

„Power is made perfect
in weakness“



**On the way to a church which is sensitive
towards sexuality and role models**

**Documentation of the Pastoral Workshop on
“How to become an HIV and Aids competent church?”
at Swakopmund 2010 and Neudietendorf 2011**



MÖWe – The Institute for Mission,
Ecumenism and Global Responsibility
of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia



GMÖ – Parish Service for Mission
and Ecumenism of the Evangelical
Church in the Rhineland

Contents

I. The common agreement of Neudietendorf	5
1.1 Introduction: On the way to the common agreement of Neudietendorf	5
1. The starting point: The question of a church which is sensitive towards HIV and Aids	5
2. The changed perspective: success and shortcomings	5
3. The results so far: on the connection between sexuality and HIV and Aids	6
4. The context: the common agreement of Neudietendorf	7
1.2 The common agreement of Neudietendorf – the document	8
Introduction	8
1. Sexuality as a gift of God	8
2. God created us with different sexual orientations	10
3. A new understanding of what it means to be a strong man	11
4. Pastors as wounded healers	12
II. Sexuality as a gift of God	15
2.1 Sexuality – a gift of life, a gift of God (a German perspective)	15
1. Sexuality and Culture	15
2. Sexuality and Church	15
3. Sexuality: What is that?	15
4. Language of the Bible	16
5. Sexuality in the Bible	16
6. Sexuality and Producing Offspring	19
7. Sexuality and Desire	19
8. Sexuality and Love	20
9. Sexuality and Marriage	20
10. Sexuality and Sin	21
11. Dangers of Sexuality	22
12. Sexuality and Responsibility	23
2.2 Human sexuality and homosexuality (a Namibian perspective)	24
2.3 Response to the contributions on “Sexuality as a gift of God”	26
III. God created us with different sexual orientations	28
3.1 God created us with different sexual orientations - Diversity rather than simple-mindedness in the church towards ways of life (a German perspective)	28
Justification	28
Creation	29
The Holy Scripture	31
Ethics	32
The Christian congregation	33
Spirituality	34
3.2 God created us with different sexual orientations (a Namibian perspective)	35
3.3 Response to the contributions on “God created us with different sexual orientations”	36

IV. A new understanding of what it means to be a strong man	38
4.1 A new way of men – and women – to be strong (a German perspective)	38
Definition of Strength – and strong men	38
Powerful in Weakness	38
Emancipation of Women	39
The Development of Men	39
Sexuality and Strength	40
The Lack of Role Models for the Development of Men.....	41
Consequences for Society.....	42
Does Church offer Role Models for strong Men and Women?	42
The Prophets	42
Jesus’ parables	43
Salt and Light	43
Empowered to be useful Salt	43
Lightening the way with the Light on the bushel	44
Consequences for Churches and Society	44
New Strength	45
4.2 A new concept of man being strong (a Namibian perspective)	46
Gender and its role	46
Leadership	46
HIV und Aids	46
The Church addresses inequality	47
4.3 Response to the contributions on “A new understanding of what it means to be a strong man”	49
1. Differences.....	49
2. What we have in common	49
3. Where we failed	49
4. Our responsibility	49
5. Vision	49
V. Pastors as wounded healers	50
5.1 Pastors as wounded healers (a German perspective)	50
0. Considerations on terminology.....	50
1. Observations on reality.....	50
2. Biblical reflections	52
3. Consequences	54
5.2 A pastor as a wounded healer (a Namibian perspective)	57
5.3 Response to the contributions on „Pastors as wounded healers“ does not exist in written form	
VI. Biblical Texts	59
Imprint	60

Guide to the reading of this text

The core of this documentation is **chapter 1.2**: the common agreement of Neudietendorf, written and signed by Namibian and German pastors.

Chapter 1.1 describes the process which made it possible.

In **chapters II to V** you will find the written contributions which were prepared by participants of the conference. These lectures as well as the discussions which arose from them are the foundation of the common agreement.

We did not change the different structures used by the authors.

The appendix in **chapter VI** lists some biblical texts which can be useful when continuing to work on this subject.

The common agreement of Neudietendorf

1.1 Introduction: On the way to the common agreement of Neudietendorf

1. The starting point: The question of a church which is sensitive towards HIV and Aids

In the past few years, the churches have become much more open towards the subject of HIV and Aids and have contributed a great amount in the fight against HIV and Aids. However, the churches hardly ever acted as pioneers in this area. The churches in Namibia were forced to deal with this subject due to the suffering of millions of people in their congregations. The German churches followed the social changes and the pressure from society to act against HIV and Aids – part of this is that the churches became more open in their dealing with the question of homosexuality. In both countries, the struggle of the churches to fight HIV and Aids is mainly a matter of diaconia and pastoral counselling. In Germany, probably more so than in Namibia, HIV and Aids has become an “outsourced” area of specific projects and special niche congregations. The churches’ struggle against HIV and Aids is fairly successful. However, the church congregations¹ at the grass root level are often far from being open towards people living with HIV and Aids as well as the worries and needs of their families. How can the church strive to become more sensitive and open for this matter?

Starting with this question, an ecumenical consultation process began with a 14-day pastors’ conference in Namibia in October 2010, in which 20 male and female pastors, deans, deacons, partnership officers and members of the network for pastoral Aids counselling from two Namibian and three German churches² took part.

2. The changed perspective: success and shortcomings

The intensive discussions among the participants, bible studies and lectures, visiting of projects and encounters with people working there, and visiting of several congregations resulted in an interesting change of perspective for the participants. This change was the result of the observation that the main demands that were formulated in the past decades for the struggle against HIV and Aids have so far been implemented. However, these successful activities seem to have had little success in actually increasing the churches’ sensitivity towards HIV and Aids.

1. The struggle against the stigmatising of people living with HIV through social inclusion: the churches initiated impressive social projects to re-integrate people living with HIV and Aids into society. However, these people hardly ever found a way back into the midst of their church congregations. We assumed that it was the often generalising condemnation of sexuality and the inability to openly speak about these matters that prevented people stigmatised by HIV and Aids from returning to their church congregations.
2. Development of counselling services and the possibilities of HIV testing: Countless offers for testing and counselling are now available. It is, however, the Christian men [!] who often refuse to use these offers. We assumed that for many men, weakness, illness, abstinence and need of counselling – especially when it comes to matters of sexuality – are in conflict with the wide-spread image of a “strong man”.
3. Breaking the silence on HIV and Aids: there are many pastors who possess great skills and competence in counselling. Competence when it comes to HIV and Aids, however, is hardly ever developed. If they are personally affected in any way, it remains a secret in most cases. This is probably a result of the wrongly conceived image of the pastor being a “discarnate saint”.
4. Availability of antiretroviral drugs: in Namibia, good medical care is offered by both the state and the churches, also when it comes to antiretroviral (ARV) drugs. However, many people living with HIV and Aids lack the most basic things, such as mobility or nutrition, to be able to make use of these offers.

¹ e.g. the work of the church congregation of St. Georg in Hamburg or “Kirche positHIV” (Church PositHive) in Berlin.

² Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland (EKiR), Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen (EKvW), Evangelische Kirche Kurhessen Waldeck (EKKW). With the exception of ELCIN, all of these are member churches of United Evangelical Mission (UEM). The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia-German Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCIN-GELC) was also invited. They could not send participants, but organised one of the excursions.

The struggle against poverty as a part of the struggle against HIV and Aids remains – despite the positive developments so far – a challenge for society and the churches and diminishes the possibilities of access to ARVs (cf. point 4). The participants decided that the aspect of poverty and medical care are continuous challenges for the church, but decided not to follow up on these issues when dealing with the question of a church being more sensitive towards HIV and Aids.

The subject of homosexuality, a matter with great conflict potential, was identified as a new, hardly dealt with matter for the churches. This subject became the fourth point in the discussion on how churches can become more sensitive towards people living with HIV and Aids.

3. The results so far: on the connection between sexuality and HIV and Aids

During the last days of the pastors' conference in Swakopmund, Namibia, four main observations were analysed, relevant bible texts were gathered, the reality in the congregations was described and the tasks for the churches were formulated. These results were drafts, rather than finished observations; also due to the lack of time. Even though further work on the results of the conference was needed, the preliminary concepts were remarkable. The parallels between the situation in the churches in Germany and those in Namibia were astounding when it came to comparing the causes for the lack of sensitivity towards HIV and Aids. The tasks and challenges, though different in emphases, are similar for all churches of the two countries.

Below is a summary of the four main statements from the workshop in Namibia:

1. **Sexuality as a gift of God:** An approach to HIV and Aids which is free of prejudice is connected to a prejudice-free and affirmative dealing with sexuality. If the churches continue to see sexuality as a moral category, the church will not be the place where people living with HIV and Aids can feel accepted. Sexuality is a gift from God!
2. **A new understanding of what it means to be a strong man:** the self-image of many people is based on a false image of male strength. This image is formed by society, but is also carried by the churches. If the churches do not begin to exemplify a new image of masculinity, very few men will make use of the HIV and Aids testing and counselling offers available. We need a new understanding of what it means to be a strong man!
3. **Pastors as wounded healers:** the image of pastors (both their self-image and the image others have of them) is shaped by an ideal: the ideal of a better person. The churches also uphold this image. A pastor and counsellor, who is seemingly immune to human woundedness, will not be called upon to help by people living with HIV and Aids, as the subject is so strongly connected to morality. We need a new image of pastors, which shows them as wounded healers!
4. **God created us with different sexual orientations:** the acceptance of different ways of life and sexual orientations is a strong taboo in the churches. By doing this, the churches obscure a part of human reality and an important factor in the spreading of HIV and Aids. However: God created us with different sexual orientations!

These observations and the notes were handed to a working group consisting of members of the workshop, who met in Neudietendorf in Germany in the following year (2011) for further and more detailed work on this subject and the composition of a common statement.

4. The context: the common agreement of Neudietendorf

The common agreement of Neudietendorf is not a statement of the churches or even the United Evangelical Mission. The results of this process do not represent the views of the churches – neither of the churches in Namibia nor of the German churches. The agreement is a result of a two-year process in which individuals intensively shared their observations and views on the images of men and pastors as well as the inability of the churches to openly speak about sexuality and different sexual orientations. Not only the intensive discussions, but also the lectures and bible studies were helpful for this. During this process, a certain level of familiarity and openness was reached among the participants, so that highly controversial points of view were uttered and conflicts occurred. Even though it cannot be detected in the final paper, one should be aware of the fact that this process was not always an easy one. It was mainly the image of men and masculinity and the question of homosexuality that were controversial and needed intensive discussions. The concept of “safe spaces” was very helpful for this: creating a space where people could openly speak about their personal experiences, fears and concerns.

Concerning the subject of homosexuality, one should be aware of the special context in which the process took place. On the one hand, the Dodoma Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) had been released shortly before the first workshop. This statement caused

uncertainty, also within the German churches. This Dodoma statement was also the result of a process and was created in a certain context, which also does not become evident in the final wording of the text. On the other hand, the German participants of the Swakopmund workshop were mainly members of the network for pastoral Aids counselling, who regularly deal with the counselling of HIV positive people and are constantly faced with the afflictions and fears of – and discrimination against – homosexual people in Germany. The aforementioned process, context as well as the other important subjects which were discussed would be unfairly disregarded if the relatively clear position on homosexuality was singled out and interpreted as a provocation. Regardless of one’s own opinion on homosexuality: if the church wants to be a church of this world, it is essential to deal with the ongoing challenge of developing the ability to speak about sexuality, different ways of life and the realities of this world. Since the statements in this agreement could lead to the discrimination of those involved, the participants have agreed not to publish any names. It is to be noted, however, that all participants supported this agreement.

A church which is sensitive to HIV and Aids can only be achieved through the acceptance of different ways of life and sexuality as subjects of discussion. It is important to encourage a free, safe and open discourse on sexuality within the churches, while at the same time being aware of different cultural contexts and different biblical and social understanding. The common agreement of Neudietendorf – which describes sexuality as a gift from God, explains different ways of life and sexual orientations from the point of view of the theology of creation, questions the current understanding of masculinity, and calls pastors to act as wounded healers – can be helpful on this path.

The agreement is carried by the vision which concludes the document: „We are a competent church on the issues of ways of life, sexuality, HIV and Aids as well as the woundedness of the community of believers.”

1.2 The common agreement of Neudietendorf – the document

Introduction

During the German – Namibian pastor’s conference in September 2010 in Namibia on “How to become an HIV and Aids competent church”, we identified four general topics which have to be discussed and worked on in order to achieve that goal: sexuality, sexual orientation, the role of men, and the understanding of being a pastor. In the follow-up seminar in Neudietendorf, Germany in October 2011, we decided on the following common statement.

1. Sexuality as a gift of God

1.1. What we have in common

God created human beings in His own image and likeness as sexual beings, “and God saw ... it was very good” (Gen 1:26-31). As male and female, we are created with desire, lust and passion. God created us in relation to one another as equals. According to the Bible, there is a task for human beings to fill the earth and take ownership of creation. However, sexual intercourse is not purely for the purpose of reproduction, it is also an essential expression of life (see: Song of Songs and the love stories in the Old Testament). Sexuality should not be seen only as an act of sexual intercourse alone. Sexuality touches the whole identity of a person, that is: body, mind and soul.

Sexuality is not a sin; everybody has the right to live his/her sexuality and practice it, as long as the Twofold Commandment of Love and the Golden Rule are adhered by (Mk 12:29ff; Mt 7:12).³

We have realised that our society is constantly confronted with sexuality (e.g. in the media) without any direction and guidance for people on how to express their own emotions, passion and needs. There is a lack of words to address sexuality in a serious and responsible way. Having said that, we see that our churches have also failed to speak positively about sexuality as a gift of God, but rather have had an approach to sexuality based on shame, where it is condemned as a sinful part of the flesh, something that must be defeated. Therefore, we need a new way of understanding and speaking about sexuality in a positive way.

1.2 Differences and explanations

The hermeneutical approach to biblical traditions is contextual. It depends on our historical, political, theological, social, cultural and gender-related backgrounds. This is why the understanding of sexuality can differ.

We agreed that there is a common fear regarding sexuality in the church which is grounded in church history, especially influenced by the theology of Augustine. In his teachings he divided body and soul. These doctrines of Augustine dominated Christian church history for many centuries up to now. These doctrines were also spread all over the world by the Christian mission. Augustine’s separation of body and

³ Mk 12: 29 Jesus answered, «The first is, «Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.» 31 The second is this, «You shall love your neighbor as yourself.» There is no other commandment greater than these.»
Mt 7:12: In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

soul helped to shape a fear regarding sexuality in the church. Several biblical examples: e.g. 1 Cor 7:1-9⁴, offer evidence of these ideas.

It is crucial to discuss sexuality responsibly in a new way. The churches have failed to discover a beneficial way of speaking about sexuality in the past and present, but have rather used restrictive, narrow and constraining examples when dealing with the subject of sexuality. Since the realisation of nakedness because of the Fall of Mankind, sexuality became a matter of shame. This is, however, not the state of creation which is good in the eyes of God (Gen 1:31).⁵

We suggest a more affirmative way of speaking about sexuality, using terms such as “mutual”, “respectful”, “caring”, with integrity”, adoring”, “responsible” and “loving”.

We recognise that we are used to speaking about sexuality in a negative way, but we want to avoid this. However, we must explicitly name and condemn sexual violence, such as aggressiveness, rape, abuse, etc. as a crime. Also, sexual interests such as sodomy, pederasty and incest are not compatible with the Commandment of Love by Jesus.

1.3 Tasks, mission and vision

Our churches should be open and affirming to the topic of sexuality. The churches should be a place where the topic of sexuality is talked about in a positive way and in a positive language, so that our congregation members can feel accepted not only with their souls and their minds but with their bodies as well, just like God created them. Sexuality should no longer be a taboo or considered a sin. Churches should be the places where a positive language regarding sexuality is developed and used.

This will help to become more sensitive to the needs and desires of the people and will help to support the fight against HIV and Aids. When sexuality is named and addressed openly, it is possible to educate people regarding a responsible sexuality.

Possible tasks:

- The topic of sexuality must be discussed and worked upon on different hierarchal levels in the churches.
- Educational material for different addressees (multi-generational, people in different situations in their lives, lay people doing educational work and pastors) should be developed on how to talk about sexuality as a good gift of God. Sexuality should be described in a positive and affirmative way, so that the limitations of a responsible sexuality need not be imposed, as they are self-explanatory. The reasons why sexuality often is a taboo have to be analysed in each church so that it is possible to find a way to overcome the fear of sexuality.
- Education of different groups has to take place:
 - Pastors should be trained either on pastors’ conferences or within their theological education. Biblical texts have to be chosen and bible studies/sermons/worship services need to be developed to help the pastor in the congregation on grass-root level.
 - The topic needs to be addressed on the congregational level (sermons, bible studies, youth groups, leagues, etc.).
 - Pastors or elders should address parents in “life skills education”, where parents can learn to talk about sexuality with their children. Depending on the culture the generation of the grandparents should be included in the life skill education.

⁴ 1 Cor 7: 1 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: «It is well for a man not to touch a woman.» 2 But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 This I say by way of concession, not of command. 7 I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind. 8 To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. 9 But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.

⁵ Gen 1:31: God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

2. God created us with different sexual orientations

2.1 What we have in common

We advocate for a theology of solidarity and compassion with the following heading: God does not condemn but loves all – we should do the same.

This implies the following:

First of all, there is the theological aspect of how God deals with diversity. God created us as man and woman, with different sexual needs and therefore, sexuality can be lived in a diversity of ways. It is our right to live our own identity according to how we are created – sexuality is a human right. Jesus' teaching is clear: no condemnation, but love and acceptance (e.g. Jn 4).⁶

Second of all, there is the question of how the church deals with diversity. We should not use a terminology which points a finger at others and should not distinguish between "us" and "others", because we are one body of Christ – we all belong together (Rom 12).⁷ Baptism establishes that we are all equal before God; everyone is a subject with the same rights in the church, with their own dignity and not an object of pity.

It is preferable that people should not have to hide the way of

⁶ Jn 4: 7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, «Give me a drink.» 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, «How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?» (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, «If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, «Give me a drink,» you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.» 11 The woman said to him, «Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?» 13 Jesus said to her, «Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.» 15 The woman said to him, «Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.» 16 Jesus said to her, «Go, call your husband, and come back.» 17 The woman answered him, «I have no husband.» Jesus said to her, «You are right in saying, «I have no husband»; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!» 19 The woman said to him, «Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.» 21 Jesus said to her, «Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.» 25 The woman said to him, «I know that Messiah is coming» (who is called Christ). «When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.» 26 Jesus said to her, «I am he, the one who is speaking to you.»

⁷ Rom 12: 3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.

living their sexuality. The task of the church is to help them to live a liberated life - therefore we as church have to campaign for human rights.

If diversity is accepted, we must ask the question how this diversity in sexuality can be lived. The criteria are: the love towards God and one's neighbour, the Golden Rule as well as 1 Cor 6:12.⁸ This means a relation is based on responsible action. It takes place on eye level; and is lived without domination. Both are free to decide and each one knows which consequences the decision can have.

We see that in our churches the question, which ways of living sexuality are acceptable, is answered in different ways.

However, we propose that whatever way of living their sexual relationship two persons decide on a mutual ground to be good for them should be respected – especially if this decision is based on love.

2.2 Differences and explanations

We have to acknowledge that there are different ways of living sexual identity in our communities, e.g.:

- Heterosexual
- Homosexual: people who prefer to stay as men or as women together
- Transsexual: men and women who feel they belong to the other sex and change their biological sex by operation
- Intersexual: who are born with the attributes of both biological sexes
- Transgender: men or women who cannot identify themselves directly with one of the two gender groups
- Transvestite: men who dress and style themselves as women
- Bi-sexual: a person (man or woman) who feels attracted to men as well as to women

As well as diverse ways of relationships, e.g.:

- Married couples
- Married couples with children
- Couples staying together without marriage
- Single parent households
- Patchwork families (couples with children from previous relationships)
- Rainbow families (homosexual couples with children)
- Older men interested in younger women and older women interested in younger men – on the second point a great discussion has started in Germany

We can observe that there are people whose identity and ways of living relationships change throughout their lives.

