

*Academic Statement
on the Ethics of
Free and Faithful
Same-Sex Relationships*

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Foreword

Krzysztof Charamsa

In this *time* of epoch-making challenge the *Academic Statement on the Ethics of Free and Faithful Same-Sex Relationships* offers a powerful intellectual and spiritual *manifesto* in favour of both non-heterosexual *people* and the community of the *Roman Catholic Church*. Let me reflect on these four elements: *time, message, people* and the *Roman Catholic Church*.

The time of the epochal challenge

When the Nicolaus Copernicus published *De revolutionibus orbium caelestium* in 1543, formulating the heliocentric theory, he dethroned Earth and humankind from their position at the centre of the universe and triggered a radical crisis in biblical cosmology. The doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church seemed to be in danger and it took well over two centuries for Copernicus’ book to be removed from the *Index of Forbidden Books*. The ecclesial reception of his discovery, and the consequent updating of biblical understanding, was lengthy, and in the process it cost the freedom of Galileo Galilei and the suffering of many. This was eventually acknowledged by the papacy itself, which in 2000 asked for forgiveness “for the violence some have used in the service of the truth”.¹

Later, in 1859, the publication by Charles Darwin of *On the Origin of Species*, outlining the basis of the theory of evolution, began the second great scientific revolution, and with it another challenge to the Roman Catholic Church. With Copernicus, the ancient geocentric cosmology supported by biblical interpretation fell; with Darwin, the traditional understanding of world history began to decline, undermining many certainties of biblical chronology. The biblical reference points concerning a definite beginning and end of the world slipped into indeterminacy. The entire understanding of reality

was changing, requiring “being” to make room for “becoming”. The problem of the coexistence of biblical creation with evolutionary development had to be resolved, something which is possible, contrary to the initial impressions of church authorities. The ecclesial confrontation with the sciences of evolution was also tortuous: only at the end of the twentieth century did the papacy recognise that the theory of evolution is more than a scientific hypothesis,² and therefore a religious faith which sees itself as in agreement with human reason cannot avoid integrating its findings.

The Copernican revolution forced us to change our understanding of humankind in space; the Darwinian revolution demanded a new understanding of humankind in history and time. Both revolutions demanded a revision of the biblical interpretations and theological formulations that had hitherto provided certainty to the minds of Christians, and any attempt at an objective assessment of their correctness caused ecclesial authorities to fear betraying revealed truth. The difficulty seemed insurmountable, nourishing suspicions against and rejections of scientific discoveries, for too long discredited as “passing fads”, “ideologies irreconcilable with the faith” or “hypotheses lacking certainty”. Fear paralysed for years the start of a serious dialogue with up-to-date scientific knowledge.

In the twentieth century, scientific research brought about a third epochal revolution, which no longer concerned the space of the universe, nor the history of humankind, but our most intimate dimension: sexuality. The shift in thinking now involves the construction and understanding of the persons themselves, their identity and dignity as sexual beings marked by a diversity of sexual orientations. Facing this new challenge is probably

A RELIGIOUS FAITH WHICH SEES ITSELF AS IN AGREEMENT WITH HUMAN REASON CANNOT AVOID INTEGRATING ITS FINDINGS

¹ John Paul II, “Homily for the Day of Pardon” (12 March 2000), at http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000312_pardon.html.

² John Paul II, “Messaggio ai membri della Pontificia Accademia delle Scienze” (22 October 1996), §4, at http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/messages/pont_messages/1996/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19961022_evoluzione.html.

even more difficult than the two previous revolutions, because it questions something central to being human: namely, being both an “individual” and “in relationships with others”. Once again, the age-old certainties and the hitherto unquestioned constants of our understanding of reality tremble before the challenge of discovery, with the mind of some Christians taking refuge more often than not in the rejection of developments in human knowledge.

In the past, biblical cosmology and historiography were in crisis, now biblical anthropology seems to be under threat. On that issue too the biblical message seems at first sight to contradict the findings of the human sciences. The Bible seems to oppose the fact that sexuality in its nature may not be defined by heterosexuality alone: instead, it includes a range of sexual orientations, among which is homosexuality. As with regard to the discoveries of the heliocentric system and the evolution of species, so too the contradiction between today’s understanding of human sexuality and the biblical message is only apparently insurmountable. The Word of God is in fact open to and prepared to accept the gifts of human reason regarding sexuality in general and same-sex sexual orientation in particular. The Church, therefore, is called once again to become aware of this openness of the revealed Word, a Word that is not afraid of the intelligibility and rationality of human knowledge. Before the *intelligentia fidei* lies the challenge of the third epochal revolution.

A message of hope in the hour of wavering certainties

The *Academic Statement on the Ethics of Free and Faithful Same-Sex Relationships* prepared under the auspices of the Wijngaards Institute for the Catholic Research prophetically captures the need for this critical hour in Christian history. The research concludes that “there are no grounds, either from science or from the Bible, to support the current Catholic teaching that every act of sexual intercourse has a procreative meaning and purpose, and that consequently same-sex acts are ‘intrinsically

disordered’ because they lack procreative meaning and purpose” (§1.5). Therefore, it is urgently recommended that “the competent authorities in the Catholic Church set up an official consultation process to seek the opinion of Christian theologians and experts in other relevant disciplines with regard to the ethics of same-sex relationships” (§2.1). In such a transparent process of ecclesial study, the scientific authorities consulted should represent the views of the majority of the relevant academic communities. It is the responsibility of the competent church authorities to issue a new pronouncement revising the current doctrinal and moral position in the light of current scientific and biblical knowledge. The present research can be considered the first step in this process of maturation.

Even in the event that the magisterial authority of the Church lacks absolute certainty about the new human and biblical knowledge on same-sex sexual orientation, it will not be possible to deny at least the existence of well-founded doubts about the validity of the traditional systematisation of Church knowledge on sexuality. The community of believers cannot neglect for generations to come the task of addressing the justified objections of the sciences and biblical studies in such a vital area as sexuality. One understands, therefore, the urgency of a serious and objective confrontation by the Church with the intelligibility of sexual orientation. Same-sex sexual orientation, like heterosexual orientation, is not a ‘tendency’, the result of an individual’s choice, of some defect or unnatural factor. Rather, same-sex sexual orientation is the natural capacity for a deep emotional, affective and sexual attraction *towards*, and intimate and sexual relationships *with*, individuals of the same sex. Today there is no longer any doubt that the variety of sexual orientations is much more than a scientific hypothesis, and as such it demands to be taken seriously by theological reflection.

