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I Will Call My People, Who Were Not My People

So let us come back from dealing with homosexuals as people to the evaluation of the issue of homosexuality itself. One significant motif runs like a thread through the entire Bible. At first glance, it seems to have nothing to do with our subject. But it can become very important for homosexuals in self-doubts, who are on the search for the answer how they should live before God.

The Bible not only presents us a God, who in His mercy towards a lost world opens His arms to undeservedly grant again access to its proximity through Christ. But the Scriptures also show us concrete examples where God in individual lives acts scandalously "inconsistent" in respect of his own specifications. Jesus himself formulated the programmatic sentence, that the Sabbath (here as part of the commandment) was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2, 27), and that it is not lawful if man perishes because of the observance of the Sabbath commandment (Luke 6, 9).

Various statements in the Bible explicitly expel certain groups of human beings from the people of God, from "the community", or at least from the liturgical assembly. But time and again, God himself defies his own exclusion criteria and allows people to come near to him, calls them to particular tasks and chooses them, even ahead of those who are already "included".

Here some examples:

- Deuteronomy 23,4ff explicitly excludes each Moabite from the opportunity ever to affiliate the "congregation of the Lord", no matter of which generation (due to the Moabites' hostile attitude towards the Israelites during the peregrination through the wilderness): "No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, not even in the tenth generation." Incidentally, the supplement that no treaty of friendship should be closed with the Moabites, suggests that the "assembly of the Lord" here is a question of ethnicity, not only of admission to the worship meeting. But Ruth the Moabite came to "the God of Israel" in order "to take refuge under his wings" (Ruth 2,12) and was willingly accepted. Her descendant or grandson - David - even became king of Israel. Her marriage to a Jew, Mahlon first, then Boaz, is opposed to other directives of the Bible (Deut 7,3; Ezra 9,1 f; Neh 13,23 f.) Jesus himself is a late descendant of the Moabite woman, who according to God's own commandment never should have been part of the Jewish people.
- -The Mosaic laws also explicitly excluded castrati from the congregation of the Lord. (Deut 23,1. But God promises against his own commandment: "And let no eunuch complain: I am only a dry tree. For this is what the Lord says: To the eunuchs, who ... hold fast to my covenant - to them I will give within my

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temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters” (Is. 56,4f). By the way, the first gentile Christian – the official from Ethiopia – supposedly was a eunuch.

- Although no “bastard” could enter the “assembly of the Lord” (Deut 23,3) of all people God calls Jephthah to be the judge of Israel, a man whom his father Gilead had not begotten of his wife as his half-siblings, but of a prostitute (Judges 11,1 f.)
- Despite of God's apparent rejection of all forms of prostitution the Canaanite harlot Rahab is the only survivor of God's tribunal at Jericho, because God sent the spies of Israel just in her house, and because she had helped them, encouraged them and asked them in advance to be spared.
- God clearly condemned David's adultery with Bathsheba and the cold-blooded cruelty in doing away with her husband Uriah, who always had been loyal to him. Yet God chose of all the numerous sons of David with other wives (who were first in succession) just the son of this Bathsheba as coming King and calls him shortly after he was born with the surname Jedidiah (“darling of the Lord”).
- In the context of David's repudiation and resumption of his son Absalom, who had taken bloody revenge on his half-brother Amnon for the rape of his sister Tamar, a wise woman gets to the heart of the attributes of God: “God devises ways so that a banished person does not remain banished from him.” (2. Sam 14,14).
- Because of his stubborn impiety God cursed Jehoiachin, one of the last kings of Judah, with the saying, no one of his descendants should ever again succeed in ascending the throne. Immediately afterwards, he describes the true and just king who one day will come out of David's descendants (Jer 22,30; 23,5f), and whose progenitor after this curse Jehoiachin by no means could be. But centuries later, we do find the name of exactly this Jehoiachin in the family tree of this promised King of Kings, Jesus Christ (Matthew 1,12). What a “cunning grace” of God, that Jehoiachin and his descendant Joseph, Mary's husband, were ancestors not in a biological, but nevertheless in a legal sense. On the face of it the curse was thus fulfilled, but actually lifted in mercy.
- Although God in the Old Testament several times condemned magical practices and astrology and rejected them as futile (Lev 19,26; Jes 47,12-14; Dan 2,27f), of all people He calls astrologers, the “magoi” from the east, to be outstanding witnesses of the Christmas events.
- In Luke 4,25-27 Jesus makes himself unpopular in mentioning that during the famine none of the widows of Israel had received help by Elijah, but a widow from Sidon. Sidon is the city/country of origin of Queen Jezebel, who in ancient times was ruling in Israel and was known proverbially for her wickedness and seduction to idolatry (Rev 2,20). Similarly in Elisha's times none of the numerous Israelite lepers was healed but Naaman, the Syrian

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general, therefore an enemy of Israel, who had conducted numerous wars against God's people.