Furthermore we observe that many people are afraid to come

⁸ 1 Cor 6:12: «All things are lawful for me,» but not all things are beneficial. «All things are lawful for me,» but I will not be dominated by anything.

out and that rumours can be enough to ruin someone's reputation due to the stigmatisation of certain sexual orientations. We would like to explicitly mention that there are relationships and sexual dependencies which are not based on free choices, but are the consequences of poverty, such as:

- Commercial sex work
- Sugar daddies/mammies
- Drug related prostitution

2.3 Tasks, mission and vision

Each of us can help that everyone feels welcome in our congregations – we are responsible so that everyone feels at home. In order to create an atmosphere of acceptance, compassion and solidarity, there are concrete tasks:

- Churches as institutions have to check their respective handling of the limited admission to baptism, who is allowed to be baptised (e.g. children of single mothers). Everyone has the right to be baptised because of the commission of Christ (Mt 28:18-20).⁹
- These discussions must be integrated into the theological education as topics of theological seminars, theological homework, theological discussions, exam papers, subjects of doctoral theses, etc.
- Internships and research opportunities with documentations on the studies should be offered to students

⁹ Mt 28: 18 And Jesus came and said to them, «All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.»

3. A new understanding of what it means to be a strong man

3.1 What we have in common

The starting point of the topic was the observation that men play a huge role in spreading HIV and Aids, but a small role in prevention and seldom get themselves tested. Another point is the gender injustice which still exists in our societies and the need to achieve a society which is more just on all levels. Therefore, we formulated some thoughts and wishes on how men could be strong:

A strong man is he

- whose strength doesn't hurt others;
- who loves his fellow human being and doesn't dominate him/her;
- who understands women and men subjects and not as objects, and who treats them as equals
- who is able to live on an equal level with a strong woman (or another strong man) and to interact on equal basis with each other;
- who protects himself and his sexual partner(s) from becoming infected, who overcomes fear, takes up responsibility and gets tested;
- who allows himself to show emotions and talks about his fears, weaknesses and feelings also to women;
- who respects and supports women's leadership in different working areas and empowers women to take up leadership positions;
- who is able to listen and to communicate openly;
- who takes more time with family and who shares responsibilities for the upbringing of children and the household duties;
- who does not always put his job first;
- who takes responsibility in society in order to help to positively shape it;
- ...

God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9).¹⁰ In this sense, a man who allows weakness shows strength and reflects the example of Christ, who humbled himself and died for the sake of all. We realised that the new understanding of what it means to be a strong man also opens up a new perspective of the relationship between men and women. In the interaction with the "YOU" (according to a term of Martin Buber's philosophy which refers to the other one), "I" realise and understand myself. The stories of Creation make it

¹⁰ 2 Cor 12:9: But he said to me, «My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.» So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

clear that human beings are created to be in relation to one another, “it is not good, that the man should be alone” (Gen 2: 18).¹¹

3.2 Differences and explanations

Our two societies are patriarchal societies, but in Namibia it is more obvious, in Germany it is more subtle.

The changes of the patriarchal systems are linked with fears, especially the fears which men have: They feel that if role models are changing, they will be dominated by women and that they will lose the power of decision-making in economic, household, sexual and family-planning matters and especially that they will lose their manhood.

The majority of men still have the fear to be tested: They cannot cope with a possible positive result; that the outside world will think that he has many sexual partners and that the partner might leave.

Even the attempt to change with role models is hindered by the extended families, society and, especially in Germany, the business world.

But there are exceptions: in Namibia there are also women heading the household, are taking up leadership positions. Slowly there are changes visible: women are claiming their rights.

In Germany, women have taken leadership positions, but nevertheless they experience restrictions from society and some severe set-backs.

3.3 Tasks, mission and vision

Church should take their important role in society seriously and help change the perception of how men – and women as well – can take over responsibility in a broken society which is mostly guided by a maximisation of profits. Prior to this, these discussions have to be launched in the churches themselves.

Churches should:

- create platforms for men to share their experiences and problems
- create spaces where women can share and show what they have achieved and where men are invited to listen
- encourage women to support other women in leadership positions
- introduce a system of a gender oriented rotation in leadership
- offer activities for fathers and their children
- encourage men to get involved and to work in the primary school sector
- employ men in kindergartens and primary schools, so

¹¹ Gen 2:18: Then the LORD God said, «It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.»

- that children can experience men as role models as well
- promote the new role model in the pre-marriage counseling, in confirmation classes, Sunday schools
- encourage the new understanding of men being strong as a topic and basis for the entire work in the churches.

4. Pastors as wounded healers

4.1 What we have in common

Healing is done by God, not by people because God heals both pastors and congregants.

God assigned pastors for the healing ministry, to proclaim the Gospel, pray, care, accompany and to be responsible for the entire diaconal service.

Pastors are wounded healers who are human beings and sinners.

In their weakness and brokenness they should follow Jesus in his footprints. Jesus also was and is wounded.

In their brokenness pastors should acknowledge their own woundedness and their failures. Only then they will be able to assist and care for the wounded congregants. This acknowledgement will help them to lead an exemplary and responsible life, also with regards to their sexuality.

Pastors are sexual beings just like every other human being. Therefore, we have to make sure that the same positive criteria (cf. I.2. and II.1.) for sexuality apply for pastors (female and male) and other people. This includes respect for each other and meeting each other with dignity. Pastors can be wounded in their sexuality just like any other person (by education, traditions, abuse, failed relationships, frustration, etc.). Pastors are not immune to be infected or affected by HIV and Aids: When a pastor is HIV-positive he/she does not stop to be a pastor and there is no reason for them to stop carrying out his/her pastoral duties. They can even use their woundedness to care for other wounded people. Therefore fellow pastors, congregants and even the church leadership have to protect and support a pastor living with HIV and Aids against all stigmatization.

4.2 Differences and explanations

One of the important tasks of pastors is the ministry of healing. We see that in the role of the pastors there could be different concepts of the healing ministry: e.g. healing others or helping others to find their own way of healing. We realise that this ministry can cause misunderstanding. Pastors can do the healing ministry but there is the danger of pastors feeling like they are God. Congregants can also put pastors in the place of God, thinking pastors are the healer, when in fact it is God who heals, not the pastor.

In their ministry, pastors can help people to be restored to wholeness in the image of God. Wholeness means physical, psychological, social and spiritual health.

They do it by:

Strengthening people's faith through the power of prayer which can even cause physical healing

- Helping people to face and accept the realities of life
- Counselling in decision-making processes
- Enabling forgiveness
- Advising people to seek other professional help if necessary

However, congregants expect pastors to be perfect in every way, to be the leaders of the congregation and to be healers. We also realise that there are certain expectations, both from the pastors for themselves, as well as from the congregants. One of these expectations is: a pastor is "holier" than others, at least "holier" than the congregants. This can lead to the following situations in reality, that congregations expect pastors to:

- live within the framework of social normativity, i.e. living in a harmonious heterosexual marriage with well-behaved children. They should either conform to this normativity or be asexual beings (like a virgin).
- not share their problems and weaknesses.
- have a strong faith without any doubts and to have answers to all questions.

These ideas of social normativity and a set up concept of "holiness" are also shared by the community of pastors. There is peer pressure by colleagues to uphold a certain image.

With regards to this reality, it is important for us to underline that we are all, pastors and congregants, holy in the face of God through the death and resurrection of Christ. This applies to the whole congregation. There is no special "holiness for pastors" Nevertheless, we are human beings, sinners, we are created, we are not the Creator. ("simul justus, simul peccator").

4.3 Tasks, mission and vision

We want to encourage pastors to acknowledge and deal with their own brokenness and wounds. Therefore one important point is that we need supervision and counselling for pastors. The pastors need a forum where they are able to talk about it and support each other in a trustworthy atmosphere.

Teaching and information for congregants about pastors as wounded healers should take place and be done by someone from outside.

We want to accompany people in their illness/woundedness, pray for them, but also advise people to seek other

professional help if necessary.

Therefore we have to clarify what healing in a Christian way means.

This is also necessary for the pastors themselves to be accompanied by the congregants.

As wounded human beings, pastors must be trained in certain skills and competences within their limitations.

Therefore we need training on leadership skills, to delegate tasks, learn to live with our limitations and fill the lack of competence.

Pastors should be encouraged to get themselves tested and be strong enough to disclose the result to be an example for the others/for the society.

We want to initiate workshops with church leaders, pastors and congregants on stigmatisation (woundedness caused by ways of life, HIV and Aids, culture and tradition) and workshops on sexuality as well.

This is our vision:

Pastors and congregants accept pastors as human beings (including their sexuality).

As a community we are open to accept our woundedness in all forms and to share what we are ready to share.

We open society for discussions on the issue of sexuality.

There is no more stigmatisation and prejudice (especially on sexuality and diversity).

We are a competent church on the issues of ways of life, sexuality, HIV and Aids as well as the woundedness of the community of believers.

Sexuality as a gift of God

2.1 Sexuality – a gift of life, a gift of God (a German perspective)

1. Sexuality and Culture

The understanding of sexuality varies through the times and different cultures. It depends on whether the structures are patriarchal or matriarchal, whether there are father or mother goddesses or a whole pantheon of gods, whether these are mere fertility symbols or philosophically influenced and thereby spiritualized religious trends, whether there was an enlightenment or not, in which parts of the world and under which living conditions they arise, what kind of historical events had an impact on them, what natural living conditions are and what was created from these. “The way we experience, evaluate and shape love and sexuality depends on the society surrounding us, its cultural, religious, ethical values and standards.”¹²

2. Sexuality and Church

The handling and the understanding of sexuality in church history is especially characterized by Augustine. In his thought he was very much influenced by Neo-Platonism and its characteristic division of body and soul. This resulted in an upgrading of soul compared with body. Everything related with body, thus also sexuality, was considered inferior. Sexuality became something bad, impure, sinful, something that should be avoided if possible. “Since church father Augustine ... and his determination of sin as concupiscence (desire) church and theology used to regard sin in a particular closeness to sexuality or even sexuality as an expression of sin. This is a moral misunderstanding of sin, and sexuality as a positive part of human beings as a creature is defamed or denied.”¹³ “In this understanding sexuality is only good when practised for reproduction and exclusively occurs within marriage. All other forms of sexuality appear as sin.”¹⁴ Following the teachings of Augustine original sin was synonymous with sexual desire; everything connected with sexual desire, makes a human being a sinner.¹⁵ That is the reason for the Church’s interest in the sexual life of its members (although it is rather voyeuristic) as, so to speak on the trail of

sin. But “the... equation of sin and sexuality which is latently advocated until today is an error of Christianity”¹⁶ because the Bible itself is not at all hostile to sexuality, but rather full of sensuality.

3. Sexuality: What is that?

Sexuality is “the entirety of all life expressions originated in gender”. Gender is the “differentiated characteristic of all living creatures in regard of their sexual reproduction”; regarding human beings the “sex drive should be understood as a basic life expression”.¹⁷

“Sexuality is a ‘natural disposition’ – created and wanted by God – which human beings share with higher developed animals/beings. Their general biological sense aims to preserve and increase the species by reproduction... Body and soul of human beings are created in a way that the emotional dimension of satisfaction of sexual desire can be decoupled from the biological function of reproduction... This high degree of independence of the emotional dimension within sexuality as satisfaction of sexual desire does not permit the conclusion that the specifically human side of sexuality can just be found there and that it can be decoupled from its existence securing function... It is not only a matter of the differences between the various functions of sexuality but also of its coherence and correspondence and thereby on sexuality as holistic phenomenon, which determines, permeates, covers and binds the biological, emotional, personal and social side of life”.¹⁸

¹² W. Clasen, M. Meyer-Blanck, G. Ruddat (Hg.): Evangelischer Taschenkatechismus. Rheinbach 2001. p.302.304.

¹³ M.Kießig and others (ed.): Evangelischer Erwachsenenkatechismus. Gütersloh, 6th completely revised edition 2000. p.181.

¹⁴ Ev. Taschenkatechismus (note 12). p.303.

¹⁵ J.Feiner, L.Vischer (ed.): Neues Glaubensbuch. Freiburg 1973. p.327.

¹⁶ R.Bartelmus: Sexualität (AT). 2008. <http://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/nc/wibilex/das-bibellexikon/details/quelle/WIBI/referenz/28477/cache/5eb44edac9917da796e274519430d68/>, accessed on March 13th, 2012.

¹⁷ Duden Volume 5, Fremdwörterbuch, Mannheim/Leipzig/Wien/Zürich, 8th revised edition 2005. p.952f.

¹⁸ Evangelical Church in the Rhineland: Diskussionspapier „Sexualität und Lebensformen“ sowie „Trauung und Segnung“. Düsseldorf 1996. p.13.

4. Language of the Bible

The Old Testament doesn't have an own word for sexuality. It just happens and is simply taken for granted, as descendants have always been part of God's promises to the patriarchs. Therefore sexuality as intercourse is necessary – with the exception of Mary. And therefore the conclusion is natural that in all histories where children are procreated, sexuality happened.

4.1 Old Testament

In the Hebrew language it is hidden behind the word *jada* = "to know", being intimate with someone, being familiar with someone in the sexual sense.¹⁹ "Here we find the Bible passages where *jd'* describes the sexual intercourse of man with woman (Gen 4:1.17.25; 24:16; 38:26; Judg 19:25; 1 Sam 1:19; 1 Kings 1:4) of woman with man (Gen 19:8; Judg 11:39;...) and the homosexual intercourse (Gen 19:5; Judg 19:22)²⁰." Therefore human beings are described in the passages on Creation as sexual beings. They are differentiated in sex and physical community is essential (Gen 1:27; 2:23-24). "Sex is not indecent or forbidden. It is a gift intended by God for human beings."²¹ The whole way how the words are used shows that it means more than making love, more than a physical encounter. It means that they come closer to one another as entire person, a process of becoming familiar with each other. Physical and mental connections are established. A part of this is, caring for each other, feeling respect and awe for each other. But at the same time the word "to know" is used for the intimate relationship God wants to have with us and it opens another perspective of sexuality: God comes into play.

The Old Testament tells in manifold, different, variable and often in a carefree manner about sexuality. It shows a positive relation to sexuality and joy in physical pleasure – at the latest it can be seen in the Song of Songs.

Genesis describes human beings as sexual beings, existing in sexual differentiation and with physical coexistence as a basis. Part of this is also the rejection of all mythologization and deification of sexuality and specially the rejection of cult prostitution and its practices. Sexuality and sexual polarity are something that is created and not godlike; sexuality belongs to creation and not to cult.²²

4.2 New Testament

In the Greek language the word "eros" is used for physical love. But this word doesn't appear in the New Testament. At most you can find the word "philia" (love between friends or brothers). Otherwise it is only spoken about "love" as "agape". Here sexuality can be included. But actually sexuality is no theme in the New Testament until the letters, mainly when marriage or being single and sexual offence or catalogues of vices are concerned. Body and soul are a unity for Paul – and sexuality is a part of it: The body is not simply a part of man which could be distinguished from the actual I.²³ Jesus just gives one hint in Mt 19:5 when he alludes to Gen 2:24.

Sexuality in the polarity of sexes – as with all aspects of human, Christian life – is clearly understood in its relationship to Christ and is associated and subordinated to Him: 1 Cor 11:3 and 1 Cor 11:11-12. Part of it is also the general commandment of love. The double commandment of Mk 12:29-31 as well as the Golden Rule Mt 7:12 give a frame to human life and by this also to sexuality.

5. Sexuality in the Bible

5.1 Male Sexuality

The Bible, like history of mankind – especially in the Christian shaped Europe – mainly deals with male sexuality. Sexuality, so to speak, stands in the service of men (and reproduction). Normally they are the active ones (in contrary to Gen. 38), they govern sexuality. That is why the outstanding role of men and the male point of view and vision was in the focus up to the end of the 20th century. It just changed with emancipation and feminist theology.

In this regard men are often seen as the "crown of creation" and therefore as head of women. It was the general Christian view that women have to be subordinated to men, a view that was (wrongly!) drawn from the Biblical story of creation of the Old Testament, especially Gen 2:18-22, and the rules for Christian households in the letters of the New Testament as there are Eph 5:22-24 and 1 Cor 11:3+7-9. But this all is already expressed in Gen 3:16.

So everything, including sexuality, has to be subordinated to him. The Bible knows many stories, where men use women for sexual intercourse even with force. Sexual permissiveness we see with David but as well with the story of Simson (Judg 14ff). Basically a woman is selected out for marriage (which means sexual intercourse and descendants) not the other way round – also with the old tradition mainly by the parents.

¹⁹ W. Gesenius, Hebr. und Aram. Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament, Berlin/Göttingen/Heidelberg 1962.

²⁰ E. Jenni, C.Westermann (ed.): Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament. München/Zürich, 4th edition 1984. p.691.

²¹ S. Artner, R.Steiner: Sexualität – Kirchliche Standpunkte, 2003. <http://www.reli4you.at/ethics/sexualitaet.html>, accessed on March 13th, 2012.

²² G.v.Rad, Theologie des Alten Testaments. Vol 1. München 1982. p.163.

²³ E.Lohse: Grundriß der neutestamentlichen Theologie. Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln/Mainz, 3rd edition 1984. p.88.

5.1.1 Onanism

The modern foreign word for masturbation is wrongly derived from the Bible. There is no passage in the Bible about masturbation.

Gen 38:9 rather describes the coitus interruptus which is the denial of the completely finished sexual intercourse. This is regarded as being negative (Gen 38:10) because Onan refuses reproduction although it is commanded in the story of creation (Gen 1:28).

5.1.2 Sodomy

As with onanism here too a Biblical story became template for the name of a sexual behaviour. The history of Sodom and Gomorra in Gen 19 does not describe the sexual intercourse with animals, which is what this expression means today. But in Ex 22:18, Deut 27:21 and Lev 18:23-25 it is mentioned and like in Lev 20:15 it is drastically rejected in the purity laws and when the differentiation to other people is important. And when we examine the second story of creation very exactly we will find that already there the decision of man is against animals as partner (Gen2:20).

5.1.3 Homosexuality

There are just few parts of the Bible where homosexuality is mentioned. Especially mentioned in this context are Gen 19:4-5, Judg 19:22-24, Lev 20:13 and Rom 1:27. Also 1 Cor 6:9-10 is mentioned and generally deals with fornication.

The Biblical passages of the Old Testament see cult prostitution in the foreground and the strong wish to distance from this environment (Lev 18:3 or Lev 20:23). The catalogues of vices of the New Testament should be seen analogue to the Old Testament as a distance to the Greek environment and the decadence of the antique society. That is the basis for their judgements.²⁴ The question of the “homosexual love” was not discussed at all. That is the same for Rom 1:27 where an inherent homosexuality is not considered at all.

A special case are David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:1-4, 1 Sam 20:17+41b and especially 2 Sam 1:26). In the New Testament it remains an open question what is meant with “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn 21:7).

5.1.4 Prostitution

Regarding the cults exercised in the surroundings of Israel cult prostitution is mentioned and men are participating (Deut 23:18, 1 Kings 14:24 and 2 Kings 23:7). The translation “*catamites*” points to this theme in the New Testament as in the enumeration 1 Cor 6:9-10.

5.1.5 Rape and Pederasty

The stories Gen 19:1ff and Judg 19 deal with cases of male rape. Here men are not only subject but also object, which is seen as a more serious case of rape - even if it is not carried out. In today's understanding Gen 19:30-38 represents a – even double – rape of Lot by his daughters.