It can be perceived that the need for a desired revision by the Church is also intrinsic to the official Roman Catholic position. Today it is becoming more common to admit that past certainties

THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN TODAY’S UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN SEXUALITY AND THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE IS ONLY APPARENTLY INSURMOUNTABLE

are being superseded, which can be illustrated with the following example. While the recent document on biblical anthropology of the Pontifical Biblical Commission definitively recognises that the biblical passage in Gen 19:1-29 has nothing to do with homosexuality, the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which is binding on all Catholics, still uses that passage as the first biblical step in condemning homosexuality as a grave depravity.³ This is just one of the doctrinal inconsistencies that – as recommended by the *Academic Statement on the Ethics of Free and Faithful Same-Sex Relationships* – now demand a thorough revision. Such a revision cannot be satisfied by merely passing over in silence the key passage responsible for a centuries-old homophobic interpretation of the biblical and post-biblical world.

Point by point the *Academic Statement* punctually demonstrates that the entire biblical argumentation long considered fundamental for the condemnation of homosexuality can no longer be considered as such in light of the development of the human sciences and biblical studies. In this sense, the Declaration adopts and develops the other principle recognised by the above-mentioned document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission: “the Bible does not speak of erotic inclination towards a person of the same sex, but only of homosexual acts. And it deals with these in a few texts, which differ in literary genre and importance”.⁴ Indeed, the biblical world could not have known same-sex sexual orientation as an essential characteristic of human sexuality. “While the biblical authors knew that some people were engaged in same-sex sexual activity, it is unlikely that any of them were aware that some people had what is now called a ‘homosexual orientation’, i.e. an innate, exclusive and permanent same-sex sexual attraction”.⁵

For ethics, as for anthropology, the lack of knowledge about sexual identity is an obvious problem: one cannot conclude an exact ethical evaluation of acts of a sexual nature without an adequate understanding of the sexual nature of the subject of the acts themselves (*agitur sequitur esse*). Biblical texts were based on a knowledge of sexuality specific to their time, and they need to be read on the basis of the greater knowledge we have today.

In favour of the human person

There is an important difference between the development of knowledge about our sexuality and that about the solar system or the evolution of species. In the past, scientific novelties could remain, all things considered, matters not of primary importance for the daily lives and spiritual experience of most people. In contrast, today the understanding of sexuality touches every human being and directly involves their daily experience of interpersonal, family, social and ecclesial relationships, their love life, and above all their positive acceptance of themselves, their identity and dignity. In this light, there is much greater urgency in religion’s duty to make sense of same-sex sexual orientation than in its duty to address the movements of the planets or the evolutionary developments of species. The right to a dignified life, an affective and psychosexual maturity free from unjustified conflicts of conscience, and a proper understanding of sexual rights and responsibilities, cannot wait unduly for a religious response consistent with up-to-date human and biblical knowledge.

The rigorous research offered in the *Academic Statement* is far from being an instance of sophisticated exegetical and theological output hardly accessible to non-specialists. In reality, behind ac-

³ Pontificia commissione biblica, *Che cosa è l'uomo? Un itinerario di antropologia biblica* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019), §§186-188, pp. 162-65, all translations from Italian mine; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1992), henceforth “CCC”, §2357.

⁴ *Che cosa è l'uomo?*, §185, p. 161.

⁵ Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research, “Christian Objections to Same Sex Relationships: An Academic Assessment. Interim Research Report” (April 2021), §5.1, at https://www.wijngaardsinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/christian_same_sex_relationships_interim_report.pdf.

ademia there are people, and *academia* empathically stands on the side of people, especially when they represent the minority, the “last ones” who are, and must be, the primary concern of the Church. When people suffer, because they feel discriminated against and persecuted, rejected or marginalised because of doctrines, laws and disciplines, about whose correctness there are now well-founded doubts, the competent Church authorities have a religious and Christian duty to carefully and empathetically revise them.

A gift and a commitment for the Roman Catholic Church

The *Academic Statement on the Ethics of Free and Faithful Same-Sex Relationships* is a gift and a commitment to the Church desired by Pope Francis. Exegetes and theologians, aware of their scientific and Christian responsibility, address themselves to that “Church which ‘goes forth’ [which] boldly take the initiative”.⁶ Their work “help[s] ‘the judgment of the Church to mature’”, a Church which “needs to grow in its interpretation of the revealed Word and in its understanding of the truth”,⁷ because “Christian doctrine is not a closed system, incapable of raising questions, doubts, inquiries, but is living”.⁸

By presenting the progress of the humanities and biblical sciences to the Church, the signatories perform an act of intellectual honesty and trust in the Church as described with prophetic zeal by Pope Francis:

⁶ “*Evangelii gaudium*: Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World” [*Evangelii gaudium*] (24 November 2013), §24, at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

⁷ *Evangelii gaudium*, §40.

⁸ Pope Francis, “Address to the Participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church” (10 November 2015), §14, at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151110_firenze-convegno-chiesa-italiana.html.

⁹ *Evangelii gaudium*, §243.

¹⁰ “Discorso ai redattori e collaboratori della rivista ‘Aggiornamenti sociali’” (6 December 2019), available at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2019/december/documents/papa-francesco_20191206_rivista.html.

¹¹ *Evangelii gaudium*, §231.

