup> Ken Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject–Honour, Object–Shame?" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 67 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995): 87–107. Stone later interpreted Judges 19 as reflecting men of Gibeah's attempt to humiliate and subordinate the Levite by treating him as a sexual object. In this case the honour of a male is threatened. See Ken Stone, *Sex, honour and power in the Deuteronomistic history* (California: William Carrey International University Press, 1996), 170.

and practice. These questions place Scripture on a supreme level which tend to ignore the ideological nature of the biblical texts.

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