Pederasty is clearly and precisely rejected, as it is spoken about sexual abuse of boys 1 Cor 6:9-10 and 1 Tim 1:8-11.

5.1.6 Incest

Sexual activities among family members are mentioned. An appropriate collection can be found in Lev 18:6-18 and Lev 20:11-21 and concerns father, mother, sister, daughter, granddaughter, aunt-in-law, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, half-sister. And they are mentioned in 2 Sam 13 (Amnon and his sister). In these cases man is subject and woman object – the converse case is the story of Judah and Tamar in Gen 38 and Lot and his daughters Gen 19. In each case their behaviour is considered to be a culpable way of life and penalties are determined.

5.1.7 Other Aspects

5.1.7.1 Nudity and Shame

Nudity plays a role in the Bible in its own way like in the story of the paradise Gen 3 where nakedness is perceived as vulnerability and has to be covered – this is done by God Himself by the creating of clothes. That is also the first time where shame in relation to nudity is mentioned

Nakedness in public is criticized with Michal and David (2 Sam 6:20). Uncovering of the nakedness is regarded as being forbidden and indecent like in Deut 23:1. This is mentioned in the story of Noah and his sons (Gen 9:21-25).

A very unusual formulation can be found in the saying: „Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh.“(Gen 24:2.9, also Gen 49:29) This “rite of touching the genital member while swearing” is to be understood as “oath at the source of life”.²⁵

5.1.7.2 Transvestism and Eunuchoidism

Deut 22:5 clearly opposes transvestism - of both sexes. - Eunuchs are rejected as we can read in Deut 23:1; as it is understood to be a conscious action against reproduction. Also Mt 19:12 is often denoted as description of eunuchs, which also plays a role with regard to celibacy, but it is not to be understood in the sense of concrete emasculating.

5.2 Female Sexuality

In large parts of the Bible and Christian history female sexuality plays no role at all. A woman is just an object of men (Ex 20:17). She has no own sexuality or just in connection with men and

²⁴ A.Strobel: Der erste Brief an die Korinther. ZBK 6.1. Zürich 1989. p.109.

²⁵ C.Westermann: Genesis. Kap.12-36. BKAT 1.2. Neukirchen-Vluyn 1981. p.471.

II. Sexuality as a gift of God

2.1 Sexuality – a gift of life, a gift of God (a German perspective)

for the procreation of offspring. With the theme of the “infertile woman” (Sara, Rebecca, Rahel, Hanna...), there are many passages where this becomes clear.

The Old Testament knows a lot of rules in the frame of purity requirements, which deal with women and their sexuality, especially with motherhood, as there are Lev 12:1-8 and Lev 15:19ff. One story is very remarkable (Judg 13:3-5), which establishes rules for pregnancy. When considering the pureness of women menstruation is mentioned too, as in Lev 15:19ff and Lev 18:19. It is regarded as something natural, but needs to be ritually integrated.

Gen 38 is different. Here a woman takes sexual initiative - in this case to ensure reproduction – but at the same time it is a case of incest, like in Gen 19:30-38. Is this a case of theft of semen? And also Potiphar's wife acts out her sexuality (but here it is not about reproduction but about pure lust) and moves up to a man in a demanding attitude. That leads us to the theme of female seduction. This theme is especially connected with the story of the paradise. But also in the book of Proverbs there are some hints connected with the theme “desire” even if the main theme here is wisdom and foolishness: Prov 6:23-29; 7:4-27.

Excursion: The Ideal of virginity

Already in ancient times virginity was considered to have a special charm; and in special cultures and societies virginity was and is seen as a precondition for marriage up to now (also the movement “no sex before marriage” uses the principle of this mythical ideal). This context is already described in Deut 22:13-21. With Mary this ideal entered Christianity and it is regarded to be “divine” (Lk 1:34; Mt 1:20-23; cf. Mt 25:1ff). A positive valuation of virginity and abstinence can also be found in the letters of Paul. But usually this is realized in regard of the expected return of Christ, so in 1 Cor 7:25-38.

5.2.1 Sodomy

In the context of purity laws and the distinction from other people there is a passage in Lev 18:23-25 about sex with animals. Here the woman is regarded as an independent sexual being, similar to the passage in Lev 20:16.

5.2.2 Homosexuality

We can hear nothing on the subject of female homosexuality.

5.2.3 Prostitution

Prostitution is a theme one always comes across in Biblical stories, especially in connection in and around Israel (cult prostitution). It even plays a role in the genealogic tree of

Jesus (Mt 1:5 which refers to Josh 2:1). The prostitute Rahab is mentioned in Heb 11:31 and Jas 2:25 and- despite of her profession – mentioned as an example for the faithful. Prostitution is therefore no contradiction to faith and religion. Also in Prov 6:23-25 and Mt 21:32 it is spoken rather positively about the prostitute.

It is regarded negatively in the catalogues of vices or it is mentioned in the context of fornication.

Excursion: Cult Prostitution

In the Baal cult and other religious ceremonies around Israel, prostitution at the temple or altar played an important role. Female but also male prostitutes have cultic functions, serve in holy places, and function as a priest. In this way sexuality is integrated to the rite and in a way it becomes divine and has a special value. Sexuality is used as a cultic instrument. In Israel people want to separate themselves clearly from this (Deut 23:18). Therefore prostitution as well as fornication is often equated with idolatry, wrong religion, apostasy from God and especially in the prophetic books as a picture for criticism of the Israelite lifestyle – especially in the book Hosea (Hos 1:2; 4:11-14). As a contrary to this the marriage is chosen as an image for the relationship with God.

5.2.4 Incest

Incest by a woman can be found in Gen 38:13-27 and at the same time connected with the keyword “prostitution” - and in Gen 19:30-38. Besides this men are the initiators of incest (above all in 2 Sam 13) and are warned against it (Lev 18:7-18; 20:11-21). Only Lev 18:7 takes a female position.

5.2.5 Rape

Here the examples of Dinah (Gen 34) and Absalom's sister (2 Sam 13) should be sufficient here. In the stories in Gen 19:1ff and Judg 19, women are offered as substitutes for rape because their rape is obviously considered less serious, as it is only “damage to property” (tenth commandment). There are many other passages where it seems that a man is allowed just to take a woman and sex becomes an act of caprice. But the manifold laws of marriage, the description of adultery and the consequences and also the rights of slaves impress the duties also in regard of sexual behaviour and set limits to arbitrariness.

5.2.6 Single Mothers

Also this issue is mentioned, when we hear about the flight (Gen 16:6ff) and the later repudiation of Hagar with her son by the father (Gen 21).

6. Sexuality and Producing Offspring

If we regard Gen 1:28 isolated it seems that sexuality is just for reproduction, the survival of the species – there is no difference between human being and animals (Gen 1:22).

In the stories dealing with the infertility of women (e.g. Sara in Gen 16, Rebecca Gen 25, Rachel Gen 29, Hanna 1 Sam 1, Elisabeth Lk 1) we get to know how painful and disgraceful this situation is for those who are concerned and their families is and how important the procreation of descendants is. In contrary to this infertility is regarded as a punishment (Gen 30:1; Is 47:9; Jer 18:21) or a curse, Gen 30:2. Therefore the prophets can use this as a symbolic action (Jeremiah).

But for this, there are also regulations, e.g. procreation by the maidservants (Gen 16:1-2 and Gen 30).

The ensuring of descendants is also the reason for the marriage with the sister in law described in Gen 38 and Deut 25:5-6.

The Bible also knows aphrodisiacs, such as mandrakes (Gen 30:14, Song of Songs).

Throughout the whole Old Testament it is like this: To have children and to give birth to children is essential for the people of Israel and is part of the holy promises (starting with Abraham Gen 12:2). Those who have children are blessed (Ps 127:3; 128:3-4; Gen 33,5). Concerning this, sexuality is not related to age (e.g. Sara in the Old Testament and Elisabeth in the New Testament).

In the New Testament pregnancy and birth are specially mentioned in connection with John and Jesus (Lk 1-2). But for Jesus himself sexuality and procreation is no theme at all. With the letters of Paul we mainly find this question where he is dealing with more complex themes like “marriage” and “sin”. In other letters the rules for Christian households touch the theme indirectly.

But if we think about the creation of human being in Gen 1:26,27 (taken up e.g. in Ps 8:6 and Jas 3:9), procreation is clearly combined with God’s creation of humankind in God’s image.

Excursion: Man’s likeness to God

Gen 1:26-27 states man’s likeness to God, the human being is created as an “image of God”. The context suggests that the task of ruling is concerned (cf. Ps 8). This likeness to God surely does not imply a physical image. The phrasing that human beings are created as “man and woman” is not as clear as in Gen 2 and therefore could also be translated as “male and female”, which allows the interpretation that human beings have both male and female parts.

Man’s likeness to God gives the human being a special dignity. And therefore the respect of this dignity is not linked to colour of skin, language, ethnic origin or sexuality. The dignity has to be respected even in issues of sexuality and the way of living it out, as human beings exist as sexual beings, as man and woman (1 Cor 11:7-12). “Sexuality leading to procreation is thus a way of blessing which human beings share with the animals. The difference between them is the relation based on partnership between women and men as a sign of the likeness to God. Sexuality is one but not the only part of this partnership.”²⁶

7. Sexuality and Desire

Sexuality is a gift of God and at the same time an “expression of deep community as a fountain of joy and pleasure”.²⁷ Subliminally it is indicated in Gen 3:16 with the expression “desire”. Potiphar’s wife makes no secret of her desire (Gen 39). 2 Sam 13:1-15 tells about the sexual desire of Amnon for his sister (but this at the same time is a case of incest and rape). More detailed we can find it in the book of Proverbs (Prov 5:18-20; 6:23-27) Closeness, tenderness, physical attraction, longing for love play thus a role in different regards. The references to beauty and charm of women indicate that sexuality is more than just a procreative function (Gen 24:16); for instance, David is seduced by the beauty of Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2-4). Also the kiss is mentioned, like it is said about Jacob who loved Rachel (Gen 29:11). So human beings are allowed to feel pleasure also when it comes to sex. Especially the Song of Songs describes very detailed and in a nearly celebrating way, sexual desire, joy in the opposite sex thus joy in sexuality. Apart from the procreative function this joy becomes a second characteristic sign of sexuality. The marriage or love songs of the Song of Songs describe in a very visual and clearly sexualized language the togetherness of the sexes, without procreation being aimed. Man enjoys the body of the woman and the other way round; descriptions and images are clearly erotic. They are an expression of the joy in the good gift of God.

Love and desire also belong together to God, when it is spoken about His anger, His jealousy and His pity. Therefore emotions have a right to be, even when not linked to the act of reproduction.

The New Testament makes it really clear. “The desire of

²⁶ EKlR, „Sexualität und Lebensformen“ (note 18), p.36.

²⁷ U. Tietze: Sexualität – ein Geschenk Gottes, 2009. <http://www.mitteldeutsche-kirchenzeitungen.de/index.php?s=Tietze+Sexualit%C3%A4t>, accessed on March 13th, 2012.

II. Sexuality as a gift of God

2.1 Sexuality – a gift of life, a gift of God (a German perspective)

Christians is embedded and delimited by the agape.²⁸ Because the New Testament focuses almost exclusively on love in the form of agape and the erotic love is not mentioned at all. But Jn 10:10 indicates that enjoyment and desires were also a part of Jesus' life, which could also imply sexuality.

8. Sexuality and Love

In the Bible, the old family law is the usual thing. Marriages are arranged, parents decide about wife and husband. A love marriage is quite seldom. When this happens, it is almost always spoken about man's love for a woman: Isaac and Rebecca (Gen 24:61); Jacob and Rachel (Gen 29:11,17-18). We hear similar things about Samson and Delia (Judg 16:4ff), Boas and Ruth (Ruth 2-4), Elkanah and Hanna (1 Sam 1:5). A special case is 2 Sam 3:14-16a where tears are shed over a beloved woman who belonged to someone else before. The other way around it is quite seldom. An example is 1 Sam 18:20.

But with this special duties are connected for the man, not only concerning captives like in Deut 21, 11-14 but all the more in the marriage where love is a duty (look at the Domestic Codes). 1 Cor 13 describes love, although mainly viewed in reference to God. The Protestant Catechism for Congregations summarily says: "Sexual happiness is the result of love: But love includes responsibility for the other one, includes respect, care and reliability. Love is not the same as sexuality – but it is the compass for it. Sexuality without love degrades the partner to an object of desire."²⁹

Although sexuality and love are not the same they cannot be completely separated – a consequence is to take responsibility for each other.

9. Sexuality and Marriage

9.1 Marriage in the Bible

Normally sexuality happens within marriage, which is taken for granted, even if Bible – neither the Old nor the New Testament – doesn't have any term for it in particular not for marriage in our modern sense. There is also no teaching about marriage. Marriage is lived, it exists, it is implied (Mk 10; Mt 5; 19). There is a wedding (Jn 2; Mt 22) and marriage (Lk 14:20), a woman is taken as wife (Lk 14:20) or given in marriage (Ex 2:21), contracts are concluded and a bride price is paid. Apart from that, one can read about failure of marriage, about fornication and divorce.

Marriage is described to be a social, secular institution, a

partnership of convenience negotiated between parents; serving social protection and continuation of family, affiliation to the husband's family (only difference in Gen 2:24 – here rests of a matriarchate seem to be visible) means change in ownership for the woman. – That is clearly visible in the arranged marriage between Lea and Jacob.

The sexual intimacy and contact is even stronger than the own family. (Gen 2:24). Although it does not urgently mean marriage it is only directed to one partner (one wife e.g. with Noah, Isaac, Joseph). The independent decision of a woman is the exception. An example is Rebekah in Gen 24. She is asked about her marriage with Isaac (Gen 24:57-58). The communion and connection of the sexes is even stronger than the family (Gen 2:24) – but there is no talk of matrimony. In all these cases, the relationship concentrates on one partner (e.g. Noah, Isaac, Joseph).

Love marriages are rarely known although there are single couples joining in love (Jacob and Rachel) or who live together in love (Isaac and Rebekah). One of the few stories where a man chooses a wife on his own can be found in Judg 14:1-3. But if you really think about Gen 2:18-23 you come to the conclusion that God gives human beings the freedom to choose a partner. In contrary to that, levirate or brother-in-law marriage only serves procreation. (Deut 25:5-10; Gen 38) and is a special case regarding resurrection (Mk 12:18-27).

Concerning the disciples of Jesus we consciously hear about Peter, that he was married but that he leaves his wife to follow Jesus. But there is no passage where it is reported about matchmaking or married life of the disciples. And Paul clearly abstains from marriage.

But not only for Paul marriage just has a limited function (1 Cor 7), for Jesus it is just an interim solution for the world (Mt 22:23-30).

Excursion: Marriage as an Image

Marriage becomes an image, in particular in the prophets – above all in the book Hosea – for the relationship with God – and is not without sexual allusions: God as bridegroom and Israel as bride; both as a couple, who share their life (also Is 49; 54; Jer 3:9; Ezek 16; 23). There are various "stories of a marriage" telling about the relationship between both of them: the love of God and the infidelity of Israel, the missteps of the people (their idolatry, their whoring) and the patience but also the punishments of God. All this leads to a close connection between conjugal love (including sexuality) and the relation God wants to have with us.³⁰

²⁸ Ev. Erwachsenenkatechismus (note 13), p.278.

²⁹ H.Reller, H.Müller, M.Voigt (Hg.): Evangelischer Gemeindekatechismus. Gütersloh 1979. p.229.

³⁰ R.Jetzschmann: Liebe, Lust, Sexualität...und die Bibel. <http://www.gottesbotschaft.de/?pg=2157>, accessed on March 13th, 2012.

Excursion: Polygamy

In the Bible, polygamy is recognised as normal (two wives with Jacob, Esau, Elkanah, Saul; several wives with Gideon, David, Salomon, Rehabeam). But Bible expects the husband to treat his wives equally (Ex 21:10; Deut 21:15-17). In the New Testament it is not forbidden but monogamy is preferred (Mk 10; Mt 19) – according to Gen 2:24.

Very striking in this context are the following passages: 1 Tim 3:2; 3:12 and Tit 1:5f, where three groups are mentioned specifically to not have more than one wife – the conclusion might be that other groups are allowed to have more than one wife.

9.2 Rights and Duties

Bible generally knows matrimonial rights and duties. One of it is procreation (Old Testament) but as well love (New Testament). Marital fidelity is assumed; therefore fornication is often made a subject of discussion. Durability is aspired, as divorces are subject to restrictions, in the New Testament they are even rigorously rejected. In both cases men and women are treated differently, mostly to the detriment of women.

The New Testament regards especially the duties in connection with Christ and life in His spirit and therefore they are – although with different accentuation – the same for both sexes. Both shall love each other and behave righteously (Eph 5:25-33, Col 3:18-19, Tit 2:4-5, 1 Pet 3:1-7). This even reaches into the legislation concerning slaves (Ex 20:7-11; Lev 19:20).

War is a special case (Deut 20:7; 24:5), where someone who got married recently is allowed to stay at home during the first year of marriage.

Excursion: The Ideal of Sexual Abstinence

The Old Testament offers sexual diversity, abstinence is not known; in fact it is quite the opposite “Being single is regarded to be a shame, as it means that a fulfilled life is not realizable.”³¹ Sexual abstinence like in Is 4:1 and Jer 16:1ff rather becomes a sign for a life-threatening disorder between Yahweh and Israel. And only cultic immediacy to Yahweh demands sexual abstinence (1 Sam 21:5) and we also hear about it during war time (2 Sam 11:11)

Ascetism neither appears in the Gospel. In contradiction to that Paul affirms sexual abstinence for himself,

for members of the community he regards it to be desirable (1 Cor 7). For him marriage is an unavoidable concession to human ligation to sexual urges, he would prefer single life or sexual abstinence. But also within a marriage there may be phases of sexual abstinence if both want it. (1 Cor 7:5).

9.3 Marriage in the Understanding of Theologians

Gen 2:24 (Gen 1:26f as well) is regarded as an institutionalization of man-woman partnership, which is then called “marriage” – referring to a certain “order of creation”. The special role of marriage concerning sexuality is thus traditionally emphasized.

But it cannot be easily specified in the stories of creation because even though the community of man and woman as human beings is described and the sexual polarity and the close relation to each other are touched upon there, it is not connected with an institution. Therefore this position experiences more and more resistance.

Also the following chapters only tell us that man and woman are together, but not how, where, not by whom (Adam and Eve, Noah and his wife, Abraham and Sara). There is not yet such a thing as a wedding ceremony. But there is the delivery of the daughter by the father to the bridegroom, which concludes the marriage ceremony (Gen 29:23).

Marriage is thus assumed but not introduced, neither defined nor put in concrete terms. But above all it has nothing to do with marriage in the modern sense.

10. Sexuality and Sin

Sexuality should neither be deified nor demonized; it isn't a sin, but a good gift of the Creator. It is part of human being as a creature and it is embedded in his personality.³²

Sexuality in itself is not sin but a good gift of God.

But dealing with it might become a sin or might be concerned with sin. In the Old Testament it becomes a sin when violence, rape, incest and fornication become a major factor. This results by itself as human beings are regarded in a holistic way, as they stand before God as a unit of soul and body. Thus if soul or body suffer damage, if another person is damaged by something in the connection with sexuality, or in other words, if the connection with charity and by this with freedom, independent decision and physical

³¹ H.W.Wolff: Anthropologie des Alten Testaments. München, 5th edition 1990. p.256.

³² E. Gerstenberger, W.Schrage: Frau und Mann. Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln/Mainz 1980. p.97.

II. Sexuality as a gift of God

2.1 Sexuality – a gift of life, a gift of God (a German perspective)

self-determination gets lost, we must think about sin, we pursue a misdoing against God, who integrates himself in the double commandment of love.