The Church has no wish to hold back the marvellous progress of science. On the contrary, she rejoices and even delights in acknowledging the enormous potential that God has given to the human mind. Whenever the sciences – rigorously focused on their specific field of inquiry – arrive at a conclusion which reason cannot refute, faith does not contradict it.⁹

The Pope himself anticipates a positive ecclesial response to the competent requests:

Listening means allowing oneself to be hit by reality. [L]istening must be the first step, but it must be done with an open mind and heart, without prejudice. [...] If I must listen, I must accept reality as it is, to see what my response should be [...] without preconceptions or pre-established positions, [and without] dogmatic prejudices.¹⁰

This academic research deals with the most intimate reality of the human person, and “realities are greater than ideas”¹¹:

Realities simply are, whereas ideas are worked out. There has to be continuous dialogue between the two, lest ideas become detached from realities. It is dangerous to dwell in the realm of words alone, of images and rhetoric. [...] Ideas – conceptual

elaborations – are at the service of communication, understanding, and praxis.¹²

Today the precious living “idea”, which for Roman Catholics is the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, must face the anthropological challenge of sexuality. Pope Francis grasps this challenge with full awareness:

human self-understanding changes with time and so also human consciousness deepens. Let us think of when slavery was accepted or the death penalty was allowed without any problem. So we grow in the understanding of the truth. [...] After all, in every age of history, humans try to understand and express themselves better. So human beings in time change the way they perceive themselves. [...] In thinking of the human being, therefore, the church should strive for genius and not for decadence. [...] The thinking of the church must recover genius and better understand how human beings understand themselves today, in order to develop and deepen the church’s teaching.¹³

Accepting the human sciences on sexuality and seriously confronting them with the revealed Word, with the competent help of exegetes, theologians and scientists, is part of the called-for genius of a Church capable of courage and evangelical prophecy. Only such a strong spiritual identity makes it

possible to grow in understanding of something which may once have been thought of as certain, just as in the past it seemed unimaginable that the discoveries of the Roman Catholic Nicolaus Copernicus and the Anglican Charles Darwin could be compatible with the truth of the Christian faith.

The confrontation of revealed truth, of which the community of Christians is the custodian, with the expertise of the human and exegetical sciences in the field of sexuality, solidly summarised by the *Academic Statement*, will allow us to consolidate and improve the current conceptualisation of Christian sexual ethics and its vision of the human being created by and for God’s love. Today’s scientific understanding of innate sexual orientations helps us to grasp the true starting point and the heart of religious anthropology: the person created in the image of God, who is the pure Relationality of Love. The Bible does not settle the scientific question of how human sexuality is structured, but it teaches us the starting point and ultimate purpose of sexuality: love. In his time, the Roman Catholic Galileo Galilei defended the insight that the Bible shows the way to go to heaven, not the way the heavens go. The first is the task of religion, the second is the competence of science. Today we are called to follow the same principle with regard to the universe of human sexuality: the Bible teaches us how one’s sexuality is realised in love, and not how it exists in its differentiated nature. The former is the task of religion, the latter the indispensable contribution of the human sciences.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Antonio Spadaro, “Interview with Pope Francis,” 19 August 2013, §§96–99 (section entitled “Human Self-Understanding”), at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html.

Introduction

Luca Badini Confalonieri

“Catholic moral teaching on [homosexuality] will be intellectually marginalized to the extent that it avoids engaging with the experiences of the people and the human sciences that reflect on them.

Moreover, the dialogue with the exegetical and moral theological knowledge of the last decades must be such as not to preclude from the outset progress in learning and knowledge.

Rt Rev. Dr. Franz-Josef Overbeck
Catholic bishop of Essen, Germany, 2019

The past few decades have seen a remarkable increase in the social acceptance of LGBT people. Such a change “is why the moral question of homosexuality is no longer about its acceptability, but about the [Catholic] Church’s opposition to it, about the [Catholic] Church’s homophobia”.¹

The contours of such homophobia are well known: current papal teaching strongly condemns same-sex acts and relationships.² That teaching is reinstated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*³ – the official document used to inform all Catholics of the main tenets of their faith – and it is reiterated throughout the worldwide network of Roman Catholic parishes, schools, universities, and so on. The reach of the Roman Catholic Church is momentous, and so is the harm it inflicts on LGBT people. To this day, the latter are regu-

larly subjected to verbal and physical abuse, employment discrimination, firing, and even death.

The most comprehensive official exposition of the papal arguments dates back to 1986.⁴ Its condemnation of same-sex acts is based on two main arguments: that the bible prohibits them; and that they are biologically infertile, and so unable to fulfill “procreation”, regarded as a necessary “finality” of each and every act of sexual intercourse. Therefore, papal teaching concludes that the “homosexual orientation” is “objectively disordered” (CCC §2358); “homosexual acts” are “intrinsically disordered” (CCC §2357); and “homosexual unions” are harmful to all involved (*Considerations* §§7-8).

Those momentous claims are simply asserted with little attempt at justifying them on the basis of relevant evidence, despite the fact those papal teachings themselves explicitly and repeatedly claim to be accessible to human reason and in agreement with the natural sciences.

We are now in a better position since those papal claims were formulated to evaluate them. The sciences of biology, psychology, sociology, and genetics have made significant progress towards understanding the causes, purposes, and consequences of sexual orientation. The legalization of same-sex marriage in many countries also offers evidence to evaluate papal assumptions on the sociological consequences of same sex relationships.

1 Gerard Loughlin, “Catholic Homophobia”, *Theology* 121, no. 3 (1 May 2018), p. 189.

2 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (henceforth “CDF”), “*Persona Humana: Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*” (29 Dec. 1975), henceforth “PH”, §8; “*Homosexualitatis Problema: On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*” (1 Oct. 1986), henceforth “HP”, §3.

3 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), henceforth “CCC”, §2358.

4 CDF, HP, which expanded on PH. In turn, both documents were based on Paul VI, “*Humanae Vitae: On the Regulation of Birth*” (25 Jul. 1968), henceforth “HV”. Other documents on the issue which the CDF has published since HP do not substantially expand the reasons provided in that document for a negative moral evaluation of all homosexual relationship as intrinsically immoral: “Some Considerations Concerning the Catholic Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons” (24 Jul. 1992); “Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons” (3 Jun. 2003), henceforth “*Considerations*”; “Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of Their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders” (31 Aug. 2005); “*Responsum* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to a *dubium* regarding the blessing of the unions of persons of the same sex” (15 Mar. 2021).

The same can be said of biblical studies on what the Bible affirms with regard to the meanings and purposes of human sexuality in general, and same-sex behavior in particular. Significantly, the biblical arguments in support of condemning same-sex relationships are shared by other mainstream Christian Churches, where they often play a crucial role. For example, it was the bible the principal reason why, in 2013, the “House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality” set up by the Church of England could not find unanimity with regard to same-sex relationships, in what is to this day one of the most comprehensive research reports on human sexuality and marriage officially commissioned by any Christian Church.⁵ One of its eight members, a bishop, refused to endorse the report’s conclusions primarily on biblical grounds, which he laid out in a dissenting statement appended to the report.⁶ And the bible appears once again to be the main dividing factor in the *Living in Love and Faith* report published in November 2020 by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England.⁷

For many Christian leaders, any systematic review of those biblical texts would be tantamount

to putting into doubt the supposedly clear and unequivocal biblical condemnation of homosexual acts. And so the bible remains one of the key obstacles to reform, not just within Catholicism but for many other Christian denominations.

