

Valeria Hinck **LOVE wINs THE DEBATE**
Biblical Pleas Against The Discrimination Of Homosexual People

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Foreword

by Klaus Douglass

You will be advised against reading this book. It is far too "liberal" for pious people and far too "pious" for liberal minds. With this work Valeria Hinck puts herself courageously between all chairs¹ provided by the churches and, thereby, does an important service to countless people.

This book addresses two kinds of people: on the one hand, it wants to speak to those who are homosexual and who care about the Bible. On the other hand, it has been written for people who believe in the Bible and who care about homosexuals. The author herself belongs to the first group of people directly concerned. I myself belong to the second group: I am a pastor of a big and active protestant, generally known as a "pious" conservative church on the outskirts of Frankfurt on Main. And I am heterosexual. As is the case for many other Christians, I also believed for a very long time what I had been told since I was a child: that homosexuality was sinful and that people who lived their homosexuality were under the wrath of God. I have repeatedly come into contact with homosexual people in my life and these encounters have gradually changed my way of thinking in this matter. To me, Valeria Hinck's book represents the successful completion of a decade-long process of rethinking and I am convinced that it will help many others in this regard. This book has by no means been written exclusively for homosexuals - maybe not even primarily.

This foreword includes autobiographical features. I believe that many readers will discover certain parallels to their own lives. I have already mentioned that I am heterosexual and my sexual fantasies have never seriously been directed toward my own sex. Homosexuality had been utterly alien to me since I was young (and hence I had always been unconsciously frightened by it). Having worked in a Christian organization for teenagers, it had been put across to me very early that homosexuality was a big sin and that it had to be (simply) rejected on biblical grounds. I must confess that, at the time, I never reassessed this point of view, but the two or three Bible passages people quoted satisfied me. After all, is not a single passage of the word of God enough to make the believer feel qualified to judge? Whenever I had anything to do with homosexuals, I handed this down to them: I told them that their lifestyle was a big deviation from normality and they needed to be "healed" by the power of God. I believe that I did this kindly and quite empathetically, however, my world view didn't allow me to make too many concessions towards the person in question.

To my own shame I have to admit that it took many years of numerous experiences I had through my pastoral counseling to rise lingering doubts about whether I was right. In general, the homosexuals I got to know did not fulfill the cliché that I had about them. The men, on the one hand, were neither over-effeminate, nor did they walk around dressed provocatively in latex or leather. The women, on the other hand, weren't grim butches at all. All of them were very ordinary people. Of

¹ *To put oneself between the chairs* is a German expression meaning something like *being between a rock and a hard place*, a position between two other (opposite and adverse) opinions. Douglass here alludes to the motto of the gay Christian group "Zwischenraum" (that means: *a space in between*) where I belong to

course, some of them were a bit quirky – but who isn't? However, by and large they seemed to be highly likeable. From then on, it was increasingly difficult for me to understand why God should reject these very sensitive individuals only because of their sexual orientation and their love for the same sex. Needless to say that there were and still are things happening in the gay community that God surely doesn't approve of. But does this justify a blanket judgement of all homosexuals? After all, there is also a heterosexual *community* not so moral as well. Anyway, as the years passed I gradually felt less and less rejection and more and more tolerance towards them until finally I was asking myself if I should love them more than God does. Well, that of course was impossible. Or maybe, homosexuality was such a dreadful sin that I was deceived by the immeasurable depth of its evil nature?

A long time of silence followed during which I didn't talk about this subject. I was torn inside. As a pastoral counselor I felt sorry for these people who in their Christian churches are often faced with the dilemma of going into hiding and leading a life full of lies, or coming out only to be instantly put down as sinners by well-meaning fellow Christians who pressure them to be "healed from their aberration". But in doing so they make it impossible for those concerned to lead a happy life. On the other hand I still was basically convinced that the Bible rejects homosexuality as being wrong.

At the end of the 1990s, we offered a special guest service in our church with the theme: "When men love men and women love women". I fought like a lion that I would not have to preach in that service. But the more I told our church leaders about how torn I was when it came to this topic, the more they were convinced that I was the right person to preach in that service. So I began to study and familiarize myself with the topic and related problems. While doing that I realized that the biblical basis on which people usually build their rejection of homosexuality was quite meager. I had obviously misjudged this evidence before, but I had never seriously evaluated it either.

Since all the literature that I read about the topic of homosexuality differed largely in their focus and intention, I was once again struggling inside. There were enough "liberal" books on the market, some of which were really good. I would have liked to follow their basic message, but they were missing the faithfulness and loyalty to the Bible that was too important to me and that I couldn't just abandon. Those books that did refer to the Bible, though, categorically refused homosexuality – some used kind words, the majority, however, spoke exceptionally harshly. For all the biblical quotations, I sensed only little of the spirit of Jesus who so mercifully dealt with people.