But since Augustine, the single-sided view of Paul and the Neo-Platonism has led to sin and sexual desire being seen as synonymous. The consequence is a separation of love and desire within the church, the separation of the precious and the questionable, of a pure spiritual love and the seemingly disgraceful physical desire - quite in contrast to the Old Testament, where dedication, passion, desire, longing and enthusiasm for each other belong together.³³

The German expression „Erbsünde“ (original sin; literally „inherited sin“) might be misunderstood and could create the impression that sin could be inherited, which can only happen through sexual intercourse.

Excursion: Fornication and Whoring

Fornication and whoring are often used as synonyms. It becomes especially clear regarding the prophets and their comparison with the relationship to God and doing so fornication and whoring is equated with idolatry.

Therefore sexuality, as far as it is associated with whoring or fornication, clearly belongs to the field of sin. Both behaviours are associated with the cult of other gods in the environment of Israel, because many heathen cults were connected to sexual acts or debauchery. Therefore it means by itself falling away from God. His order is broken. Also in the Pauline Writings (especially often in 1 Cor 5-7; 1 Thess 4:3-5; or Acts 15:28) whoring in connection with the image of Christ's Body is made a central theme and concerning divorce the case of fornication is an exception. (cf. Mt 5:32) In the dictionary on the New Testament the expressions fornication, whoring is used for any kind of illegitimate sexual intercourse, for everything that is caused by desire – which should be defined.³⁴

11. Dangers of Sexuality

„Sexuality is a life-giving power created by God, which people can experience in a manifold and contrasting way: It releases and delivers; it separates and unites; it builds up and destroys“³⁵ (Prov 5:3-6; 1 Cor 7:1; 1 Thess 4:5). Therefore: “With their sexual possibilities people can do both: enrich, extend, build up, fulfil their own life and the life of others and thereby live “commensurate to community”. But they can also hurt, impair, humiliate, destroy. The realism of the Bible tells both.”³⁶

11.1 Sexuality and Power

Love, partnership and sexuality are in danger – also due to the commercialisation of all aspects of life. This leads to people being regarded as commodities. They are exploited; they become objects of those who exercise power over them. Pleasure becomes a concept without responsibility. This is especially visible in the two stories of Gen 19 and Judg 19. That matrimony can serve to secure power, that sexuality is put at the service of personal striving for power, we do not only get to know with David, who wants to use Saul's daughter Michal to attain power. In 2 Sam 16:21 and 1 Kings 12:10 sexual power is regarded as proof of imperial power.

11.2 Sexuality and Violence

Concerning this probably everyone thinks about rape (Gen 19 and Judg 10, Gen 34 and 2 Sam 13). The first two passages describe the rape of men, which doesn't take place. Instead of them, women are handed over to be raped. The other two stories are about the rape of women. As a consequence of the patriarchal biblical understanding, women tended to be regarded as an object. They had to subordinate themselves and obey their husbands and therefore no one thought about violence in marriage until modern times. - But nevertheless one might say that something like “protection of victims” is slightly visible in Deut 22:23-25. Sexuality and violence can also be a consensual interaction – in the frame of an ethics of responsibility this can be concluded from the Scriptures.

11.3 Adultery

The story of David and Bathsheba is the best known concerning this theme (2 Sam 11:2-4). Concerning adultery there are clear rules and provisions for harsh penalties (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22) As: “the uniqueness of the relationship of Yahweh and Israel strictly prohibits adultery (Ex 20:3.14)”.³⁷

³³ Ev. Erwachsenenkatechismus (note 12), p.277f.

³⁴ W.Bauer: Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur. Berlin/New York 1971. col.966.

³⁵ „Sexualität und Lebensformen“ (note 7), p.37.

³⁶ *ibid*, p.37f.

³⁷ Wolff, Anthropologie (note 31), p.253.

But it can also be remarked: being unfaithful is royal (see David), even being unfaithful is divine (Gen 6:1- 4).

In a double way the theme finds a central place in the Ten Commandments: Ex 20:14 and Ex 20:17. Lk 16:18 is a conclusion from this and Rom 13:9 even puts this in relation to the basic commandment of Jesus. Therefore adultery is the only reason for divorce (Mt 5:32; 19:9). Also in Rom 7:2-3 this is clearly mentioned. That this does not necessarily have to happen in practise we hear in Mt 15:19.

Obviously adultery has the significance of a sin, when we read Jn 8 – but due to the fact how bystanders were asked in verse 7, it remains unclear whether here the general case of a sin is talked about.

Jealousy is also addressed and integrated in a cultic way (Prov 6:32-34; Num 5:11-31).

12. Sexuality and Responsibility

Experiencing sexuality people are free to shape the boundaries.³⁸ As the Bible regards human beings holistically, sexuality cannot be regarded as isolated; it belongs to our responsibility for our whole life. But life and human beings are meant to fulfil God's demand, which means we have to take responsibility before God and our fellow human beings for all activities and we have to do everything to improve life. Everything that damages, restricts, prevents life has to be avoided when we use our sexuality. The "Golden Rule" (Mt 7:12) and the double commandment of love are a model for this. With our whole life and our whole body, we are responsible before God; Col 3:17 also applies here.

Unlike animals, human sexuality is more than satisfaction of urges or for the sake of reproduction. It is a gift of God – and therefore a task for us – to exercise it responsibly in all its forms. "Every sexual activity which is only purely self-centred and focused on pleasure is a contradiction to that kind of love which sexuality can offer and to which faith grants the freedom."³⁹ As it is said in 1 Cor 6:12: "Everything is permissible for me – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me – but I will not be mastered by anything." Therefore the partner may not be or become object of the own needs. The sexual encounter may not be degraded to a simple consumption.

That is why sexuality, in the biblical sense, must not be seen in isolation; it is always integrated into the whole ensemble, that means God's perspective of human beings and the responsibility human beings have for life since the moment of creation, for their own lives and for the lives of others. Sexuality has no end in itself but means to live in a responsible

way in regard to oneself and to others. Therefore a couple should "live sexuality in a way that none of them gets any physical or mental harm or injury".⁴⁰

Therefore human beings have to learn the proper use of sexuality and to accept limits. Then sexuality can be lived in all its variations. And it is true that "sexuality lived in a responsible way is a good gift of God".⁴¹

³⁸ „Sexualität und Lebensformen“ (note 18), p.37.

³⁹ Neues Glaubensbuch (note 15), p.502.

⁴⁰ Die Bibel und die Sache mit dem Sex. <http://www.mehrglauben.de/vertiefen/aktiv-als-christ-leben/die-bibel-und-die-sache-mit-dem-sex/17-1001-20>, accessed on March 13th, 2012.

⁴¹ Käßmann, Margot: Sexualität ist ein wunderbares Geschenk Gottes. 2010. <http://chrismon.evangelisch.de/blog/auf-ein-wort/sexualitaet-ist-ein-wunderbares-geschenk-gottes-3975>, accessed on March 13th, 2012.

2.2 Human sexuality and homosexuality (a Namibian perspective)

I wish to talk with you today about human sexuality. It is a topic that some of us may find difficult to discuss, because of personal shyness or a concept of personal privacy or fear of offending others. Because human sexuality is a sensitive topic for many, we might not be as open in issues relating to sex and sexuality as perhaps we might wish to be. But human sexuality is not a topic we should be embarrassed or concerned about discussing among our colleagues and our brothers and sisters in the Community of Christ.

Our sexuality is part of who we are. It is a gift bestowed upon each of us by God who made us in his divine image (Gen 1:26-27). We owe our sexuality to God and therefore should not hesitate to recognize it as an essential part of our personal identities. Our sexuality is not something to be ashamed of, but something we should embrace. Sex is good. When a physical act of love is shared between two people in a mutually loving and respectful relationship, it is how God intended us to enjoy our sexuality.

Unfortunately, the issue of human sexuality has become one weighed down in controversy. That is because society is confronted with how to respond to our homosexual brothers and sisters who seek to practice their human sexuality openly and honourably. They are looking for recognition of their rights to be who they are and to live their lives being true to themselves, as creatures made in the image and likeness of God. Today, gays and lesbians are taking their demands for equal rights and respect to society's institutions. The legislative and judicial branches of governments in countries throughout the world are being asked to extend the equal rights to those citizens who are denied rights because of their sexual orientation. Consideration of the issue includes an analysis of culture and tradition and the evolution of societal perspectives on Human Rights. Government institutions have drawn conflicting conclusions on the rights to be afforded to members of the homosexual community depending upon the weight and influence of culture, tradition, religion and concepts of civil rights and equality that have been evolving in modern society.

The 21st Century has seen an extension of full equal rights to homosexuals, including the right to marry, by no fewer than ten sovereign countries (Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain and Sweden) and six states of the United States of America (Connecticut, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, Iowa and New York). In contrast, homosexuality remains a crime in several countries, with 36 of 54 sovereign countries

of Africa, including Namibia, 21 countries of Asia and the Pacific, and 11 countries of the Middle East declaring homosexuality illegal. As is obvious, the issue of society's response to homosexuality is one that stretches from one end of the spectrum to the other.

Christian Churches have not been exempted from the calls for equal rights from the homosexual community and similarly are confronting the issue. Indeed, for many who oppose equal rights for homosexuals, religious belief is a cornerstone of their opposition. Thus, the Church holds a prominent position in the debate. For the Church, the issue begins with Holy Scripture and the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Many in the Church struggle with scriptural texts on homosexuality that seem to conflict with the Good News preached by Our Lord and Saviour. This conflict has resulted in divergent positions among Christian denominations on the issue of homosexuality, not unlike the differences resulting from the consideration of the issue by civil society institutions. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) supports equal rights for gays and lesbians while the Roman Catholic Church does not. There is no denying that this is a most difficult issue for many in that it touches upon one's cultural, personal, theological and spiritual core beliefs which can appear to be irreconcilable.

I speak to you today – an ordained pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) – as one who has struggled to reconcile scriptural verses with my personal view of what it means to be a Christian. What follows is a reflection of my personal belief that the Church, as the embodiment of Christ's message of good news and salvation, must recognize the right of our homosexual brothers and sisters to equality in both civil society and in the Church. This is not a statement of policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Republic of Namibia, but rather a statement of personal conviction.

My initial source of guidance on this and other moral issues begins with the divine revelation of the Bible. We Christians can point to verses in both the Old Testament and the New Testament that suggest a condemnation of homosexuality. Genesis tells us the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sin of homosexuality. Lev 18:22 directs that "thou shalt not lie with mankind as with woman-kind, it is abomination." Lev 20:13 tells us that the abomination of homosexuality requires that both parties "surely be put to death."

The proscription against homosexuality also appears in the New Testament. 1 Cor 6:9-10 includes homosexuals among the wicked who are defined as the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers and prostitutes. Rom 1:26-27, 1 Tim 1:9-10 and Jude 1:7 all admonish homosexual behaviour as deserving of the wrath of God. Of course, among some biblical scholars there are differences of opinion on the interpretation of these verses.

I am not here to debate the differing opinions or the conflicting conclusions that flow from such opinions. I accept that these biblical passages can be read to express disdain for homosexuality. But that does not settle the issue for me. To cast out from God's grace a group of people because of their sexual orientation seems to me to overlook the message of Christ as spoken in Lk 4:18 and 19 when in fulfilment of the writings of the prophet Isaiah, Jesus said:

"The Spirit of the Lord is with me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

And Lk 6:37-42 instructs us:

"Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

These passages go to the very core of Christ's teaching – that we, each of us, must extend an outstretched hand to those in need of comfort and support, and we must do this without judgment or condemnation. These words of Jesus are inclusive. They charge each of us to recognize our common brotherhood and sisterhood with all men and women. These words do not exclude any of our brothers or sisters from the good news of Christ's message. They do not instruct us that it is okay to pick and choose those deserving participants in a Christian community. If these words of Jesus do not discriminate in their reach to our brothers and sisters, then how can we? I say we cannot – not as individual Christians or as the Christian community of the Church. As a Church we must extend our reach to embrace those men and women who have been marginalized because of their sexual orientation. We must bring them into our community, not banish them from it.

The conclusion as to the Church's responsibility to be inclusive to homosexuals is in keeping with the ministry of the African Christian Church. In Africa, the role of the Church has

long been to attend to the physical and spiritual needs of its people. Diakonia has been the driving force in the Church's ministry on the continent, tending to the vulnerable, to the marginalized and to the sick. The strength of the Church in Africa is grounded in its recognition and practice of the message of compassion spoken in the Gospel of Luke.

In recent times, we saw the Church depart from its diaconical mission in favour of a strict reading of biblical verses that condemned those who engaged in certain sexual behaviours. At the beginning of the HIV/Aids epidemic in Africa – an epidemic that is driven by heterosexual sex – the Church was slow to embrace People Living With HIV/Aids (PLWHA). Initially, the Church chose to view the epidemic from a moral perspective which led to condemnation of those infected with HIV/Aids, a condemnation grounded in biblical verses that spoke of the wrath of God to those engaging in immoral acts. The Church's early theological rigidity on the issue of HIV/Aids fuelled stigma and discrimination against PLWHA, adding to the suffering of those infected and affected with HIV/Aids. When the Church recognized HIV/Aids as a health issue and not a moral issue, it could once again embrace its diaconical mission. It was then that the Church rose to its full moral stature and assumed a leading role in the response to HIV/Aids. I would not like to see the Church repeat history and confront the issue of equality for our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters as it initially confronted the issue of HIV/Aids. Assuming a narrow and theologically rigid perspective over the message preached by Jesus will impede the Church's diaconical work. It will prevent the Church from extending its compassion and comfort to homosexuals and will prolong a societal response of stigma and discrimination. The Church has the chance to learn from history and not to repeat the mistake by rejecting those whose lifestyle differs from that of the majority. Only in embracing our homosexual brothers and sisters can the Church fully live its diaconical mission.

Finally, as a person who was born and grew to adulthood under apartheid with its inherent injustices and indignities, the issue of equality for homosexuals is particularly meaningful. I, and millions of others, know the effects of being denied basic human respect and basic human rights – the toll such treatment can take on a person's self-confidence, sense of self-worth and emotional and psychological resilience. No doubt, homosexuals – excluded from access to a full range of societal benefits – must struggle with feelings that can undermine their own sense of value and entitlement to basic human and civil rights.

The African Christian Church must speak out in support of these brothers and sisters in the Name of Our Lord and Saviour.

2.3 Response to the contributions on "Sexuality as a gift of God"

The first thing that comes to mind: both authors only scarcely give a positive description of sexuality as a gift of God. Both are meticulous and show exegetical competence but only circle around the actual subject, mainly through explanations of irresponsible misuse of this gift. They describe this very carefully by listing commandments. An affirmative understanding of sexuality you find mostly just for the question of reproduction. Then sexuality is described as a duty of mankind (Gen 1:28) and a part of the promises of God (Gen 12:2) and the evidence for the blessing. Sexuality outside of this duty can only be found continuously in the Songs of Songs or the "love stories" of the Old Testament.

This description of negative limits of sexuality do not only mirror biblical findings but also describe the reality in the churches today: sexuality only becomes an issue when it is lived in a way that is not according to the will of God. The determinative stand of the Bible, theology and church until today is, to my mind, most vividly described in 1 Cor 7:1-9: sexuality is a burden and if you can't live without it, you should at least practice it in an "orderly" fashion. Here it becomes clear that Bible, theology and church are incompetent when it comes to pleasure, reality and the experiences of individuals!

However, three access points for a responsibly lived sexuality can be found in the papers.

1. On the one hand it is possible through the description of limits, by naming practices that are unacceptable such as sodomy, incest, pederasty, cult prostitution. This is like saying: "OK, try not to imagine there is an elephant in the room!"
2. A second possibility is to reverse the arguments and get a positive description from that: „respectful“, „honourably“, „becoming familiar“, „caring...and awe for each other with a possible reversal: „the egoistic breaking of the divine order“.
3. The most helpful access to this is the description of sexuality as an expression of life between human beings in various biblical and ethical basic models. Sexuality is not an area of human life with special rules. The rules are covered by the double commandment by Mark (12:29ff) and the Golden Rule (Mt 7:12) and the conclusion of 1 Cor 6:12: "Everything is permissible for me – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me – but I will not be mastered by anything" and Col 3:17.

In the end, however, all three approaches do not go further than to describe ethical questions of sexuality. They describe how it can be done, not what it actually is, this gift of God. The impression left by 1 Cor 7:1-9, has had an impact on

the historical understanding and everyday life in the church. To work against this impression, I would like to underline the following basic insights that can be found in these two papers:

1. Humans have desires and lust: Gen 3:16, Eccles 9:7-9 and even 1 Cor. 7:1-9 exclude all doubts.
2. Human beings are built in the likeness of God. Sexuality is divine. "And God saw ... it was very good!" (Gen 1:27-31)
3. Sexual intercourse is one element of sexuality, sexuality one element of human beings.

After reading these papers I am still struggling with the theological consequences which result from the missing descriptions of sexuality as a gift of God for the Bible, the history of theology and the actual reality we see today. Maybe an interpretation of the story of creation and the Fall of Mankind can help us in understanding the fear that the church and the Bible have towards sexuality. The strongest arguments for understanding sexuality as a gift of God can be found in the story of creation: the creation of human beings in the image of God and as a couple in which the two people relate to one another. The Fall of Mankind is characterised by the knowledge of what is good and evil. The first human reaction to this knowledge is shame. Now equipped with the knowledge of what is good and evil, the God-given physical lust and passion is diminished by the dictate of rules and commandments. Being ashamed of nakedness, which is, in fact, the state in which God created man and woman, is a "sinful", human reflex, of which the wish to be clothed is the result. It might be helpful to see the "disguising" and "hiding" of lust and passion out of shame as a symptom of the Fall of Mankind also as a description of some associations of the Bible and the Church today. This understanding could shift the attempts to perceive sexuality as a gift of God in the light of a liberating theology rather than from an ethical or moral point of view. The goal is to afford deliverance without condemnation (Lk 4:6).

God created us with different sexual orientations

3.1 God created us with different sexual orientations - Diversity rather than simple-mindedness in the church towards ways of life (a German perspective)

There has always been a diversity of ways of life and sexual orientations.

During our seminar in Swakopmund in autumn 2010, our working group gathered many examples of how the reality of diverse ways of life and sexual orientations is perceived in Germany and Namibia. For instance, the possibility of a civil union for gay and lesbian couples is a social reality in Germany. There are also examples of so-called *Rainbow Families*, in which same-sex couples raise children. Pre-marital sex and non-marital partnerships are also a reality in Germany. However, in both countries there is a distinctive heteronormativity and a heterosexism, which stigmatise people with deviating ways of life and sexual orientations.

In more recent publications on the subject of ways of life and sexual orientations, the abbreviation “LGBTQ” (= Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Queer) is often used. This abbreviation stands for the inclusion of the different sexual orientations.⁴² Since this abbreviation (“LGBTQ”) is too complicated in the linguistic usage of this paper (LGBTQ people, LGBTQ being, LGBTQ ways of life, etc.), I would prefer to use the term “multisexual” to make things easier.

Justification

1st theory:

God accepts the human being: in their diverse ways of life and with their own particular physical, psychological, socio-cultural and sexual traits.

This is the Protestant teaching / the gospel of the justification of the sinner. God gave his affirmation to the human being as a sinner (*simul iustus, simul peccator*).

Luther's reformatory realisation was based on the understanding that human beings can stand upright in front of God, because God accepts them unconditionally, as they are – with their own particular characteristics. This also means that God accepts the different ways of life and sexual orientations, as they are. They are not seen by God as loss-making traits, but as part of the person themselves.

2nd theory:

God becomes human – not the other way around: God unconditionally engages with the entire human being – also their way of life and sexual orientations.

In the letter of Paul to the Philippians it is said of Jesus “he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.” (Phil 2:8)

God does not just accept the human being; he also becomes unconditionally involved in the life and death of human existence.