RECENT RESEARCH HAS CONFIRMED THAT THE BIBLE CONTAINS NO CONDEMNATION OF FREE AND LIFE-LONG SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

Yet in the entire bible, only five short passages have been identified as potentially referring to consensual same-sex behaviour, the so called “clobber texts”: two parallel verses from the book of Leviticus, and three from the letters of Paul the apostle. They have been quoted time and again in official church documents as biblical justifications for prohibiting same-sex relationships.

Their influence extends to popular culture. In 2000, *The West Wing*, a popular TV series on American politics, presented a short but powerful exchange involving a conservative Christian and a fictitious President of the United States in which the latter criticises the former’s interpretation of Leviticus 18:22 as banning same-sex relationships.⁸ Said exchange, itself based on a much forwarded email, has since become a popular internet meme still widely shared over the web, more than 20 years after its first airing on TV.

5 House of Bishops of the Church of England, *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality* (London: Church House Publishing, 2013).

6 Keith Sinclair, “Scripture and Same Sex Relationships”, in *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality*, ed. House of Bishops of the Church of England (London: Church House Publishing, 2013), 158–72.

7 House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England, *Living in Love and Faith. Christian Teaching and Learning about Identity, Sexuality, Relationships and Marriage* (London: Church House Publishing, 2020), <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/LLF%20Web%20Version%20Full%20Final.pdf>. Religion Media Centre, “Living in Love and Faith”, 12 Feb 2020, <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/living-in-love-and-faith/>: “Interpretation of biblical texts lies at the heart of the dispute, with traditionalists taking literally a text which calls homosexual acts an ‘abomination’ and others seeing this as a code written at a particular time in history, while the thrust of Christian teaching is for love, tolerance and understanding”. Immediately after the publication of *Living in Love and Faith*, “Julian Henderson, the bishop of Blackburn and president of the conservative Church of England Evangelical Council, said: ‘While discussions about these issues are always welcome ... this is actually about obedience to scripture.’” Harriet Sherwood, “Church of England could rethink stance on LGBTQ+ issues by 2022”, *The Guardian* (9 Nov. 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/09/church-of-england-could-rethink-stance-on-lgbtq-issues-by-2022>.

8 “The Midterms”, *The West Wing: Complete Season 2* (2003), DVD (originally broadcast 18 Oct. 2000), extract available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSXJzybEeJM>.

Again, in February 2016, Manny Pacquiao – then member of parliament in the Philippines and a boxing star – caused controversy by posting on his Instagram account a quote of Leviticus 20:13 calling for the death penalty for homosexuality, as well as quotes from Leviticus 18:22 and 1 Cor. 6:9. The event received widespread worldwide coverage: “Pacquiao’s post was up for about two hours and got more than 18,000 likes before being deleted”, the *Los Angeles Times* reported.⁹ Mr Pacquiao later uploaded another short Instagram post where, while apologising for the offense caused, he reiterated: “I’m against same sex marriage because of what the Bible says”.¹⁰

An analogous incident occurred in April 2019, when Australian rugby union star Israel Folau wrote on his Instagram account – followed by more than 360,000 people – that “homosexuals” would be condemned to “hell” unless they “repent”.¹¹ Mr Folau responded to the backlash by insisting he was standing by “what the Bible says”.¹²

He was eventually sacked, and the Australian Christian Lobby raised A\$2m within 48 hours to help fund Mr Folau’s legal defence in the court case which ensued.¹³

Given the traction that such biblical interpretations still have on a not irrelevant number of Christians, it is not futile to address them, this time in a joint academic statement. Particularly so in view of the fact that biblical research has recently produced ground-breaking findings whose revolutionary potential cannot be overstated. They finally make it possible to confirm that the two key verses in Leviticus – and, more generally, the entire Hebrew Bible – do not prohibit, much less condemn, free and faithful same-sex relationships. And they also allow a similar degree of confidence with regard to all three passages from the apostle Paul.¹⁴

Also of note is that much of that crucial research has only been published over the past two years – indeed, the most comprehensive

analysis so far of the two Leviticus verses was only published in March 2020 – and so they are still only known within academic circles. They have not yet been picked up by church leaders, official church documents, or the media.¹⁵

Since August 2018 the Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research – a UK-based non-profit think tank – has been coordinating an interdisciplinary panel of twenty academics to examine the main Christian objections to same-sex relationships. Among them, particular attention has been paid to current papal teaching, and within it to the biblical arguments specifically, for the reasons just outlined.

The conclusions are outlined in a research report on which the present *Academic Statement* is based.¹⁶ The statement itself includes a concise “Summary of Findings”, followed by “Recommendations.” Those two sections have been agreed and endorsed both by the twenty con-

tributing academics, and by all academic co-signatories.

A third and final section is entitled “Assessment of the Official Papal Arguments against Same-sex Relationships.” It offers a more detailed explanation of the “Summary of Findings” aimed at addressing the current papal position on that issue. This final section has been endorsed only by the original contributing academics, and peer-reviewed by the co-signatories.

One of the goals of the report and accompanying academic statement is to help accelerate the dissemination of the recent findings from biblical studies by bringing them to the attention of the Catholic hierarchy in general, and the relevant Vatican institutions more specifically. Similarly, we hope that other Christian Churches debating the morality of same-sex relationships will find them of interest. At the same time, the research report will remain open to updates should new evidence emerge.

9 Chuck Schilken, “Manny Pacquiao Posts Bible Verse That States Gay People Should Be Killed”, *Los Angeles Times* (18 Feb. 2016), <https://www.latimes.com/sports/la-sp-sn-manny-pacquiao-bible-instagram-20160218-story.html>.

10 Cindy Boren, “Manny Pacquiao Defends Stance on Gay Marriage with Bible Verse”, *The Washington Post* (18 Feb. 2016), www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2016/02/18/manny-pacquiao-defends-stance-on-gay-marriage-with-bible-verse/; Guardian sport, “Manny Pacquiao Provokes Storm by Calling Gay People ‘Worse than Animals’”, *The Guardian* (16 Feb. 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/feb/16/manny-pacquiao-gay-people-worse-than-animals>; Manny Pacquiao, *Instagram* (16 Feb. 2016), <https://www.instagram.com/p/BB2BsT7udzM/>.