- The tax collector in Jesus' parable (Luke 18) cannot show a single thing indicating a godly life. Accordingly the Pharisee considers him as condemned by God. The only thing the tax collector can do, is to confess his sin – and then to return to his corrupt world. We do not even read a bit of an intended change! But because of his humble confession Jesus tells him to go “home justified before God”.
- The entire Gentile mission means enclosing previously outsiders. The Book of Acts gives a moving picture of how incomprehensible and inconceivable this step appeared to the first Jewish Christians, for whom the term “people of God” still was associated with “the people of Israel”, of which the Gentiles had to be excluded as “unclean”. Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles, does not get tired to point out this fact again and again. Thus he writes to the Gentile Ephesians (2,12 f): “At that time you were ...excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope ... But now in Christ Jesus you ... have been brought near ...” Curiously enough for our overall context, Paul refers to this process of incorporation into the people of God as something “against nature”: “contrary to nature” the Gentiles are cut like a branch out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and are grafted into the cultivated olive tree of Israel” (Rom 11,24).

The list of examples could go even further. Repeatedly there is revealed a biblical principle: Distancing regulations, which were made to preserve God's people from bad influences, never were meant to exclude single God-seeking individuals from the closeness of God. Interestingly, in the examples we see quite different exclusion criteria. Partly they are a matter of self- committed sins, partly of sins 'inherited' of the fathers, partly of conditions, in which you fall as a victim, or in which you are simply born into. Guilt or innocence, internal or external responsibilities are not always easy to separate.

Surprisingly even the general biblical principle “who confesses his sins and renounces them” seems not necessarily to apply to all the examples. But always God's will to accept the individual wins out over dogmatic guidelines.

The divine willingness to include the excluded, is most beautifully expressed in the Book of the prophet Hosea (2,25), whom Paul quotes in Romans to underline the sovereign choice of God's grace: “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved’. In the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people’, there they will be called ‘children of the living God” (Rom 9,25f.).

Transferred to our question, all this could mean: Let the order of creation plan male and female as the first and ideal partnership. Let the Bible rightly reject all forms of sexuality that are based on promiscuous habits. Let a homosexual living individual insofar be “not my people” as he is not living according to the order of marriage between man and woman. But may he not have the same possibility as the Moabite

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woman, "to seek refuge under God's wings", to find acceptance as outsider at first glance with his (in the truest sense of the word) "extra-ordinary" relationship?

For some people, who thereby see threatened the biblical core values; the concept of asylum might be helpful. The Bible already knew a right of asylum. There were specially appointed cities of refuge, to which people, who had unintentionally become guilty in the death of another, could flee from persecution by the avenger of blood (to whom they otherwise would have been delivered since human blood shed required human blood in turn). The Israelites had to grant protection to foreign runaway slaves. Contrary to the usual practice in the countries of the ancient world they could not be extradited.

An asylum seeker is someone who does not demand, but plead; someone who asks for the granting of a status he does not own by law – whether it is the impunity for a murderer, the freedom for a slave or the right of citizenship for a foreigner. But what he is granted is the right to make this request. The granting of asylum here is comparable to an adoption: Somebody else's child passes without legal claim to the status of one's own child.

Now no one would seriously want to argue that the establishment of an asylum system or an adoption law was devised to undermine civil right, child's right or inheritance law or in order to question these "primary systems" through the creation of an extraordinary rule. Thus the statement that acceptance of homosexual partnerships would declare invalid the order of "marriage" is not coherent to me as well.

The fear that recognition of the extraordinary could jeopardize the original issue, that the granting of exemptions could soften all the rules is not necessarily biblical! Time and again, on the action of Jesus we can see that in case of doubt He decided for the benefit of the individual case, and that He always judged the heart of people and not what seemed to lie before His eyes.

God's principle to choose those for His children who were (apparently or actually) not allowed to be His children, also includes that He did not constantly point out to them that they were actually not welcome. Gods loving devotion to man in Christ reveals, that there is no simultaneously **Yes** and **No** but "in Him it has always been **Yes**"(2 Cor. 1,19). This sounds like something a gay Christian is deeply longing for.

It is well known what emotional trauma it means for a child, to get constantly the feeling of being unwanted in his family. But from their youth on many homosexuals get exactly this feeling through jokes and condemnatory statements of the people around, and unfortunately often the most vehement rejection, contempt and defamation is evident by Christians.

The hope of a homosexual Christian will always aim at a completely affirmed existence before God, because - as already mentioned - with less a religious person cannot exist.