In the eyes of the heterosexistic society, deviating “multisexual” ways of life and orientations are often perceived as *godless* – however, God is particularly present where a human being lives and loves.

3rd theory:

Sin (Greek: *hamartia*) is the state of human being separate from God.

Sexual orientation and ways of life alone are *not* a characteristic of sin or guilt. (cf. 1 Tim 4: 4: For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving. Also, 1 Jn 4:16: God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.)

⁴² For the (sociological) meaning of the abbreviation cf. <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT>; accessed on August 26th 2011.

III. God created us with different sexual orientations

3.1 God created us with different sexual orientations - Diversity rather than simple-mindedness in the church towards ways of life (a German perspective)

The so-called Fall of Mankind in Genesis chapter 3 is traditionally the primary story for the origin of sin.

This however, is not the only concept of sin in the Bible. Sin/hamartia is also the state of being separate from God, which is expressed in peaceless strife, hatred, injustice and greed in this world.

According to Henning Luther, sin is an image of human beings in which the difference between creator and creation is blurred and human beings are mistaken for God.⁴³

Many people are taught that sexuality is sinful, unclean, something to feel guilty about. Therefore, many people are afraid that their way of life and sexual orientation is also sinful, unclean, something to feel guilty about, if it does not conform to the heterosexual code and order.

Creation

4th theory

Every person possesses an individual sexual orientation. Their particular ways of life results from this.

Sexual orientation is a sex-based interest in another person, either of the same or the opposite sex. "Sexual orientation consists of erotic attraction, sexual behaviour, sexual fantasies, being in love, self-definition and social interaction. These aspects can be contradictory sometimes."⁴⁴

Sexual orientations can be very diverse. They are the personal characteristics of a person which are not instantly recognisable. In social science one speaks of an "invisible stigma"⁴⁵ for lesbian women and gay men, which is not immediately identifiable on the outside. It is usually the own decision of "multi-sexually" living people, whether they want to outwardly show their sexual orientation.

For many years now, I have been leading a "group for the

parents of same-sex loving sons and daughters". Many times the parents assure me that they "actually" don't have problems with the way of life of their children, as long as their children do not show it. And some also add that "thank God" their son's/daughter's sexual orientation cannot be seen on the outside. Usually this is because of the fear that their son/daughter would have difficulties in everyday life and their jobs, if one could recognise their sexual orientation from their social behaviour or their outward appearance.

It is interesting to ask about the image the parents have of gay men or lesbian women— in other words, what they think a gay or lesbian person has to do to become outwardly recognisable as such. It is usually the stereotypes, the prejudice-laden images: gay is associated with feminine, camp, overly styled. Lesbian is associated with masculine, boyish, short haircut.

Similar perceptions of gay men and lesbian women were also gathered in our working group in Swakopmund. Gay men are perceived as having feminine attributes and girly behaviour, lesbian women were associated with masculine characteristics. However, sexual orientation of people is like language. It is diverse, different and individual.

The sexual orientation of human beings is a core trait of their personality. It consists of many characteristics which are specific to the respective identity.

In the handbook "sexual orientation and diversity in education and consulting" it says: "the way people perceive their sexual orientation differs immensely and is a mirror of their personal identity".⁴⁶

Just as people are different in looks and in personality, they are also individually different in sexual orientation. Whether one's own sexual orientation is "right" or "wrong" cannot be dependent on the sexual orientation of the partner.

It is also written in the aforementioned handbook that "in different cultures and countries of the earth the subject of sexuality is treated differently. ... Sexuality plays an important role in the development of our identity because we are validated in our identity as a man or a woman through sexual experiences, just as we validate others in their identity. ... The sexual identity is the basic self-understanding of a human being of who they are as sexual beings – of how they perceive themselves and how they want to be perceived by others. It includes the biological, social and also psychological sex as well as sexual orientation.

The biological sex means: one is either a boy/man or a girl/woman in a purely physical sense. In one in 2000 cases a definite determination of the sex is not possible at birth. In this case, one speaks of intersexuality. The psychological sex or sexual identity constitutes the personal conviction of a person

⁴³ cf.: Henning Luther, Religion und Alltag (Religion and everyday life), Stuttgart 1992, p.172.

⁴⁴ Ministerium für Gesundheit, Soziales, Frauen und Familie des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Mit Vielfalt umgehen. Sexuelle Orientierung und Diversity in Erziehung und Beratung, Düsseldorf 2004. Brochure I: Coming-out und Identitäten.

⁴⁵ cf. <http://www.socialinfo.ch/cgi-bin/dicopossode/show.cfm?id=655>, accessed August 25th 2011: "The term stigma describes a physical, psychological, characteristic or social attribute of a person, which is imputed on them by a third party. The stigma evokes rejection, anxiety or unease in the third party and devalues the carrier of the stigma. Erving Goffman (1967) differentiates between visible and invisible stigmata and the different consequences. The carriers of visible stigmata (colour of skin, Jewish mark, etc.) experience rejection. Visibly stigmatised people try to lay down their stigma through special achievements. Sometimes they fight for the public acknowledgement of their stigma. Carriers of invisible stigmata however, try to maintain undetected by playing a role. They have to deceive their fellow human beings, in order not to be recognised as carriers of the stigma (e.g. former prison inmates or psychiatric patients) ... The theory of stigmatisation is part of symbolic interactionism, which stresses that deviating behaviour only develops as a reaction to stigmatising patterns of action by the social environment."

⁴⁶ Ministerium für Gesundheit, Soziales, Frauen und Familie des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Mit Vielfalt umgehen. Sexuelle Orientierung und Diversity in Erziehung und Beratung, Düsseldorf 2004. p.11.

III. God created us with different sexual orientations

3.1 God created us with different sexual orientations - Diversity rather than simple-mindedness in the church towards ways of life (a German perspective)

of being either female, male or both. For instance, transgender people do not perceive themselves to be part of one or the other sex. This may not be confused with transsexuals, who feel that their body does not have the right sex and therefore want to adjust their biological sex.

The social sex (or: *gender*) constitutes the norms and expectations that exist in a certain culture or society of how a woman or a man should behave. These gender specific roles have an effect on the appearances, clothing, hair styles, etc., but also body language and behaviour, which are defined by the respective culture as “feminine” or “masculine”.⁴⁷

In Gay Theology⁴⁸ it is debated whether there is a fixed sexual identity for the self-perception of human beings and whether the concept of a fixed sexual identity orientation is even applicable to multi-sexual people.

The Queer Theology has already distanced itself from the concept of identity because it “no longer assumes that a life-long fixed sexual category exists, but that a multitude of sexual possibilities is possible.”⁴⁹

5th theory

Sexual orientation and handling of sexuality are acquired, just like other physical skills (e.g. language).

If one thinks that “multisexual” orientations are “wrong”, “negative”, “sick”, “sinful” or even “curable”, this theory could suggest that one should just not be allowed to come to the point of acquiring or learning the assumed “perverse” sexual orientation.

The social scientist and sociologist Helmut Kentler has convincingly compared the diversity of sexual orientation with language, which also has to be acquired or learned, depending on the environment someone grows up and is socialised in. In an interview with Hans-Georg Wiedemann he says:

“Sexualisation is a complicated sequence of learning, which is part of the entire process of socialisation. ... The respective acquired sexual orientation does not say anything about the respective patterns of sexual attitude and behaviour. ... Homosexuality and heterosexuality are dialects of a body language, which we call sexuality”.⁵⁰

Here, sexual orientation is understood as a skill (just like a language), which people have to be introduced to, in order to be proficient in it. Just as there are different languages, Helmut Kentler believes that there are different sexual orientations, which have to be learned in order to exercise it.

Just as there are no “wrong” or “sick” languages/dialects, in principle, there are no “wrong” sexual orientations. Every sexual orientation has its worth. It then depends on how skilled one is in communicating with one’s own language.

6th theory:

“Female” and “male” are not definite categories. It depends on what society determines are “female” and “male”.

“One is not born a woman, but one becomes one” (Simone de Beauvoir⁵¹). In the same way, one is not born a man, but one becomes one. Sexual orientation is independent from biological sex and biological sex is also independent from sexual orientation. Therefore, a man (in the biological sense) can for instance love a man, but also a woman and vice versa. During the discussion about diversity of ways of life and sexual orientation one often bases arguments in the categories of “male” and “female”. This was also the case in our working group in Swakopmund. However, that which we associate with “female” or “male” is a product of one’s own interpretation.

Boys play with toy cars because they are boys – or do they play with toy cars because society wants it that way? Do girls play with dolls because they are girls - or do they play with dolls because society wants it that way? Is blue the colour for boys and pink the colour for girls?

Hans-Georg Wiedemann discusses this in this way: “whether someone is a man or a woman is not always clear when viewed from the outside. ... The premise of the naturally given fact when it comes to sex is not even maintainable in the biological sense. ... Additionally, one has to differentiate between the biological sex and the social sex (gender).⁵²

As a side note, I would like to quote a midrash on Exodus 33, verse 18 onwards: “In Exodus 33, verse 18 onwards the story of Moses is told, who wants to see God face to face. God refuses this, He lets his glory pass Moses and Moses is only allowed to see God’s back. “For no one shall see me and live” it is written there. Rabbi Rabba says: If it is true that God created human beings in *HIS* own image, male and female, then what might God look like? Poor old Moses would not have survived it!”⁵³

⁴⁷ ibid.

⁴⁸ cf. the subjects “gay theology” and “queer theology”. Wolfgang Schürger, Christian J. Herz, Michael Brinkschröder (ed.), *Schwule Theologie. Identität – Spiritualität – Kontexte*, Forum Systematik Vol. 23, Stuttgart 2007

⁴⁹ Heidi Porsch, *Queer-Theologie*, in: Wolfgang Schürger, *Schwule Theologie*, p.92.

⁵⁰ Hans-Georg Wiedemann, *Homosexuelle Liebe, Für eine Neuorientierung in der christlichen Ethik*, Stuttgart 31991, p.28 et seq.

⁵¹ Quoted from: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_andere_Geschlecht, accessed August 28th 2011.

⁵² Hans-Georg Wiedemann, *Schöpfung und Transidentität*, short presentation on the 12th public conference of Transidentitas from 11th to 13th April 1997 in Frankfurt/M., private manuscript.

⁵³ According to: Rinse Reeling Brouwer, Frans-Joseph Hirs, *Die Erlösung unseres Leibes – Schwul-theologische Überlegungen wider natürliche Theologie*, Knesebeck 1995, p.103.

7th theory

Ways of life and sexual orientations are not “natural” in the sense of a God-given and determined order of creation – contrary to the belief of a biological/natural teaching on creation. Referring to an assumed “divine order” has also led

to the politics of Apartheid, for instance. Representatives of Queer Theology⁵⁴ stress that “in God, sexual diversity and passion are anchored as divine characteristics”.⁵⁵ This means that human beings received sexual diversity and passion (and with that, sexual orientation) as a gift of creation in the sense of a skill.

The former American Jesuit John J. McNeill opposes the official catholic teaching (which perceives homosexuality as an aberrance of the divine plan and as a sin which can be overcome or a curable disease) by writing the following: “I oppose this. God created human beings in a great diversity, both when it comes to sexual identity as well as sexual orientation. Therefore, all the attempts to force human beings into the heterosexistic categories of “masculinity” and “femininity” destroy the great richness of God’s creation.”⁵⁶

On the other hand, there are also important arguments to not see ways of life and sexual orientation as “natural” in the sense of an order which is God-given and determined.

If we see “multisexual” orientations as a normality of creation, we are in danger of designing an ideologised image of God and creation. Then the focus is on what we think God’s creation is. Often enough people have brought up the order of God’s creation to legitimise *their own* interests. For instance when ethnic segregation was theologically justified or when in the Third Reich German Christians believed in a so-called God-given order of creation related to race and peoples.

At the beginning of the 1990s Dorothee Sölle wrote: “the fixed pattern of roles of a certain ... family order was glorified as an order which was given by God and His creation. The methodical logic was similar to the belief that slaves were chosen by God to serve the whites. Far into the 19th century, and even today, racism is justified in the theology of Apartheid.

The damnation of homosexuality is another example of a rigid, repressive interpretation of order [sic. order of creation]. The dual sexuality of human beings in the story of the creation of mankind is used for the interests of heterosexism, an imposed enforcement of a form of love.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ For a short overview on what Queer Theology means, see Michael Brinkschröder in: Schürger, Schwule Theologie (note 48), p.38. More to this from Heidi Porsch, Queer-Theologie. Geschichte – Themen – Chancen, ibid. p.85-101.

⁵⁵ Porsch (note 54), p.98.

⁵⁶ John J. McNeill, „Sie küssten sich und weinten ...“, Homosexuelle Frauen und Männer gehen ihren spirituellen Weg, Munich 1993, p.14.

⁵⁷ Dorothee Sölle, Gott denken – Einführung in die Theologie, Stuttgart 2002, p.66. See also: Allan Boesak, Gottes Vielfalt feiern, in: Gerechtigkeit

This is why we should be careful about what we call God-given, natural or the characteristic of a species.

Especially reformed theologians have spoken out for a liberal and natural theology, against the law of what is natural in the theology of creation.⁵⁸

The Holy Scripture

For 30 years now, I have experienced, when visiting the Evangelical Kirchentag in Germany that the opponents of “multisexual” ways of life and orientations use passages from the Bible to protest against the diversity of ways of life and sexual orientations in the church. The few Bible texts which are associated with same-sex practice have been meticulously studied, interpreted and discussed in various publications.⁵⁹

8th theory:

Certain ways of life in the Bible (e.g. patriarchy, polygamy, slavery, death penalty) are questionable or even taboo for us in our context. However, we are still true to the Bible without fundamentally imitating the ways of life in the Bible.

Some examples which are usually understood and practiced differently by us than in biblical times:

In Deut 22:22 adulterers are given the death penalty. In Lev

– Visionen vom Reich Gottes, Jahrbuch Mission 2011.

⁵⁸ e.g. Alfred de Quervain, Ethik, Vol. 1, Sanctification, p.326. cf also Karl Barth, KD III/4, p.39 et seq.

⁵⁹ Rainer Stuhlmann gives an overview of the passages from the Bible, in: Hans-Georg Wiedemann, Homosexuell, Das Buch für homosexuell Liebende, ihre Angehörigen und ihre Gegner. Stuttgart 2005, p.95-109, but also on the website of the evangelical Gay and Lesbian group “zwischenraum”: <http://www.zwischenraum.net/zwischenraumframe.htm>; accessed 27.08.2011; also on the website of HaC (homosexuals and the church): https://www.huk.org/cms/front_content.php?idart=35. Lev 18:22 and Lev 20:13 describe anal intercourse between men as an “abomination”, “idolatry”, turning to other gods. These passages were probably in place to resist the sexual customs of Syrians and Babylonians. They were known as places of cult for the gods, as a deification of sexuality.

For Israel, sexuality is a gift of God, but not godly in itself.

Gen 19:4-11 (Sodom) und Judg 19:22-26 (Gibea): The context is the attempt of homosexual rape by heterosexual men, which for a man (in the patriarchal understanding of that time) was especially humiliating. Also, there is the breach of the divine right of guests, under which the men, who were to be raped by the men of Sodom and Gibea, stood. In the teachings of Jesus and in the Gospels, sexual orientations are not mentioned. Also Mt 19:7 et seq. and Mk 12:18-27 do not mention sexual orientation.

In the Graeco-Roman world, homosexual practices were acknowledged, especially as active anal intercourse between free and adult citizens. For Paul (Rom 1:2 et seq and 1 Cor 6:9-11, also 1 Tim 1:10), homosexual practice is a sign of non-Jewish people. Paul does not make a distinction between hetero- and homosexually oriented people. According to Paul, homosexuality is the result of the adoration of other gods. He receives this idea from the Old Testament. Homosexual practice is dishonour in the eyes of Paul. Paul feels that homosexuality is “against nature”, - however, he uses the same argument when speaking of the length of hair for men and women – in this case he is talking about time-related culture or fashion.

III. God created us with different sexual orientations

3.1 God created us with different sexual orientations - Diversity rather than simple-mindedness in the church towards ways of life (a German perspective)

18:9 and Lev15:19-24 it is forbidden to have sexual relations with a menstruating woman. Nudity was seen as a taboo and a punishment: Gen 9:20-27; Is 20:2-4, 47:3. Polygamy is a given in the Bible and is not questioned (also in the New Testament).

Jürgen Ebach and many others have shown that especially passages from the Torah, which supposedly condemn homosexuality, do not play a binding role for the interpretation, because a multitude of other parts of the Torah have no relevance for us today: "My own sexuality does not follow the regulations of the Old and the New Testament. ... It would be false of me, were I to - ... accuse homosexuals of not adhering to the laws of the Bible. How false would it be, if I were to degrade those who, like me, are trying to find ways how we, as Christians could adhere to the laws of the Old Testament and still be their own person. If we understand this question as a mutual concern, we might get somewhere. If people are being excluded through the misuse of biblical rules according to one's own interest, we will not get any further. When it comes to homosexuality, being a know-it-all moralist is not fitting, especially when we feel obligated to the teachings of the Bible."⁶⁰

9th theory

"Heterosexuality is not the standard norm in the Bible, nor is matrimony a commandment" (Rainer Stuhlmann).⁶¹

The understanding of matrimony in the Bible is different from ours today. (Bible: union of economical and contractual agreements and interests; today: union of love).

Rainer Stuhlmann furthermore writes: "Jesus, as we know, was not married, and he gave a special dignity and rank to those living alone (Mt 19:10-12). Terms such as "foundation of marriage" or "marriage as an order of creation" are absurd when it comes to the Bible, especially since there is no word for matrimony in Hebrew or Greek."⁶²

10th theory

The diversity of sexual orientations and ways of life are not critically reflected in the Bible. The world of the Bible knows many ways of life and sexual orientations. However, the writings of the Old and New Testament have a different view and understanding of these issues compared to us today.

The books of the Bible were written in a time of tension, exclusion and openness towards multicultural, multireligious

ideas and foreign ways of life. The Song of Solomon is the only book in the Bible which deals with sexuality in a lustful sensuality. Here, the language of sexuality is expressed in the Bible. The Song of Solomon is, however, the only evidence of "multisexual" orientations in the Bible.

The conclusion of the Synod of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland in 1992, following the discussion of the working paper on "homosexual love" includes: "homosexuality, the practice of homosexual partnership and homosexual love is not perceived in the Bible".⁶³

Rainer Stuhlmann continues: „male homosexuality violate the rules of patriarchy, not the rules of God. Only those who think the rules of patriarchy are the rules of God will think that God fundamentally forbids homosexual behaviour."⁶⁴

Ethics

11th theory

The ethical normality of the Bible is determined by Jesus in the commandment of love: (Mk 12:29 et seq.) 'The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these.' This commandment is valid for everybody, regardless of their way of life or sexual orientation.

Regarding the second part of this commandment, the interesting question is: who is my neighbour? Luke picks up this question in his description of the Jewish argument about the highest commandment and does this by telling the story of the "Good Samaritan". Mark (12:29 et seq.) and Matthew (22:35-40) speak about the debate and answer of Jesus.

So, who is my neighbour? Jesus asks: Who was a neighbour of the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? And his answer: "The one who showed him mercy". Of all people, it was the Samaritan, someone who was regarded as inferior. My neighbour is the person who shows solidarity when I least expect it.⁶⁵

What does this mean in the context of multisexual ways of life and orientations? My neighbour is also the one who lives outside the social, economic, religious, ethnic and sexual normality. He or she is my neighbour, whom I am compelled to love.

⁶⁰ Jürgen Ebach, Homosexualität und Altes Testament, in: idem: Weil das, was ist, nicht alles ist! Theologische Reden 4, Frankfurt 1998, p.131-145, quotation: p.144f.