11 Tacey Rychter, “Australian Rugby Star’s Contract to Be Terminated Over Anti-Gay Comments”, *New York Times* (11 Apr. 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/11/world/australia/israel-folau-rugby-contract.html>.

12 “Israel Folau: Australia end player’s contract over anti-gay message”, *BBC Sport* (15 Apr. 2019), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/rugby-union/47932231>.

13 “Israel Folau: Rugby star recoups donations in sacking row”, *BBC News* (25 Jun. 2019), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-48753566>; Australian Associated Press, “Israel Folau reportedly tells Australian Christian Lobby he would ‘absolutely’ repeat anti-gay posts”, *The Guardian* (19 Oct. 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2019/oct/19/israel-folau-reportedly-tells-australian-christian-lobby-he-would-absolutely-repeat-anti-gay-posts>.

14 See Bruce Wells, “On the Beds of a Woman: The Leviticus Texts on Same-Sex Relations Reconsidered,” in *Sexuality and Law in the Torah*, ed. Hilary Lipka and Bruce Wells, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), pp. 123-58; Brett Provance, “Romans 1:26–27 in Its Rhetorical Tradition”, in *Greco-Roman and Jewish Tributaries to the New Testament. Festschrift in Honor of Gregory J. Riley*, ed. Christopher S. Crawford, Claremont Studies in New Testament and Christian Origins vol. 4 (Claremont, CA: Claremont Press, 2018), pp. 83–116.

15 So recent are those publications have been, that it has been impossible for them to be considered by the above mentioned *Living in Love and Faith*, the most comprehensive official church report on the issue published in November 2020 (but whose findings were finalized in 2019 after almost two year of research, consultation, and dialogue), or indeed by the December 2019 book-length report by the Pontificia commissione biblica, *Che cosa è l'uomo? Un itinerario di antropologia biblica* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019).

16 Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research, “Christian Objections to Same Sex Relationships: An Academic Assessment. Interim Research Report”, at https://www.wijngaardsinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/christian_same_sex_relationships_interim_report.pdf.

1. Summary of Findings¹

1.1. Some Persons Are Non-heterosexual in Orientation.

Sexual orientation is one's degree of sexual attraction to persons of the opposite sex, the same sex, or both sexes. It is manifested in physiological sexual arousal patterns to male or female erotic stimuli. In turn, sexual attraction motivates sexual behaviour, and both influence sexual identity. No evidence exists to suggest that individuals can consciously alter their genital arousal patterns to change their sexual orientation or identity.

Sexual orientation is largely determined during pregnancy, by factors which are genetic and hormonal rather than social. In a significant minority of cases, such an orientation is non-heterosexual. Like other forms of non-heterosexuality, homosexuality is a "natural variation within the range of human sexuality".²

Because sexual orientation is largely determined during pregnancy through genetic and hormonal factors, it is not the result of a free choice. Non-heterosexual people are no more responsible for their sexual orientation than heterosexual people are for theirs.

1.2. Papal Teaching.

Current papal teaching condemns same-sex orientation as "objectively disordered", and same-sex

acts as always "intrinsically disordered" (*PH* §8, *HP* §3, and *CCC* §2358).

Papal teaching provides two types of arguments for this teaching, both of which are unsupported by the relevant evidence.

1.3. The Biological Argument.

Same-sex acts are "intrinsically disordered" because they are incapable of biological procreation, regarded as "an essential and indispensable finality" of every act of sexual intercourse (*PH* §8, also *HP* §3, *HV* §3, *CCC* §§2357, 2366).

However, the natural sciences show that the vast majority of acts of heterosexual intercourse do not have the biological capacity for procreation, and therefore they cannot have procreation as their proper "finality." In this, non-heterosexual "acts" are not different from the vast majority of heterosexual "acts": in both cases, they are biologically incapable of procreation.

Moreover, current papal teaching regards heterosexual marital intercourse as ethically legitimate even when there is no possibility of procreation (*HV* §11). Likewise, Catholic theology and Canon Law maintain that the capacity for biological procreation is not even necessary for sacramental marriage: "Sterility neither prohibits nor nullifies marriage" (*Codex Iuris Canonici* §1084.3).

NO EVIDENCE EXISTS TO SUGGEST THAT INDIVIDUALS CAN CONSCIOUSLY ALTER THEIR GENITAL AROUSAL PATTERNS TO CHANGE THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR IDENTITY

THE PAPAL CONDEMNATION IS BASED ON THE BELIEF THAT PROCREATION IS AN "ESSENTIAL AND INDISPENSABLE" FINALITY OF EACH AND EVERY ACT OF SEX

Individual sexual acts in particular, and marriage in general, include moral ends other than procreation. Non-heterosexual acts and relationships, too, can include the same non-conceptive moral ends.

Thus it is incorrect to condemn them as intrinsically evil for not being "ordered *per se* [i.e. in and of themselves] to the procreation of human life" (*CCC* §2366, quoting *HV* §11), because biologically incapable of it.

1.4. The Biblical Argument.

Papal teaching asserts that the Bible condemns same-sex sexual activity. It points to Genesis 19-1:29, Leviticus 18:20 and parallel 20:13 in the Hebrew Bible; and to Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; and 1 Timothy 1:10 in the New Testament.

However, those verses only refer to specific kinds of male same-sex sexual activity and none of them condemns male same-sex relationships in general (see §3 for a summary of recent research).

In the world inhabited by the biblical authors, male same-sex sexual activity was expressed through sexual relationships which were ordinarily temporary (i.e. not lifelong), not free, and even exploitative, due to imbalances of age, status, and power. Therefore, no biblical passage condemning male same-sex sexual activity is relevant for moral-

ly evaluating free and faithful male same-sex relationships.

Also significant is that nowhere in the Bible is female same-sex behaviour explicitly condemned.

Finally, nowhere in the bible is procreation required to be present in each and every sexual act, or in the life of a couple. The Bible emphasizes that human sexuality in general, and marriage specifically, are no less for companionship and mutual help (Genesis 2:18, 24).