Again, I was at an even bigger loss: Ultimately, I didn't find any answer to my question of what the Bible might be saying about homosexual love. Indeed, the Bible does not approve of homosexual *practices*, but does it actually exclude a *predisposition* towards homosexuality, too? It was the phenomenon of homosexual *love*, especially, that seemed to have been disregarded in the relevant verses. While this discovery left me feeling helpless, I once again painfully understood what Paul meant when he wrote: "For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2nd Corinthians 3,6). But who would finally interpret these verses "from the Spirit"? That means: who has read these verses with Jesus' eyes? Who has – as Luther might put it – understood these words coming from the heart of the Bible, instead of obstinately listing them very literally and thereby resulting in a harsh, both fatal and spiritless judgement about homosexual lovers.

The sermon I preached to about 800 visitors was a mirror of my inner conflict. Afterwards, I was completely unhappy with myself and I thought: 'Well, you have made an utter mess of this sermon. This kind of ambiguity is of no help for anybody.'

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And yet, I did not anticipate that what I had said was obviously on many people's minds. I cannot think of any other sermon that I have given in my life that might have attracted similar interest. I have since come into contact with homosexuals who are part of Christian communities where no one knows about their sexual identity. Many of them lead a double life, some of them are even married. They live in constant fear of being discovered. They are afraid that if they are exposed they might be pressed to look for spiritual healing, that they might be put down as sinners, be accused of lacking the will to repent, be charged with a deceitful lifestyle and be relieved from their ministries within their churches. They fear that they might so persistently become subject of people's gossip that they will no longer be accepted and be able to find their place in their churches which actually they love and are committed to wholeheartedly. However, what scares them most is the thought that God might hate them because of their homosexual disposition, that he might loath them, that they might bring about their own eternal damnation because they are homosexual and live out their sexuality.

At that time, I would have loved to have a manual that could have helped me to assess the applicable biblical verses. I also talked to a lot of family members and friends of homosexuals – worried parents, pastoral counselors, "pseudo-wives". Almost without exception, they were looking for guidance from within the Bible that exceeds the well-established verdict 'It is immoral, you just don't do that'. They had already realized in their own and through other's sufferings that this was the wrong answer to their question, even though it superficially seemed to be the basic message in the Bible.

Valeria Hinck has successfully closed the aforementioned gap. She has written an exceptionally intelligent and brave book that will change the ecclesiastic landscape. The author does not only make a good case – she also convinces through her own spirituality. After reading this book, many Christians will more readily and more easily stand by homosexuality itself as well as their homosexual fellows. In my opinion, Valeria Hinck has managed to prove that love for the Bible and love for people of the same sex are not mutually exclusive and that it is possible to remain loyal to both, to the Holy Scripture and to our homosexual friends in our parishes. I have gained a lot by reading this book and I have been deeply moved by it and by the clarity with which Valeria Hinck interprets the Bible, by her love for the Bible and her love for Christ that we both share. If she were a member of my parish, I would definitely entrust her with whatever kind of lectureship position – as leader of a cell group, a preacher or whatever else. In many other churches however, she would only be allowed to accomplish minor tasks because, for many years, she has lived in a long-standing homosexual relationship.

When I think about that, I am overwhelmed by grief and anger because Valeria is no single case. Whereas she is courageous enough to openly admit and live her homosexuality, the predominant majority chooses to hide their natural disposition. We as heterosexual Christians should think about a couple of questions. The question whether there is something wrong in what **we** are doing: how it is possible that our churches are characterized by a hostile atmosphere that prevents countless people from openly telling that they are homosexual, and why the church is dreaded by homosexuals to be especially intolerant in a culture that is anything else but gay-friendly. Instead, we ponder the alleged 'sin of homosexuality' and force those concerned to live a lie that we in turn blame them for afterwards. The time has come for us to remove the beams from our own eyes and to stop balefully condemning and excluding people – claiming this to be the biblically justified position.

South-African Apartheid as well as slavery were also once said to be founded in

the Bible because blacks did not get the best of the bargain in the scripture. Nevertheless, history's verdict about this interpretation is clear. Nowadays, no one is in doubt about who sinned against whom in this case. It is quite likely that one day history will judge similarly the way heterosexual Christians deal with homosexuals today. Of course there have to be those who step up and have the courage to swim against the current, side by side with their homosexual brothers and sisters. Valeria's book is great help in this respect because it finally does away with the absurd notion that homosexuality has to be rejected on account of the Bible and that we have to choose between obedience to God or solidarity to our homosexual fellow humans.

I hope that this book will have many attentive readers. On the other hand, I also hope the readers who gain valuable insights from this book, will be courageous enough to act upon them and happily brave the coming headwinds.

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