⁶¹ Rainer Stuhlmann, Homosexuelle Liebe, in: dokumentiert - Reformierte Kirchenzeitung 6.95, 265; auch in: Hans-Georg Wiedemann, Homosexuell, 2005, p.108.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, Synod 1992, Homosexuelle Liebe, working paper for Rhenish congregations and church districts.

⁶⁴ Stuhlmann, Liebe (note 61), p.262.

⁶⁵ Brouwer, Erlösung (note 53), Knesebeck 1995, p. 63 et seq.

The Christian congregation

12th theory

In the Christian congregation there is a diversity of ways of life and sexual orientations, even when it is not talked about openly or if it is taboo.

In many parts of the world, the social and cultural life is designed to fit heteronormativity and heterosexism.

In the working group in Swakopmund there was an intense discussion about whether or not gay men and lesbian women (could be) accepted in the congregation as “Children of God”. The critical point in the discussion was that theoretically, we could view the different sexual orientations as equal. In the congregation, however, we often find a different reality, because many congregants have a different understanding of “multisexual” ways of life and orientations.⁶⁶

The opposite to a diversity of sexual orientations is homophobia. Homophobia is widely spread in many societies. “Heteronormative systems appear to offer stability to states and individuals.”⁶⁷ This also is the case for most churches. Therefore it is a vital educational necessity to act against homophobia in schools and churches.⁶⁸ Sexual diversity in the church should liberate the church from the bonds of homophobia and heterosexism.

13th theory

Therefore, it is necessary that the diversity of sexual ways of life and orientations does not only receive a place in the Christian congregation, but are also respected.

Many statements of churches (protestant state churches) on diversity of ways of life and sexual orientations are designed in such a way as not to offend anybody. They do not want to exclude the people with “multisexual” orientations, but at the same time, they do not want to offend the “normal” majority in the churches and congregations, who still often perceive “multisexual” ways of life and orientations to be a disgrace. This means that many churches and congregations have to master a balancing act. It also means an ambiguity, for which the “multisexual” people have to pay the price. It is a “yes, but”.

One statement which is often uttered is: “We don’t mind gays/lesbians/people with other sexual orientations, but they don’t have to be so obvious about it.” A gay colleague of mine who is a pastor was told by the elders of his congregation:

“You can be gay. We don’t have a problem with that, as long as you don’t say it openly in public.”

The intentions were good, even from the elders. But what the elders were actually saying was: Please don’t show yourself the way you are, but the way we want you to be.

These encrypted messages lead to the suppression of those living in “multisexual” ways of life.

One can often hear the opinion that homosexuality is not “bad”, as long as it is not practiced.

In the context of worldwide ecumenism it is often said that we (in the North) have to be considerate about the partner churches in the South, when it comes to “multisexual” ways of life and orientations. However, the theological challenge of this subject is thereby diminished.

We can also look towards the churches who have taken steps towards a co-existence of “multisexual” ways of life and orientations and the defence against heterosexistic norms. For instance, the United Church of Christ in the USA. For quite some time, the UCC has been in an “Open and Affirming” process. Multisexual ways of life are not just tolerated and accepted, they have a place in the church and experience appreciation, without ‘ifs’ or ‘buts’. The UCC welcomes people with different sexual orientations and diversity of ways of life with the words: “Whoever you are, where ever you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here!”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ „The gay neighbour is also a child of God.“ – this phrase will be difficult in a Namibian congregation. You can’t only talk about that topic; you have to have in mind the cultural background of the people.” Working paper of working group 2, Swakopmund.

⁶⁷ Lutz van Dijk and Barry van Driel (ed.), *Sexuelle Vielfalt lernen – Schulen ohne Homophobie*. Berlin 2008, p.30.

⁶⁸ cf. the concern of Lutz van Dijk & Barry van Driel (note 67).

⁶⁹ cf. <http://www.ucc.org/lgbt/>, accessed on August 25th 2011. I would especially like to point out the offers of the Center for Gay and Lesbian Studies in Religion and Ministry (CLGS), which is part of the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. See also: <http://www.clgs.org/>, accessed on August 26th 2011.

Spirituality

14th theory

The diversity of ways of life and sexual orientations are a reality of life which should be perceived as a threat and should not trigger fear (homophobia). It should be understood as a supportive invitation for a foundation of community.

In the introduction of the book by Lutz van Dijk and Barry van Driel, Desmond Tutu writes under the title „homophobia is a crime against humanity“:

“Discrimination and persecution of people on the grounds of their sexual orientation is every bit as unjust as racism. Homophobia is a crime against humanity. We were able to overcome Apartheid in southern Africa, we will also overcome homophobia. ... We struggled against Apartheid ..., because people were being blamed and made to suffer for something we could do nothing about; our very skins...It is the same with sexual orientation. It is a given.”⁷⁰

15th theory

The worship service is the place where the diversity of the ways of life and sexual orientations should be witnessed, celebrated and appreciated.

The South-African theologian Allan Boesak hit the nail on the head: “Our Christian belief compels us to empathy and solidarity with those who experience persecution and oppression. We should whole-heartedly and unreservedly accept our homosexual brothers and sisters, in the same way Jesus did. We should resist all kinds of misanthropy, just as we resisted all kinds of racial discrimination and the oppression of women. The call to justice demands us to not worsen the plight of homosexual people by simply tolerating them, but that we accept them and thereby celebrate God’s diversity.”⁷¹
We can do this as the community of God’s children in worship – all over the world. God invites us all.

⁷⁰ Desmond Mpilo Tutu, Homophobie ist ein Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit (introduction), in: van Dijk, Vielfalt (note 67), p.7.

⁷¹ Boesak, Vielfalt (note 57), p.204

3.2 God created us with different sexual orientations (a Namibian perspective)

This paper will try to explain what is meant by, “God created us with different sexual orientations” and if that is the case, why should we condemn, discriminate and reject those who express their sexual attractions differently than the generally and Biblically accepted way, the heterosexuality.

As Christian churches and especially as Lutherans we cannot anymore avoid dealing with the issue of homosexuality. Today we do have many active members with different sexual orientations in our churches, parishes and congregations. How do we treat them in any decision-making? For example the most crucial questions facing especially, ELCIN and ELCRN with majority of Lutherans are:

1. Should the church allow or solemnize same-sex marriages?
2. Should the church ordain persons who are in same-sex relationships or marriages?
3. Should the church allow bona fide members of specific parishes involved in same-sex relationships to be elected as elders, as leaders of choirs and as leaders of various committees?

Before digging deeper in the Namibian understanding and context about homosexuality, I will look at two basic concepts about the nature and cause(s) of sexual orientation. Many people base their beliefs on homosexuality on the religious teaching that they have received:

- Many Christians, especially from other evangelical, main-line, Roman Catholic, and some other denominations believe that heterosexuality is the only normal, natural and non-disordered sexual behaviour. Homosexuality is defined as a same-sex sexual activity. They believe that homosexuality is mainly a choice that young people make, and that they are often greatly influenced to make this choice by bad parenting and /or sexual molestation during childhood. Being a choice, it can be changed at any time with some effort.⁷²
- Contrary, many liberal Christians, progressive Christians, secularists, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, human sexuality researchers, mental health professionals, etc. believe that there are three normal, natural and non-disordered sexual orientations: heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality.⁷³ Homosexuality is defined in terms of sexual attraction to members of the same sex. They believe that homosexual orientation is fixed early in life, perhaps before birth and perhaps at conception. Being an orientation, it is rarely if ever changeable.

⁷² http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_caus.htm.

⁷³ http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_caus.htm.

What is sexual orientation?

Sexuality is a vital part of who we are as humans. Above the ability to produce, sexuality also defines how we see ourselves and how we physically relate to others.

Sexual orientation is a word used to refer to a person's emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction to individuals of a special gender (male or female). Sexual orientation describes a pattern of emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to the opposite gender, same gender, both genders, or another gender.⁷⁴ According to the American Psychological Association, sexual orientation is enduring and also refers to a person's sense of “personal and neither gender social identity based on those attractions, behaviours expressing them, and membership in a community of others who share them.”⁷⁵

Sexual orientation involves a person's feelings and sense of identity; it may or may not be evident in the person's appearance or behaviour. People may have attractions to people of the same or opposite sex but may elect not to act on these feelings.

Homosexuality in the Bible

Homosexuality, a word for which there is no specific equivalent in the Hebrew Old Testament (OT) or the Greek New Testament, since the term itself, as well as the English word, originated only in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, there are a few biblical references to persons of the same-sex relationships who engaged in sexual intercourse.

The most explicit OT references to such a practice are in the ‘Holiness Code’ of Leviticus, where, under penalty of death, a male is strictly prohibited from lying with another male as a woman does (Lev 18:22; 20:13). This and other provisions in the code may have been prompted by a concern that Israel should not adopt the ways of Egypt and Canaan (see Lev 18:3-4). Neither here nor elsewhere in the OT is a female homosexuality mentioned. Despite the fact that from post-biblical times up to the present the terms ‘sodomy’ and ‘sodomite’ have been used of homosexual practices in general, the story in Gen 19:1-29 involves only the more specific case of intended gang rape - of Lot's angelic guests.⁷⁶

Homosexuality in Namibian context

Homosexuality in Namibian context is considered as a taboo on cultural, political and religious levels. Nearly most of the

⁷⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_attraction.

⁷⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Psychology_Association.

⁷⁶ Harper's Bible Dictionary.

Namibian cultural groups even during their traditional practices strongly oppose the practice of homosexuality. Most constitutions of the different traditional authorities in Namibia are clearly opposed to homosexuality. For example, the Constitution of the Khomanin people clearly says that people in same-sex relationships will not be allowed to marry. They further emphasized that the practise of homosexuality will not be allowed among the Khomanin community.⁷⁷ The whites and coloureds groups are an exception.

On the political and government level homosexuality is considered as demonic and as criminal. In 2004 during the National Assembly session, the then minister of Justice, Minister Albert Kawana said that homosexuality is illegal and criminal in Namibia.⁷⁸ So currently homosexuality is not legal in Namibia. The former president, the Father of the Namibian Nation Dr Sam S. Nujoma, made the following statement in 2001: “The Republic of Namibia does not allow homosexuality or lesbianism here, and the police must arrest, imprison and deport homosexuals and lesbians found in Namibia.”⁷⁹ However, most of the opposition parties declared on the de-

⁷⁷ Khomanin Traditional Authority Act.

⁷⁸ The Namibian, 7 May 2004.

⁷⁹ The Namibian, 2 November 2009.

bate of homosexuality that Human Rights were for everyone, irrespective of their sexual orientation. There are also claims that the homosexuality issue is western made and is enforced on Africans.

On the religious level, most of the mainline churches, Pentecostal churches and charismatic churches condemn homosexuality to the strongest terms. Very recently, during his consecration, Presiding Bishop of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), Bishop Dr J. Shangula urged Namibians to refrain from social ills such as homosexuality and corruption.⁸⁰ Bishop Dr Z. Kameeta of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) is more tolerant and supportive to the debate about homosexuality.

Having said that, it is very much difficult to address the issue of homosexuality in Namibian context, however, we can also not deny the existence of people with different sexual orientations in the Namibian society. They are there and as churches, traditional authorities and government we cannot avoid the question of homosexuality.

⁸⁰ New Era, 15 March 2011.

3.3 Response to the contributions on “God created us with different sexual orientations”

Great thanks to the two contributors, especially to the two different point of departures:

In the presentation from a German perspective indicates different theological positions supporting diversity: based on the theological topoi: Justification, creation, the Holy Scriptures, ethics, the Christian congregation and spirituality the different theories are developed and explained. I appreciate very much the constructive access to indicate the basis of a new theological understanding that welcomes diversity, different sexual orientations positively in order to broaden the perception of life in a holistic sense.

The presentation from a Namibian perspective is stronger linked to the challenges within the Namibian context, that homosexuality is lived and often negatively reflected or seen as a “taboo” as mentioned in the text or a so-called illness of the society. So the ambiguous situation is striking: a context, the lives of people, the hidden and open stories are indicating that homo- and bi-sexual relations are lived, but that churches are slow in opening up the discussion for any acceptance.

A few open questions and remarks to the papers in detail:

To the German contribution:

6th theory: on the question of maleness and femaleness: clear is that gender is determined by society, but sex is biological given – or do you say it's sometimes not correct or easily to distinguish the sex.

Is the Song of Solomon really an example of “multi-sex” orientations or rather evidence that love has not to happen und is not happening only in a setting of matrimony?

The 11th theory on ethics seems for my understanding to be too much limited to the great commandment of love – a normative ethical concept should have also reflected the human responsibility as mention in 1Cor 6. Or - and this would be a question all one should discuss - would it make more sense to change to another ethical concept which bases on the situation or the context (e.g. Situational Ethics/Joseph Fletcher: “Only one thing is intrinsically good, namely, love.”⁸¹)?

⁸¹ http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/situation_1.shtml.

To the Namibian contribution:

What are your answers to your questions in the beginning? Are the anti-homosexual mood and intentions more culturally rooted or more mission-based or is it difficult to differentiate?

The intention of the German paper could be also summarized with inclusive approach and I also have the feeling that this could be the Namibian wish as well. Inclusive in the sense of Paul Germond as a “theology of inclusion”.⁸² Since it is a hermeneutical question if I read a text with the intention of exclusion or inclusion and often homosexuality was seen or assumed to be the topic which was not always right, one has started reading the biblical evidence in order for searching hints and verses supporting the own assumption – reading for the sake of exclusion.

According to the hermeneutical questions one can go further and discover that within the Bible there is a dialogue about customs and laws – one prominent example is Gal 3:26ff, which we discussed in the Bible study.

Further then Germond describes “the exclusivist theology of Heterosexism”⁸³, refers to the South African time of struggle, heterosexuality has the tendency to be on the right side in the public discussion, like in the other times some people used the Bible to maintain racial differences, the leading role to one class not only in the political era. In times of the struggle the Kairos document or other prominent texts of Black Theologian or Liberation Theology have re-read the Bible and came to an inclusive approach and a clear answer how to challenge the other theology.

I see that in some of theories as well as in the conception of the German paper you can find a theology of inclusion. Like in the analysis of the Genesis texts one could even summarize like Germond in doing that “procreation is a blessing, but does not clearly report it as a command of God”.⁸⁴ In the NT he refers to Jesus’ inclusive teachings and action (Stories of healing e.g. the lepers).

For the discussion I would like to follow this track of theology of inclusion and keep this as point of departure for our making and thinking and would like ask the two presenters first of all a question:

To the Namibian presenter: Reading the thesis of the German paper, which three would mainly fit and challenge the diverse situation in Namibia? Later we also should discuss it together.
To the German presenter: Knowing Namibia, hearing now about the first gay-marriage, but also knowing the illegal

status still where would you start with discussions in churches – which three theories should be taken up first leading to re-thinking of theology and coming to a theology of inclusion? And at the end a quite provocative quote from Germond, with which he ended his contribution: “If theologians and church people wish to continue to exclude lesbian and gay Christians from full participation in the church, they should have the dignity to be honest and to say so, rather than hiding behind the pitiful defence of the six texts.”⁸⁵

⁸² Germond, Paul: Heterosexism, homosexuality and the Bible, in: Idem and St. de Gruchy (ed.), *Aliens in the Household of God, Homosexuality and Christian Faith in South Africa*, Cape Town, 1997, p.188-232.

⁸³ Ibid, p.194.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.198.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.228.

A new understanding of what it means to be a strong man

4.1 A new way of men – and women – to be strong (a German perspective)

This essay is about how men (and women as well) can find a new way of being strong in the German society. This new way should be founded theologically.⁸⁶

Definition of Strength – and Strong Men

When one defines strength one usually distinguishes between the physical and the mental side of strength. Most of the time men are physically stronger than women; they do the physically hard work, carry heavy, heft, lift and stem. Very often strength has something to do with power as well. Powerful men (and powerful women) are strong not necessarily in a physical way but rather in their appearance. They act masterfully and confident in every situation, sometimes even dominant. If a powerful person is also physically strong, this combination often scares people. In other cases a person seems to compensate his or her physical deficit by their grim appearance.

According to an often-used cliché men are called the strong gender while women are supposed to be the weak gender regarding the physical aspect of strength. While domestic violence against women is a big issue, it is only part of the truth. Men suffer from being powerless within a marriage or a relationship, but also in their jobs: they are mobbed or harassed, they feel constantly stressed because of too much work, they are afraid to lose their job, they are afraid of not being able to cope because everything has to be done faster and faster. Even little kids, especially boys have to deal with others taking advantage of their psychological but also physical power and they have to endure violence. There is already a pecking order declared on the playground.

The EKD department 'Working for men group' issues a workbook on special men's topics each year. This year's work

book is called "Powerful in Weakness" and in the introduction Björn Sufke, a men's therapist, states: "We as men were never the powerful gender. Even though most powerful people are men."⁸⁷

He continues, "The tension that comes with being strong or weak builds up in interpersonal relationships. If a man decides to admit his weaknesses and fears, he is branded to be a Sissy. If he decides to appear strong, he will be accused of falling back into the traditional male role."⁸⁸

Powerful in Weakness

This year's workbook is called „... powerful in the weak – men between power and powerlessness”.⁸⁹ Apostle Paul who is physically a rather weak person understands that inner strength has nothing to do with physical power. Only those who don't rely only on themselves (and their strong bodies) but accept that Jesus is the way to follow will be granted God's grace and will really be strong through this grace. When accepting his own finiteness Paul is freed. He is able to overcome his own weakness through the consciousness that God carries and leads him. When accepting that his power arises through the assurance of Jesus' love and grace he is able to carry out all his tasks powerfully, to accomplish his mission. We – and that includes men and women as well – have to stop thinking that it is possible to live our life successfully just relying on ourselves.

I want to leave its deficient attempt which says that one can only be strong through weakness. While I myself find this attempt very interesting and very politically correct I don't think that Apostle Paulus, the God-fearing martyr, sounds very attractive to those people who were not raised with a religious background. Today's society seems to think that sin and penance are not important and relevant any more. Nevertheless they are searching for a sense in life which has nothing to do with consumption and material goods. What kind of understanding of strength can we offer them as churches?

⁸⁶ Our focus is on the heterosexual man. My impression is that homosexual men are more ready to change as they were/are on the fringe of society and can't live with a status-quo the way traditional men can. I have decided that although I'm very conscious that the situation of homosexual men is very different, I, as a heterosexual woman, have not enough insight to comment on it.

This paper works with generalization. Some of them base on the study "Männer in Bewegung", Zehn Jahre Männerentwicklung in Deutschland (Men on the Move, 10 years of development of Men), Rainer Volz/Paul M. Zulehner, 2008, BMFSFJ. But I'm aware that there are always exceptions to the rule (sometimes a lot). It is my attempt to show social problems, I don't intend to provoke with clichés.

⁸⁷ EKD's Workbook Men's Sunday 2011 „... in der Schwachheit mächtig?" (Powerful in Weakness?), Introduction by Heinz-Georg Ackermeier, Dr. Helmut Eiteneyer, p. 3

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ 1 Cor 12:9: My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

How can we as so called “do-gooders“ get involved in a reasonable and sustainable way, how can we use the crisis to show how important Christian values are - without raising an admonishing finger?

How have the roles of men and women developed during the last decade(s)?

What kind of men and women are living in our German society? While we know that we have to work with clichés because this society is very differentiated (people from the Western and the Eastern part of Germany, people who are living in the city or in rural areas, ...) we are still asking these questions: How does this society look like one year after the financial crisis, shortly after an nuclear catastrophe in Japan, right in the middle of a war in Afghanistan, a society with an unemployment rate of 8% and a children’s poverty rate of 12%? What kind of men and women live in this society? How have they changed? Has there been any kind of development within the roles of men and of women? How do politics support their self-conception? What does society do for them – and what are they doing for society?