1.5. Conclusions.

There are no grounds, either from the sciences or from the Bible, to support current Catholic teaching that each and every act of sexual intercourse has a procreative significance and finality, and that

consequently same-sex acts are "intrinsically disordered" because they lack a procreative significance and finality.

The criteria for morally evaluating same-sex relationships and sexual acts should be the same as those used for morally evaluating heterosexual relationships and sexual acts.

Homosexual relationships can be as life-giving and blessed as their heterosexual counterparts. They can fulfil one or more of human sexuality's non-conceptive meanings, including pleasure, love, comfort, celebration, friendship, and companionship.

¹ The paragraph numbers in italics in square brackets refer to the relevant section of the Research Report, which provides the evidence backing the statement, e.g. [RR §2].

² World Medical Association, "Statement on Natural Variations of Human Sexuality" (Oct. 2013); see also Dinesh Bhugra et al., "WPA Position Statement on Gender Identity and Same-Sex Orientation, Attraction and Behaviours," *World Psychiatry* 15, no. 3 (2016), 299-300.

“The life and love of same-sex couples are worth no less before God than the life and love of any other couple”.

Stellungnahme zum „Responsum“ der Glaubenskongregation [“Statement on the ‘Responsum’ of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith”] (21 Mar. 2021), signed by 212 professors of Catholic theology.

2. Recommendations

2.1. Official Consultation Process. In view of the harmful consequences of Catholic teaching on people with a non-heterosexual sexual orientation, the global reach of Catholic-run institutions, and that the topic has already been extensively researched, we recommend as a matter of urgency that the competent authorities in the Catholic Church set up an official consultation process to seek the opinion of Christian theologians and experts in other relevant disciplines with regard to the ethics of same-sex relationships.

Regardless of the consultation process adopted, the opinions gathered should be independent, representative of the majority view of the pertinent academic communities, and made public.

In case of a lack of unanimity, the names and arguments of those who disagree with the majority opinion should also be made public.

The present report can be regarded as the initial step towards such a consultation process.

2.2. Official Magisterial Document. Should the evidence and arguments put forward in the Wijngaards Institute's report be endorsed by

the consultation process, an official magisterial document should revoke the absolute condemnation of free, faithful, and lifelong non-heterosexual relationships, and set out the criteria for their moral evaluation, pastoral accompaniment, and liturgical celebration.

2.3. Bishops Conferences. Independent of an official magisterial document, national episcopal conferences should recommend that Catholic-run institutions immediately stop any employment practice discriminating against non-heterosexual people.

2.4. Elimination of Discriminatory Practices. Acceptance of *Humanae Vitae* and *Homosexualitatis Problema* as a mark of orthodoxy should be removed from all selection procedures, including that of bishops, candidates to the priesthood, and all staff of Catholic institutions.

2.5. Restitution. Where possible, damage to the careers of employees at Catholic institutions and Catholic scholars who have been censured for speaking out in defence of the morality of free, faithful, and lifelong same-sex relationships should be recognized and corrected.

3. Assessment of the Official Papal Arguments Against Same-Sex Relationships

3.1. The “Natural Law” Argument: Same-sex Relationships Are Immoral Because They Are Infertile [RR §2]

Papal teaching maintains that same-sex relationships are incapable of biological procreation, regarded as a “natural,” essential finality of every act of sexual intercourse. “Homosexual activity is not a complementary union, able to transmit life...” (HP §7), and so same-sex “unions are not able to contribute in a proper way to the procreation and survival of the human race” (*Considerations* §7).

This is based on the belief that the biological “laws of conception” (HV §13, see §10) show that each and every act of sexual intercourse has procreation as its natural “finality” and “significance” (HV §§3, 12). From such a belief, the moral requirement is inferred that couples engaging in sexual intercourse must always be open to procreation.

This argument contains the following errors.

3.1.1. No act of sexual intercourse has an independent biological “capacity” for procreation, and so it cannot be said to always have procreation as its finality [RR §4.1].

The causal relationship between insemination and, on the other hand, fertilization, implantation, and ultimately procreation, is not necessary, but statistical. If it were not so, every act of insemination would result in a conception.

Consequently, the biological “capacity” for procreation of any given act of heterosexual intercourse is relative, i.e., dependent on the statistical fulfilment of numerous conditions. No act of heterosexual intercourse has an independent

biological “capacity” for procreation, and so it cannot be said to always have procreation as its “finality.”

In practice, this means that the vast majority of acts of heterosexual intercourse have neither the biological capacity nor a finality to procreate and, in that respect, they are identical to non-heterosexual sexual acts.

3.1.2. The papal argument contradicts the biblical view about the multiple ends of human sexuality [RR §4.6].

The Hebrew Bible affirms that the finality of human sexuality comprise companionship, mutual help (Genesis 2:18, 24), and physical pleasure (Song of Songs 5:1; Proverbs 5:18-19).

Significantly, procreation is not included in the foundational passage of Genesis 2:18-24. In Genesis 1:28, where it is mentioned, it is described as a blessing. Likewise, nowhere in the New Testament is the capacity, or intention, of procreation mandated as an essential requirement for marriage in general or for each and every sexual act specifically.

Therefore, the papal axiom that “openness to procreation” is an essential requirement of each and every act of sexual intercourse does not conform to the biblical teaching.

In summary, the Bible endorses moral ends of sexual activity other than procreation. Same-sex sexual activity can fulfil those non-conceptive moral ends of human sexuality.

3.1.3 Other scientific disciplines confirm that human sexuality has important purposes different from procreation [RR §§4.3-4.4].

“The document lacks scientific basis, theological nuance and ethical caution. [...] I myself know gay couples, in civil marriages with children, who form a warm and stable family [...]. Who has an interest in denying that no resemblance or analogy to heterosexual marriage is possible here?”

Bishop Johan Bonny of Antwerp, Belgium, in an op-ed dated 17 Mar. 2021, referring to the 15 Mar. 2021 “Responsum” by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith prohibiting blessings of same-sex unions (photo © Diocese of Antwerp).



That human sexuality includes non-conceptive ends independent from procreation and aimed instead at strengthening pair-bonding is confirmed by the evolutionary biology of human reproduction, psychology, and sociology, among other disciplines.

3.1.4. The papal argument contradicts mainstream Catholic theology, Canon Law, and papal teaching itself, which do not regard infertility as an obstacle to marriage [RR §4.5].

In agreement with the biblical evidence, both mainstream Catholic theology and Canon Law maintain that the capacity for biological procreation is not necessary for a sacramental marriage: “Sterility neither prohibits nor nullifies marriage” (*Codex Iuris Canonici* §1084.3).

Similarly, in 1951 Pope Pius XII argued that fertile (married) heterosexual couples could be excused from the duty of procreation, even for the lifetime of a marriage, if they have serious reasons of a “medical, eugenic, economic, or social” kind.¹

In 1968, Paul VI repeated that position, and added that “Sexual activity [of husband and wife] does not [...] cease to be legitimate even when, for reasons independent of their will, it is foreseen to be infertile” (*HV* §11).

In a 2016 document summarizing the conclusions of the International Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis also condemned the presentation of marriage “in such a way that its unitive meaning, its call to grow in love and its ideal of mutual assistance are overshadowed by an almost exclusive insistence on the duty of procreation” (*Amoris Laetitia* [AL] §36).

It further observed that “procreation” and “motherhood” are not solely “biological realities”

(AL §178), and they “are not the only ways of experiencing the fruitfulness of love:” such fruitfulness can also be expressed through adoption, or simply by contributing to society (AL §181). Both non-heterosexual and heterosexual relationships are capable of that kind of fruitfulness.

**SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS ARE
CONDEMNED BECAUSE THEY LACK THE
BIOLOGICAL CAPACITY TO REPRODUCE.
YET STERILITY IS NO OBSTACLE TO
HETEROSEXUAL MARRIAGE.**

3.1.5. Unfounded Assumptions on the Harmful Consequences of Same-sex Unions on the Partners, Children, and Society.

Papal teaching also contends same-sex unions are “harmful” to the partners themselves and to the “proper development of human society” in general, and do “violence” to the “normal development of children who would be placed in the care of such persons” (*Considerations* §§7-8). Such contentions are not supported by the psychological and sociological evidence currently available.

3.1.6. Conclusion.

What we know from the human sciences about the multiple dimensions and meanings of human sexuality contradicts the Vatican’s absolute condemnation of all same-sex acts.³ The fact that same-sex relationships “are not able to contribute in a proper way to the procreation and survival of the human race” (*Considerations 2003* §7) does not make them intrinsically immoral. Both same-sex and heterosexual relationships are capable of being fruitful in a broad sense: for the partners, their children if they procreate, adopt, or foster, and for society at large.

¹ Pius XII, “Discorso di Sua Santità Pio PP. XII alle partecipanti al congresso della Unione Cattolica Italiana Ostetriche” (29 Oct. 1951).

² What *Amoris Laetitia* affirms there can be applied to “parenthood” in general, that is to fatherhood as well as motherhood.

³ The January 2020 Working Paper “Living in Successful Relationships” of the Synodal Way of the German Catholic Church concluded that “The normative postulates of current Catholic sexual morality contradict the knowledge of the human sciences on the multiple dimensions of meaning of human sexuality.” It further noted that “[R]elationships in which values such as love, friendship, reliability, fidelity, and mutual dedication are lived deserve recognition from the moral point of view.” Both conclusions are in line with the research summarized in this statement.

3.2. The Biblical Argument: Same-sex Relationships Are Immoral Because They Are Condemned in the Bible [RR §2]

3.2.1. The second papal argument for prohibiting same-sex sexual activity is that they are supposedly condemned in select biblical passages. These are: Genesis 19:1-29, Leviticus 18:20 and parallel 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10; and Romans 1:26-27.

3.2.2. Female same-sex sexuality.

All those verses refer only to male same-sex behaviour: nowhere in the Bible is female same-sex behaviour explicitly prohibited or condemned. Especially significant is its absence from the code on sexual purity which lists unlawful sexual behaviours of both men and women (Leviticus 18:1-30). In the New Testament, Romans 1:26 mentions women’s “unnatural relations”, without further specification. As noted below (§3.2.7), this is a likely reference to ante-diluvian women having intercourse with angelic beings (Genesis 6:1-4).

3.2.3. No biblical passage condemning male same sex activity is relevant for morally evaluating free and faithful same-sex relationships.

In the world inhabited by the biblical authors, male same-sex behaviour was expressed ordinarily through sexual relationships which were temporary (i.e. not lifelong), not free, and even exploitative, due to imbalances of age, status, and power. Therefore,

no biblical passage condemning male same-sex activity is relevant for morally evaluating free and faithful male same-sex relationships [RR §5.1].

3.2.4. Genesis 19:1-29.

To interpret that event as a condemnation of male same-sex sexual acts goes against the biblical text. That passage does not describe consensual sexual activity, but rather the attempted gang rape by Sodom’s men of Lot’s visiting angelic guests – a “wicked thing” compounded by its breach of the duty of hospitality (verses 7-8). Nor was that particular event what sealed Sodom’s fate: by the time it happened, God had already decided to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah on the basis that all its inhabitants – women and men – had been guilty of an undefined “grievous sin;” despite Abraham’s entreaties for mercy, God could not even find ten righteous people among them (Genesis 18:16-33). That is confirmed elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, where reference to Sodom’s destruction is interpreted as punishment for arrogance, and an uncaring attitude towards the poor and needy (Ezekiel 16:48-50).

**NOWHERE IN THE BIBLE IS
FEMALE SAME-SEX BEHAVIOUR
EXPLICITLY PROHIBITED OR
CONDEMNED.**

**THAT THE PROHIBITION IN
LEVITICUS 18:22 ADDRESSED A
SPECIFIC TYPE OF MALE SAME-
SEX RELATIONSHIP SUGGESTS
THAT SAME-SEX INTERCOURSE
WITH MALES OUTSIDE THE
FORBIDDEN CATEGORY WAS
VIEWED AS PERMISSIBLE.**

3.2.5. Leviticus 18:20 and parallel 20:13.

Their traditional interpretation as condemning all male same-sex sexual activity is based on a mistranslation which is no longer tenable. Rather, the prohibition is limited to a specific type of male same-sex relationship. Those are likely to be relationships with males who are married

(condemned as adulterous), or unmarried but under the sexual guardianship of a Judean woman (condemned as incestuous).

Regardless of its exact object, the fact that the prohibition addressed a specific type of male same-sex relationship suggests that same-sex intercourse with males outside the forbidden category was viewed as permissible [RR §5.3].