Emancipation of Women

During the last twenty years the development of the role of men (and integrated in this discussion also their understanding of strength) has been a topic in the German society. A critical discussion of the role of men and the development of a „new kind of man“ has taken place in reaction to an on-going development of the role of the women, their so-called emancipation.

Equality of gender, women’s emancipation and feminism - women have discussed and actively developed the understanding of their role during the last decades and have reinvented themselves. Today’s society supports them: Women’s policies (now replaced by gender policies), the introduction of a proportion of women in many leading bodies in companies, instruments like parental leave (paid time off after the birth of a baby), child-raising allowance (formerly for mothers, now for either parent), the right to a place in kindergarten for 3-years-old (in the 90s), for under 3-year olds (in the 2000s) and just recently a law was passed that soon even babies will have a right to get a place in a kindergarten. This way mothers have to interrupt their careers for as little a time as they choose for themselves. These days most families depend on the second income and the mothers are not in a position to take a long break after a baby is born (as child-raising allowance is usually much lower than the income). All these instruments lead to a different conception of a woman’s

role: she is an emancipated manager who is trying to manage her career just as well as her family. Her husband is not the sole wage earner any longer who comes home to his little wife waiting for him with his dinner. Only a few mothers use the opportunity to stay home with their children and do not go back to work for a long time. For those couples who decide that they don’t want to have children the opportunity to have a career is open for both the man and woman.

The new generation of young women smiles indulgently about their mothers who once upon a time used to fight for equal rights. The new women feel – at least as long as they are working – equal to their male colleagues. They think that gender-balanced language is ridiculous and feel that equality between women and men is a granted birth right.

It looks like the women have totally succeeded to integrate themselves into the men’s world, have taken over male standards. They even seem to have outrun the men in the so-called male characteristics: they are more hardworking, more efficient, organize both family and career, try to outsource chores and seem to be – because of their multi-functionality (which men lack, as we know) the “better men”, the more successful human beings.

Well, yes, this is a cliché and a generalization, but we all know that most of the time clichés are based upon a smaller or a bigger amount of truth. A German men’s group (Die Prinzen) focuses on this topic in their song „Women are the New Men“.⁹⁰

„Women are the new men,
it is like this almost everywhere,
They can do everything and they live longer,
I’m asking myself if I like it this way!?”

They lied to us a million times,
cheated on us even more than we cheated on them.
They are having affairs, separate sex from love;
they are Generals and sometimes perfect thieves. ...”

The Development of Men

Meanwhile those men who were aroused by the emancipation and the changing of the women (the others just dream on and stay the way they are) are looking for an adequate new role model for themselves. Already in 1982 a German female singer, Ina Deter, sang “the nation needs new men”⁹¹ (with the verse “E-MAN-CIPATED woman needs a companion”). The German male singer Herbert Grönemeyer seemed to try to meet this challenge in 1984 when he

⁹⁰ Prinzen, Album Die neuen Männer, 2008.

⁹¹ Ina Deter, Album Neue Männer braucht das Land, 1982.

IV. A new understanding of what it means to be a strong man

4.1 A new way of men – and women – to be strong (a German perspective)

launched his famous song “When is a Man a Man?”⁹² While this song is still popular and played regularly by a lot of German radio stations, the context makes us smile with rather more sympathy than appreciation.

“Men have muscles.
Men are unbelievable strong,
Men can do everything.
Men will get a heart stroke.
Men are lonely fighters.
Have to go through every wall;
have to go on and on,
... they are hard on the outside and very soft in their core ...”

No, this picture is not sufficient any more to help find a new way for men to be strong. But luckily a lot of circumstances and the environment have changed since this song was written 17 years ago. As already mentioned, it is possible for men to take parents’ leave and they will get financial support by the government during that time. At first sight statistics tell us that there are a lot of men who are taking parents’ leave: in 2009 it was 23.6 % of the German fathers with a newborn child – and about 96 % of the German mothers. But if you look closely at these figures, the question arises whether a part of these men only takes a kind of prolonged vacation after the baby is born: “53% of these couples took their parents’ leave together – for about 2 months. In average, fathers took 2.5 months while the mothers took about 11.4 months of absence and child-raising allowance.”⁹³

But while parental leave is politically a big opportunity for men and women as well to stay home and shift priorities, it will often lead to bad career prospects in their companies. Most bosses still think that men, who stay home when a baby is born, seem to be weak and not very much interested in carving out a career. Many men, fearing to never getting rid of this stigma choose not to stay home. In addition to that there is the financial loss (difference between wage of the main earner of a household and the child-raising allowance) is often too big for a household to bear. But nevertheless things are changing. There are men who take their parental leave. It is interesting that these men are not only Germans but sometimes have a migration background. The model of parental leave convinces people even if they were raised with a different background. This shows that some men are ready to get involved in the raising of their children and that is a very important change.

There are quite recent studies on these issues: „A key topic of

the development of men and men’s policy, but also of a growing interest in the development of children and a wise women’s policy is the ‘new father’. One speaks of ‘involved or engaged paternity’. This new father is needed by the children, by their mothers and even by the men themselves. ... The increasing importance of the new role of fathers does not release them from the role as the main ‘breadwinner’. But the role is enhanced by the role of an ‘educator’, which means that the man/father is involved practically but also emotionally. Within the family he contributes to the household chores, to the babysitting and the child education. Nevertheless, his contribution is often confined to certain areas which are defined as ‘male’.”⁹⁴ Sometimes this is also the fault of the mothers who think that they are the only ones who can raise “their” children. Those Super-Moms try to make a point in managing everything simultaneously – children, household chores and job as well – so that their husbands don’t really get the opportunity to enlarge their engagement in these areas. “Even today many men think that raising kids is the responsibility of women. This is the result of a study done by researchers in Germany. ‘Only slowly there is a change taking place regarding the equal distribution of work within partnerships. Very often traditional role models are cemented in the moment a child is born’, states research scientist Christian Schmitt and his colleagues who are doing research in the field of behavior of couples. The scientists put their focus on the fact that couples with children share their work much more traditionally in comparison to couples without children. Even a marriage seems to change the distribution of the household chores in a way that it is shared in a traditional way – in opposite to those couples who live in civil unions.”⁹⁵

It seems as if there has been only little change regarding the role a man is playing in the family although family is more important to fathers than it used to be. The question is whether the role has changed in other areas of living, as today not every man is a father and not every man is living in a heterosexual relationship.

Sexuality and Strength

According to the above mentioned study „Men on the move“, the fear of failing on the job has affected them and still affects them very much. „Anthropologically work and job are a perfect opportunity not only to produce something

⁹² Herbert Grönemeyer, Album Bochum, 1984.

⁹³ http://www.vernetzungsstelle.de/index.cfm?uid=D440A8D6C2975CC8A62EEB5DD2ED2741&and_uid=2A0BBF05C2975CC8A579877DAE23214B, accessed on September 9th, 2012.

⁹⁴ Study „Männer in Bewegung“ (note 86), p. 87f.

⁹⁵ Männer hängen am alten Rollenbild“ (Men stick to the old role models) in Focus online Schule, April 13th, 2010 (http://m.focus.de/schule/familie/erziehung-maenner-haengen-am-alten-rollenbild_aid_498302.html).

but also to create oneself. In this regard work/job is important to all people, men and women equally. There is a gender difference, though, because men feel that work needs to be visible for the public. Thus, work is closely related to performance, to the gain of acknowledgment and self-esteem. In our culture men feel somehow forced to produce output and performance, to show how good they are in their jobs. A man has to be successful: in his job, but also regarding his sexuality.⁹⁶

Obviously there is a connection between power and sexuality. These days irresponsible sexual behavior (which does not necessarily have to be non-consensual), leads to a rising number of HIV-infections, even in Germany. Although HIV and Aids is a topic in every school (in different grades) and students should know all about what safer sex means, many of them act rather irresponsibly. They think that HIV is not an issue that affects them. It is easy to stop an unwanted pregnancy by means of an abortion and they think that HIV is a threat only for homosexuals. "It's more fun without condoms," a young colleague said me. "I learned all about HIV but I always trusted that it won't hit me. Now I'm in a serious relationship and to be honest, I was glad to find out that I'm negative, when I went to donate blood."

This attitude – it is not my concern – seems to be very typical for our society, especially for the male part. Men show a high sense of responsibility regarding their jobs (this does not necessarily mean that they have to like their job) while they still share the responsibility in the areas of family rather unequally (education of the children, taking care of aging parents, household chores) with their wives and are rather reluctant to change this attitude. The true male ambassador (sometimes female too) of our no-risk-no-fun-society is also hesitant to take over responsibility in the area of sexuality.

Unfortunately this reluctance to take over responsibility anywhere else than in their jobs affects other areas as well. Today's men don't accept much responsibility in the area of voluntary commitment any longer – for example at church (unless as an elder) or in clubs (unless there is some kind of social admission or the perspective of political power coming along with it). There seems to be little motivation to commit oneself voluntarily just for altruistic reasons or because of charity (unless it is job-connected and can be used to improve a company's image), too strong (time-wise and emotionally as well) is the obsession with their jobs. Unfortunately, women seem to follow this example: when they are working full-time or even part-time and try to organize their families as well, there is simply no time to take over any kind of social responsibility.

The Lack of Role Models for the Development of Men

Walter Hollstein, a sociologist in the area of men's research, thinks that men still don't know how to change and how to develop today. For a long time the focus of politics was only on the equality (or smoothing of inequality) of women. But when women's policy changed to gender policy an additional problem unveiled: in the whole area of education in Germany there is a huge lack of positive role models. This is probably due to the low wages in the area of education. Additionally, educational (as well as nursing care) jobs don't have a really male image. Scandals about children's abuse do not help here but lead to employers hesitating to employ more men in these areas. These circumstances do not help to change the situation regarding the lack of male role models in schools and kindergartens. Hence there are many boys grow up without any male role models.

Educational policy in the last 20 years mainly focused on strengthening the girls. Whether boys needed any kind of special promotion was hardly ever an issue. New researches even think that the boys are the losers of our educational system. "On their quest for identity men are not supported from outside, by society. This is the reason that many men don't even start with the quest of defining themselves and trust old-fashioned role models which don't work any longer. Others run around without any orientation at all," Hollstein says.⁹⁷

Men lack positive role models which they would need in order to develop in a way that they would be ready to find a new strength, to take over responsibility in a strong way. Some studies even suppose that the new women, even as they are fighting for equality and ask the men to find a new identity, still like to trust upon the traditional characteristics of men and do not really grant them much space for development at all.

Even when looking for trend-setting role models in movies it doesn't seem that much has changed during the last 20 years. Men in movies are still very cool, they seem to have everything under control, and they are always ready to save the world and to offer a strong shoulder to cry on to their female companions. While the role of women in movies has changed quite a bit (they are stronger, more emancipated, very self-confident), they still seem to fall in love with the tough guys. Even if there was a single father raising his kids at the beginning of a movie, you can absolutely trust the movie to find him a loving mother for this kids and he will romantically propose to her before the movie has ended. Whether or not an action movie might be useful for finding any reasonable role models we don't even want to talk about.

⁹⁶ Study „Männer in Bewegung“ (note 86), p. 52.

⁹⁷ «Wann ist der Mann ein Mann?» ("When is a Man a Man?"), Focus online, January 31st, 2011 (http://www.focus.de/wissen/bildung/leben/tid-21138/gesellschaft-wann-ist-der-mann-ein-mann_aid_594249.html).

Consequences for Society

It looks like men have problems to find out how they can change because they can't find any help in society. Most men know that they have to change because new women need a new kind of man. A change "in reaction to" does not seem to be very creative and proactive. Additionally, today's men are lacking positive role models, idols, in order to start the adventure which is called quest for identity: to find a new way of being strong and of showing a new kind of responsibility. At the same time there is an increasing pressure regarding performance and competition which forces them to subordinate their private life (family, social engagement) to their working life.

Rivalry takes place on all levels in work life and is intensified by worldwide competition through globalization. This leads to a social coldness. It is characteristic for our society that job-related success seems to have the highest priority. Family has to subordinate to career, the raising of children and the home care of elderly parents is not as appreciated as "real work for real money". Simultaneously the amount of paid work decreases while unemployment increases and approximately every sixth child is threatened by poverty. Highly indebted governmental, regional and local authorities have to cut expenses especially in the area of social work. And all of this doesn't even touch topics like global responsibility and worldwide poverty. Voluntary commitment is more important than ever – but most men and women just seem to be too busy with their jobs.

In particular voluntary long-term commitment in either congregations or clubs has significantly decreased. Some people agree to commit themselves in time-limited projects, but rather seldom for a very long time.

The reluctance to take care of others is caused by different factors. One is that the entrepreneurial sense of responsibility has intensely changed during the last decades. Entrepreneurs in self-owned small and medium sized business used to be very interested in the well-being and motivation of their staff. To pay taxes was not very much liked but companies were conscious of the fact that those taxes were needed for the general welfare of the German people. Germany was proud of its strong social security net. Today market radicalism only bothers with the maximization of profit while the value and significance of social responsibility decreases.

In this situation it doesn't help that protestant churches seem to be trapped forever in the necessity of economizing and the discussion of priorities. Thus, they don't get up against society's self-centeredness – even though they would have so much to offer. Strong men, strong women, strength in a sense of taking over responsibility within society – churches should take on their role here, should concentrate on translating biblical role

models in today's world - preferably without a wagging finger. Society is in the middle of a crisis and old visions are not sustainable after the financial and economic crisis of 2009, after the nuclear disaster in Japan in 2011. Church has to and is able to use those opportunities of this crisis: everything is scrutinized and questioned, new answers need to be found.

Does Church offer Role Models for strong Men and Women?

The German Kirchentag in June 2011 showed that Protestants want a church which dares to interfere in politics; they want a church being relevant for society because it has opinions regarding the topics of that society. That doesn't indicate that church needs to have all the answers for all the problems but that church should be ready to help search for sustainable answers against a Christian background. If the German Protestants want a church which dares to interfere in the change of a society, this needs to be theologically founded. Thus we have to look for biblical role models, biblical characters that are suitable as inspiring examples for strong men and women of today's society.

The Prophets

God always promised to stay with the prophets. He led them through their difficult tasks when they often had to predict penalty and decay to their people – shall people listen to them?⁹⁸ God gives them great authority,⁹⁹ but they are unpopular, nobody likes them even though they are going the way, God has chosen. They live a dangerous life. God accompanies them and takes care of them, but he is also asking for many sacrifices. I don't think that prophets (while I don't want to measure them all with the same yardstick and know that I'm a bit generalizing here) are well-suited for this job for helping today's people to find new strength. Even in their time raising their wagging finger didn't help. In our secular world which has greater faith in science than in religion, where the devil is not feared and where God is usually stuck with the task to comfort the weak and the sad ones, the old prophets would be thrown into the same pot with some American revivalist preachers and would only be sneered at and not taken seriously. But as we don't wish for

⁹⁸Jer 1:9: Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, Now I have put my words in your mouth.

⁹⁹Jer 1:10: See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

God's penalty upon our society¹⁰⁰ (which might actually be the end of our globalized world, doomsday) and we still hope that God will risk another attempt with His people, we keep looking for other characters in the Bible who might be more adequate as idols and role models for today's men and women who are looking for a just world even in this life.

Jesus' parables

Still searching for a role model for men living their life with a new kind of strength, we find the one man in Bible who has given us our name as Christians and whom we are succeeding: Jesus Christ, the symbol for love and justice. He should be our way and our light. When did we forget that we are supposed to succeed him – not only on Sundays and not only when we pray with our children taking them to bed. We are supposed to follow Him, to act like He did from Sunday to Saturday, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Can He, Jesus the Savior of the World, be a role model to the German people in the 21st century who are living in a globalized achievement-oriented society? But he told us many parables on how to live our way.

In his parables he is calling upon us - even today - to take over responsibility. But when we are honest we would answer him that we had no time for responsibility, that we were too busy in our jobs.

It is so difficult for us as individuals (and individualism is such a high value in Germany!) to agree to Jesus' high claim and to be His successors. But maybe it would be easier if we didn't see ourselves as individuals but as a community, as the - international - community of Christians, as Church. Maybe then it would be possible to sally forth to a better world, just the way our brothers and sisters did 20 years ago in East Germany: move off and become light, start questioning everything, light candles, change the world. They were successful not as individuals but as a group of individuals, a community. A community of believers who put their light not under the bowl but brought it outside so that the whole world could see it.

Salt and Light

It is especially the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus calls to us to be strong in a responsible way. We can find both assurance and claim in Matthew's parable of the salt of the earth

and the light of the world. "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Mt 5:13-16)

There is no wagging finger threatening us. Jesus has confidence in his disciples his auditors: You are the salt of the earth. Yes, you can! You can spice the world with my Good News, with my Gospel. You are strong enough because you are on my mission in order to salt, to spice, to change the world! Without salt the other spices don't taste appropriate, the meal will taste too boring or too spicy. But when you use the right amount of salt, the meal will be perfect. Being Jesus' salt of the earth the disciples have the opportunity to be part of the perfection of the composition of life.

But it is not only the assurance –you are the salt of the earth -, there is also a demand: those who are equipped by God in such way, who are sent by Jesus with such a mission, for them it is not only a "may" but a "have to"! "If the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot." What a strong image! The assurance: you are empowered, authorized by God, to go and salt. You have the power and the strength to change the world for the better. The demand is: Go and do it, right now! Use your power, the strength Jesus assigned to you, in order to change the world. The next sentence seems like a threat at first: If you stay lying lazily in the blazing sun on the roof, then you are no longer good for anything, useless. Even though it may sound like a threat or a penalty, it's actually disappointment. If you don't use your strength properly, you are useless, born in vain.

Empowered to be useful Salt

This assurance, the demand and also the horrible consequence, they apply to us as Christians in the succession of the disciples just as much. We are empowered with the same kind of strength the disciples got. We know Jesus' words, we know all interpretations. We have the knowledge regarding what Jesus meant when he said that we should go into the world and salt it. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit who provides us with the strength to change the world, who equips us with His gifts so that we are able to contribute to the dawning of the Kingdom of God on this unredeemed world.

¹⁰⁰See e.g. Gen 19, Sodom and Gomorrah.

IV. A new understanding of what it means to be a strong man

4.1 A new way of men – and women – to be strong (a German perspective)

And we even know exactly what we have to do because prior to this Biblical text we can find the Beatitudes, an explanation of what is our mission in this unredeemed world today: Go and comfort those who mourn, take care of those who don't have enough food, who have to endure injustice ... And as we know what to do, how to salt the earth, the same consequences apply for us as well: if you don't tell the Gospel, if you don't fight for a just world, you are useless, not worth anything!!

Here is the reason why I feel that this Biblical text seems to be so appropriate for us and our society. To be useless and not worth anything is something we, as German men and women in the 21st century are very much afraid of. Jesus seizes us by our own standards. In the Beatitudes he points out that those who are poor, sad, weak, and hungry, treated unjust, are closer to heaven than we are. We who are not ready to take responsibility for those who are poor, sad, weak, hungry, treated unjust, who are not ready to commit themselves beyond their jobs, who are not ready to look over the rim of their teacups, we are not confronted with a wagging finger but with the consequence that they are useless. But this is something that German men and women cannot bear. Thus, we have to decide whether we feel ready to meet Jesus' challenge. Whether we as men and women are "salt enough", whether we feel empowered by the Holy Spirit as God's people. Or whether we are like the useless salt which doesn't salt any longer, which lays on the rooftop in the blazing sun, useful for nothing but to be trampled underfoot.