3.2.6. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; and 1 Timothy 1:10.

These passages are part of two “vice lists” detailing the kind of sinners who will not enter heaven.

Both passages include the rare Greek term “arsenokoitai” (lit. “male-bedders”); in 1 Corinthians 6:9 this is immediately preceded by the term “malakoi” (lit. “softies” or “effeminates”).

The word “arsenokoitai” is very rare, but recent research suggests it likely refers to the active partner in male same-sex intercourse.

The literary meaning must be understood within its cultural context. In the Greco-Roman world of Paul’s time, socially dominant men, generally married, had sex regularly with their slaves or prostitutes, boys as well as men, and would ordinarily take the active role. Their subordinates had little or no choice. Given this context, Paul’s condemnation of “male bedders” likely referred to those socially dominant men’s role and responsibility in exploitative, and often adulterous, male same-sex intercourse.

This is supported by the rhetorical context of both vice lists. In 1 Corinthians 6, the purpose of the list is to illustrate Paul’s broader argument: that being Christian requires acting with justice (1 Corinthians 6:7-8). “Male-bedders” can only be

regarded as acting unjustly if the reference is to the kind of male same-sex sexual activities most common in the Greco-Roman world of Paul’s time, which were exploitative [RR §5.4].

In 1 Timothy 1:10 the biblical author mentions “fornicators, male-bedders, slave-traders...”. It has long been noted that the structure of the broader vice list of vv. 9-11 appears to mirror the Decalogue. If the reference to the Decalogue is intentional, it suggests that the author of 1 Timothy regarded “male-bedders” (together with “fornicators”) as representatives of adulterers, i.e., those acting against the seventh commandment. Therefore, the “male-bedders” in view there are likely the active partners in male same-sex sexual intercourse who were ordinarily in heterosexual marriage but who, because of their dominant social position, could and did have sexual intercourse with male slaves or prostitutes on a regular basis. This is further supported by the fact that the term immediately following “male bedders” is “slave-traders,” who were notoriously involved in the sex trade [RR §5.5].

PAUL’S CONDEMNATION OF “MALE BEDDERS” LIKELY REFERRED TO SOCIALLY DOMINANT MEN IN EXPLOITATIVE, AND OFTEN ADULTEROUS, SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS.

In contrast, the Greek word “malakoi,” best translated as “effeminates,” was widely used and had a broad range of meanings denoting people with character traits regarded as womanly. It could be used to denote people who were “weak-willed” or “lacking self-restraint.” In the sexual domain, the word could refer to a “womanizer,” as well as a “pathic,” i.e., the passive partner in male same-sex intercourse. Modern translation of 1 Corinthians 6:9 often opt for this last meaning, which would make it the counterpart of “male-bedders.” That interpretive choice, however, is impossible to establish with certainty against possible alternatives. If correct, however, it could refer to those males, ordinarily younger and of a socially lower status such as slaves, who would sell

sexual favours in exchange for money, patronage, or other social benefits.

Regardless of their exact translation, Paul’s condemnation of both “male-bedders” and of “effeminates” does not entail a condemnation of free, faithful, and lifelong male same-sex relationships.

3.2.7. Romans 1:26-27.

These verses are generally regarded as the clearest condemnation of homosexual behaviour in the New Testament. They form part of a larger section, Romans 1:18-2:11, in which Paul is building up an argument in support of his tenet that all have sinned, Gentiles as well as Jews. Recent research suggests verses 26-27 likely refer to a then well-known “dual-judgment” apocalyptic rhetorical topos. It consisted of two examples from Jewish sacred history of human fallenness and divine judgment:

- verse 26 is likely a reference not to female homosexuality, but to the women who slept with angelic beings before the Flood (a literary tradition inspired by Genesis 6:1-4);
- verse 27 is likely a reference to the specific homosexual behaviour of the men of ancient Sodom (a literary tradition inspired by Genesis 18:16-19:29).

To interpret Romans 1:27 as a universal condemnation of free, faithful, and lifelong male homosexual relationships is to read into the text something

which it does not say. Such an interpretation would also be at odds with the tolerance of consensual homosexual behaviour implicit in the lack of such a condemnation anywhere else in the Bible [RR §§5.6-5.7].

ROM. 1:26 IS LIKELY A REFERENCE TO THE WOMEN WHO SLEPT WITH ANGELIC BEINGS (SEE GENESIS 6:1-4).

VERSE 27 IS LIKELY A REFERENCE TO THE SPECIFIC HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOUR OF THE MEN OF ANCIENT SODOM (SEE GENESIS 18:16-19:29).

THE BIBLE CONTAINS NO PROHIBITION OR CONDEMNATION OF FREE, FAITHFUL, AND LIFELONG SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS.

3.2.8. It is impossible to determine with absolute certainty whether Paul and the author of 1 Timothy were referring to consensual or exploitative relationships in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10 respectively. The latter were by far the more widespread, and so the likelihood is that they are the object of the biblical author’s condemnation. Likewise, intertextual evidence suggests that Romans 1:26-27 is almost certainly a reference to a stock dual-judgment motif of apocalyptic rhetoric concerning the antediluvian women and Sodom’s men.

In all three cases, the papal interpretation according to which Paul is offering a normative condemnation of non-abusive consensual homosexual behaviour is much more unlikely and, in any case, equally impossible to establish with absolute certainty.

Such exegetical uncertainty necessarily carries on to any ethical or theological inference that may be drawn from those texts. If there is no certainty as to what kind of male homosexual acts Paul was referring to – whether consensual or abusive – it is likewise impossible to draw ethical norms from it: “Theological doctrines and ethical rules cannot be based on exegetical suppositions” [RR §5.8].

3.2.9. **Conclusion.** The Bible contains no prohibition or condemnation of free, faithful, and lifelong same-sex relationships.

4. Contributors and Original Signatories

All contributing authors, original signatories, and co-signatories have endorsed the “Summary of Findings” and “Recommendations” only (i.e. §§1-2) in their personal capacity, and they do not represent the view of their employers. They have also peer-reviewed both the “Assessment of the Official Papal Arguments Against Same-Sex Relationships” (i.e. §3 here, which expands on, and is referred by, the “Summary of Findings”), and the comprehensive research report “Christian Objections to Same Sex Relationships: An Academic Assessment” which the present Academic Statement summarises.

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