Lightening the way with the Light on the bushel¹⁰¹

Following the parable of the salt we find the parable of the light which should not stand under the bushel. It means that we don't shine by our own power but by the power, Jesus has given his disciples – and us as well. Dear Christians who think it is humble and Christian-like to hide their lights under a bushel: Shine! But don't use your voluntary commitment for self-display. We are not supposed to shine ourselves just like the moon can only shine as it is lit by the sun. We are supposed to put that light on top of a bushel so that it can shine very wide for the whole world. The candle which shines on the candlestick, the beaming town on the hill – wonderful images. "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." In this sentence it is said very distinct and clear: yes, we carry responsibility, yes, we do good deeds! But it is

not for the purpose that we are praised.

The opposite usually happens in our congregations. People are complaining that they do good things all the time and nobody appreciates it publically. But the bible answers to this complaint: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." (Mt 5:8). We are not supposed to ask for a reward for what we do on earth or expect it in heaven. We are supposed to do it for the glory of God, in order to help our neighbor. If our heart is pure we might see God at some point.

In these parables we can find a new kind of strength, a new kind of power that is needed for our mission: the strength which is needed to commit yourself not only for your job but for the people in the world who need our help spiritually, politically, financially. Jesus has confidence in us, he encourages us, but he is also demanding that we have to go out in order to salt and to lighten up the world. Jesus encourages me that I can do these things, but he is also asking for my commitment. He sees me as a Christian, as a successor of His disciples. I feel empowered and strong enough to do what He thinks I'm capable of doing, what He asks me to do.

Consequences for Churches and Society

As protestant churches we have got the mandate but also the mission to tell the Gospel to the people in our crisis-shaken society. The Kirchentag of 2011 proved also as a consequence of a new understanding of mission: Christians in Germany are ready and willing to participate in politics and they want their churches to be politically relevant. Not as a medieval conglomeration of church and crown, but as churches which are self-conscious enough to put their light on a bushel so that their God-given strength and power is actually visible.

There are the professionals in the "Justice, Peace, Integrity-of-Creation"-departments of churches and mission organizations who are busy with lobbying for a just world. But I think (and I'm aware that this opinion is not shared by everyone) that it is important that the semi-professionals, the Präses and the Bishops, dare to publicly have opinions on difficult topics like gene politics, social politics, military politics (given that that they know what they are talking about). Additionally, it is also important that theologians and pastors dare to have an opinion and dare to denounce unjust conditions in the society in the pulpit but also outside of the protecting walls of the churches.

But as mature and responsible Christians, as elders, as volunteers and as church members, we should not hide behind the officials. The lay people have a prophetic ministry as well. They should feel strong enough, empowered enough to

¹⁰¹Bowl or bushel, depending on the translation.

take up positions or at least raise their voice in order to ask questions in areas where lobbying is needed: for the sick, for the sad ones, for the poor and the weak ones, for those who live in unjust conditions, for those who are suppressed. Not as individuals but as responsible Christians with the Gospel in our mind. Not in order to distinguish oneself but in the function of a disciple of Jesus: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12). Let us put Jesus’ light on top of the bowl so that it will shine, let us take over responsibility in this society so that it will change into a fairer, better world.

New Strength

In the Sermon on the Mount we find our biblical role model for those men who are searching for a new way to be strong. Dear wandering and seeking man, who doesn’t know how to change, who doesn’t find any role models. Here is your yardstick to reinvent yourself; here is the light which helps you to orientate yourself. You don’t have to become weak for that kind of strength but you have to become open and courageous in order to follow him who is the light.

Dear wandering and seeking woman, who followed the man on his way astray and even overhauled him in order to get there first, in order to become the better man: recognize that you don’t have to be strong out of yourself but out of the Gospel, in order to salt, in order to give light. Your sisters liberation theologians went the right way – follow them instead of following any man on the wrong track. Liberate yourself from the wrong values and dictates of the secular world; liberate yourself from your own claims to be perfect in managing your job, your family. You cannot win this race only equipped by your own strength. Remember that you need consolation and encouragement and that it’s ok to be weak in God’s presence. When you have liberated yourself from those secular demands you can follow Jesus on new ways and you can help to change the world.

„You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.“ The same applies to singles without family; to separated and newly assembled families; to elderly people searching for a sense in life after retirement because they feel useless like the thrown out salt; to young people who feel confused and disoriented; to homosexuals who feel lost and misunderstood in society’s heteronormativity. You all are called to build a community of Christians in Germany and in the entire world, a community where everyone feels welcome and is ready to build a completely new kind of society.

The Sermon on the Mountain helps us to find the rules and benchmark data for this new society:

“Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

He said:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Mt 5:1-12)

To be blessed – this is something we will not find in work-related “higher, wider, faster attitude”. To follow Jesus, to be his disciples, doesn’t mean that we have to leave our job, our families like the fishermen at Sea Genneseret. But if we internalize the Beatitudes and let ourselves be guided by them, we will start to realign. When we oppose the greed for profit and start taking justice, mercy and peace into account, when we start taking care of the mourning and the poor ones and try to make a bit of the kingdom of God happen even here and today, we are heading for a fulfilled and responsible life.

We will find the right way to a new kind of strength, no matter if we are men or women. This new strength will sometimes be very uncomfortable. It will often make us weak and vulnerable. But we are carried by the love of God. We give a new meaning to our life and the life of others. Hand in hand we can work on a better world: poor and rich, woman and man, old and young, black and white, homosexual and heterosexual, singles and families. Together we are the salt and the light of God.

4.2 A new concept of man being strong (a Namibian perspective)

Gender and its role

This paper wants to look at the concept of man having to be strong. The Bible clearly indicated that God created man and woman equal (Gen 1:26). Therefore it is good to deal with this topic with the eyes looking to the differences men have and form gender differences. Looking to the background of the Namibians, gender relations are influenced by traditions and cultures.

The International HIV/Aids Alliance defines gender in the following way: “There are some basic biological differences between the two sexes female and male. Beyond these differences most society in the world treat men and very differently, as having different roles and responsibilities as well as different opportunities and sometimes even rights”. While this work begins with an understanding of gender, although the term gender is widely used, it is too often employed to mean men/women or sex. It is important to note that while “sex” refers to a person’s biological make up, “gender” describes the social definition that is values and roles society assigned.

Leadership

Men are brought up to exercise power and leadership in the family and in the society. Traditionally, men are seen to have more power than women and as the provider in families, and are respected to control the properties they have. The positive side is that men have to be providers and caregivers for the families. Though some families become surprised when seeing their properties and finances are used in the manner which is not expected. They (men) use these financial assets by attracting other women. They believe that this is the fulfillment of their role; by reacting negatively which will not make their expectation to be met. But as long as it is the man who did it the family or and the community will not take the matter serious as if it was done by the woman. This power may be understood in two ways: as power to dominate women or as power which is based on the subordination of women. Men are respected to be the head of the family; they are the voice of the family as they are in control of everything they have. The woman’s salaries are controlled by her husband though is not the same case with women. In this case the context gives us a picture that gender difference in most cases means gender inequality. One can put concerns of where do these attitudes of

inequality comes from, if God gave equal power to both men and women for “dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen1:28b). Real men are those who seek God’s power to take over the position of Moses as Joshua did (Josh 1:9). This is the sharing power God pour to both men and women to work in his field.

After the ordination of women twenty years back, one can still see that even in the Church men come first and women come second. The culture makes women believe that it is an honour to elect men in the leadership level and it is seen that the time is not ripe for women to become leaders except of becoming a parish pastors. Leading high positions are still held mainly by male pastors.

In a culture the boys, while they are young, are taught to behave as a man and not like girls. They are taught not to talk about their pain, emotions and their hearts. This gave the result for today to have violent and aggressive men with increasing high rates of violence and abuse against women. The commandment of “love your neighbor as yourself” is no longer applicable for many men of today. We believe that the commandment of love is given for such reason for the dignity of others to be affirmed and defended. For men a great emphasis is placed on the satisfaction by women where satisfaction is defined in only sexual terms.

HIV and Aids

HIV is connected to many issues in the lives of men, women also including. The question why has to do with men in two ways: firstly, it has to do with men and the power men have and secondly, with the problems that men face. Compelling evidence exists that women are abused because of the power of men. And also evidence indicates that men who abused women are more likely to have HIV. This is certainly not to excuse the actions of men who abuse others, who are violent and rape women in order to prove to themselves and to others that they are a real man. And rape is in the news everyday in Namibia, especially the rape of young school girls. Men’s violence is the key role in increasing women’s vulnerability and in fuelling the HIV epidemic.

A dominant model of masculinity is the key place men at risk of HIV infection. Many of the men believe in a multiple sexual

partners and exercise authority over younger women and those who are considered weaker. The traditional image of masculinity sometimes encourages men to force unwilling partners into sex and reject condom use.

It is important to educate men about the fact of HIV transmission through sex. Violence and abuse which is the main contribution to HIV infection have deep roots in the formation and sense of self of men who are uprooted from family and community and controlled by beating women.

Men are significantly less likely than women to use voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) service. They hide themselves behind not knowing their status, but have access to antiretroviral therapy later in the disease progression than women. The lacking of skills and information born out of fear made them unable to cope with HIV and pose a big threat to their lives and partners. This means that women, who must make choices regarding their own lives, have fewer possibilities to choose from. Women do not feel safe or in control of what happens to their lives. These macho attitudes make women more vulnerable to HIV infection because of the imbalance in decision making power. It means that many women cannot negotiate condom use and are often forced to have unwanted sexual relations.

This means that men need coping skills which bring them to adjust to new roles of caring and nurturing.

For social and economic reasons, men are often in a strong position in their relationships with women. This mindset gives them more control in deciding when and where to have sex, as well as whether or not to use condoms. The question of why some still deny their own risk and blame women as carriers of infections is cause for much concern. Such blaming often leads to violence against women and or even divorce.

It has been established that discrimination against or hostility towards men who have sex with men promotes HIV transmission because safe sex messages can be difficult to communicate to the community. Another factor for men who have sex with other men becomes vulnerable because it is a taboo for the society to have these types of people. Men find it difficult to seek help about HIV because they fear to be rejected by their social group or because they feel guilty towards their regular partner. Therefore they believe that to withhold information on their HIV status from their partners is far better because they are afraid of being stigmatized and rejected by the community or because of cultural taboos. The advocating of abstinence, faithfulness or condom use sometimes does not reach many couples particularly women because of the fear of men.

The ideas of sugar daddies and/or mummies contributed a lot to violence towards women. Men do it for financial circumstances,

for young girls it is economic gain. It is adult people abuse over young people or even small kids, the rich over the poor. Such inequality dehumanize the rights of women, worsens the spread and impact of HIV. There is nothing more painful than men's understanding of hiding the truth to his wife about the infection of HIV inside marriage. Tradition taught women that they never should refuse having sex with her husband even when he is known to be involved in extra marital sexual liaisons or is suspected to have HIV or other STDS (sexual transmitted diseases). Sex outside marriage by a husband is tolerated by society, and is not seen as having any kind of impact on marriage. But sex outside marriage by a wife is an unforgivable crime.

The Church addresses inequality

Gender continues to be sensitive issue to talk about in the Church because of the male character. Many men as well as many women believe that this situation is normal.. Members of the Church agree with the Apostle Paul when he said: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim 2:13-14). Paul's teaching encouraged some people to see a woman suffer for her consequence and punished as sinners. Hence silence has come as a natural solution to issues pertaining to gender. But a true way of seeking solutions for the understanding of men to manhood demands all human being to work together and put the image of God in its rightful place regardless of any sex.

The Church can be an agent for change. It should be obvious to provide adequate information about gender to both men and women. Transforming women will change the attitudes of men about their maleness. Empowering women means empowering the nation, women should mobilize men and boys to participate in the quest for gender transformation, in most cases men don't participate in Church activities. Church is not confined in the walls, church should go where men are and give them a message. This will help men to develop desirable life standards, values and ways of facing reality.

Some information and trainings invite men to:

- Promote positive male behavior;
- Provide sexual education;
- Talk openly about gender inequality from the pulpit;
- Provide counseling for people abused– with a special emphasis on young people;
- Listen to people's own experience.

Bibliography:

Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth and Philip Vinod Peacock (Ed.): Created in God's Image. From Hegemony to Partnership. A Church Manual on Men as Partners: Promoting Positive Masculinities. Geneva: World Communion of Reformed Churches and World Council of Churches, 2010.

4.3 Response to the contributions on “A new understanding of what it means to be a strong man”

1. Differences

The situation of role models we part from

- Namibia: traditional role models (man: leadership, power.../ woman: submission ...)
- Germany: The old models don't work any longer (even the “old” model of women's emancipation!)

Obviously, this describes a tendency. There are a lot of men in Germany living according to the old model, and there are men in Namibia looking for a new model. But I suppose, the two focus chosen are not casual.

The relevant social situation we part from

- Namibia: HIV and Aids
- Germany: Men between job, family and voluntary commitment.

Obviously, HIV and Aids is not a prevalent question in Germany. I would like to ask the Namibian presenter if she focused on HIV and Aids because of the subject of the seminar or because it is the most burning question in Namibia.

2. What we have in common

- gender approach (social understanding of male and female roles and understanding men's role models no independent from women's role models)
- the need of new role models: without men's domination and power (and even less force, abuse), with equal power and rights, mutual respect ...
- to look for a new role model in a biblical perspective
 - to seek God's power
 - to use the strength Jesus assigned us

3. Where we failed

We, the males, failed in adopting the challenge. It's not casual that two women wrote the papers on the men's topic!

The starting point of this topic was the observation that men play a huge role in spreading HIV and Aids, but a small role in preventing, testing etc. The Namibian presenter still has to say: “Transforming women will change the attitudes of men.” Transforming men on their own is still far away.

We failed in including a new concept of homosexual man being strong.

4. Our responsibility

- to empower women
- to educate men (information and skills)
- to offer visions of new role models

5. Vision

- gender transformation / new male roles of caring and nurturing
- men and women together responsible for people in need; strong are men and women who commit themselves for change the world.
- I missed a more concrete vision of the new concept of man being strong, for example
 - Strong is the man who loves and doesn't dominate his neighbour.
 - Strong is the man who is able to live at eye level with a strong woman.
 - Strong is the man whose strength doesn't hurt others.
 - Strong is the man who protects himself and his sexual partner(s) from being infected.
 - Strong is the man who allows himself to show emotions.

V Pastors as wounded healers

5.1 Pastors as wounded healers (a German perspective)

0. Considerations on terminology

In a German context, it is not very easy to use the expression “wounded healer” and it is even more difficult to find an appropriate translation.

On the one hand, the meaning of “wounded” refers to “*verwundet*” (wounded) and to “*verletzt*” (bruised, hurt), but also implies the connotation of “*verwundbar*” or “*verletzlich*” (both: vulnerable).

On the other hand, with “*healer*” (literally: “*Heiler*”, “*Heilerin*”) things become even more complicated.

In modern German society, the capacity of healing is assigned to the health care system; the only competent healer is the medical practitioner. Consequently, Zerfaß translates “wounded healer” with “*der verwundete Arzt*”.¹⁰² But you can doubt that just because of the separation between the medical and the religious systems pastors could identify themselves with this concept. Additionally, this translation seems to confirm that separation; it might be more convenient to claim that “*healing*” can also belong to the religious system. When I talked with a group of German pastors about “pastors as wounded healers”, they refused to consider themselves as “healers”, arguing that this holds the danger of excessive demands. They preferred to describe what they do with expressions like “*tröstend*” (comforting), “*heilsam*” (healthful, beneficial) or “*auf Heil hinweisend*” (pointing toward salvation). One can argue that the proclamation of the Good News, the comforting pastoral care, the helping diaconal work, the work against social stigma etc. are healing activities of pastors, but obviously pastors in Germany don’t identify themselves as healers. Additionally, it might be that the mission given by Jesus “to heal every disease” (Mt 10:1) loses its specific focus when healing refers to any beneficial activity. At the same time, healing is a concept used by the African and Asian member churches of UEM; in the ecumenical discourse it plays a prominent role (cf. the World Mission Conference Athens 2005); and it is a vital part of the identity of charismatic churches. In Germany, we find healing activities within the migrant churches, and there are other people, often from an esoteric background, who understand themselves as “healer”. Therefore, German churches have to find their position towards healing, towards church as a healing community and towards the role of pastors within the healing community. Additionally, in the poem of the Servant of

¹⁰²Zerfaß, Rolf: *Menschliche Seelsorge. Für eine Spiritualität von Priestern und Laien im Gemeindedienst*. Freiburg i.Br. 1985. p.100.

God, the two terms “wounded” and “healing” are closely related: “While he was wounded, there was a healing for us.” (Is 53:5)¹⁰³

Hence, to stay within the ecumenical framework, we should not avoid speaking of healers, but the danger mentioned above indicates clearly that we should not use the word “healer” on its own, but always combine the two terms: wounded healers, broken leaders, vulnerable advocates of vulnerable people. Lacking a convincing translation, the most suitable seems to use the English term “wounded healer” as well in German.

1. Observations on reality

1.1 HIV and Aids

Starting point of the reflections on “pastors as wounded healers” was the observation that on the one hand pastors have a healing task concerning HIV and Aids: comforting the wounded souls of people infected and affected, promoting the care for the sick persons, the weakened families, the vulnerable orphans and combating and overcoming the social stigma related to this disease. On the other hand, pastors are wounded when they themselves are infected or affected by HIV and Aids.

These healing tasks of pastors as well as the fact that they are wounded by HIV and Aids apply all over the world, but obviously not in the same measure. The healing tasks are more urgent and the woundedness is more extended for example in Namibia than in Germany. Nevertheless, in Germany there are also pastors who are wounded physically, psychologically and spiritually because they live with HIV, wounded by the immunodeficiency, by the side-effects of ARVs, by the change of relationships and of conditions of life, by the social stigma they are confronted with, by the often negative position in the church.

While it is at least known that there are pastors living with HIV in Germany, I’ve never heard any reference about pastors affected by HIV and Aids, i.e. that their partner, their brother, their child or any other relative is or was living with HIV. So, their woundedness is double: suffering with a close person and suffering from the social stigma.

In another sense, being wounded by the social stigma is a

¹⁰³Translation according to Hägglund, Frederik: *Isaiah 53 in the light of homecoming after exile*. FzAT 2/31. Tübingen 2008. p.60.

big part of German pastors who ignore the existence of HIV and Aids within their pastoral work, who blank out that there are people infected or affected living in their congregations and therefore are not able to realize healing work. Others, e.g. those organized in the “Network for HIV and Aids Pastoral counselling of the Church”,¹⁰⁴ try to provide such a healing offer.

1.2 Sexuality

It is a result of the reflections during the pastors’ conference in Namibia that the issue of HIV and HIV has to be tackled in the wider context of sexuality. Therefore we have to analyze the woundedness of pastors especially in this regard. The taboo on sexuality and the heteronormativity, which within the churches are stronger than in the society in general, affect and wound pastors. As these issues are elaborated in other inputs of this workshop, there are not more details given here. But it should be clear that there is a woundedness of pastors concerning sexuality.

1.3 Woundedness of pastors in general

1.3.1 Preliminary remarks

Although the issue of “pastors as wounded healer” emerged in the context of discussing HIV and Aids, it was clear from the beginning that the subject has to be seen in a wider context. Wounds can arise in the biographic, work-related and/or spiritual situation. It is necessary to remind the church of this woundedness of their pastors. It is especially needed in the current discussion about the concept of being a pastor (“Pfarrbild”) in the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland, where the debate was opened by elaborated theological and sociological concepts, but the identity of pastors as human beings is left aside.

On the other hand, if the notion of pastors’ woundedness is widened in such a degree that any small shortcoming is considered a wound – so that “we all are wounded” –, it runs the risk of banalizing the wounds of those living with a severe disease, of the burned out etc. We should always be conscious that the notion of “pastors as wounded healers” refers to wounds of different depth and pain.

1.3.2 Biographic aspects

Wounds can arise in the private sphere, some of them long before becoming a pastor. Some examples are

- traumatic experiences during childhood, such as divorce of the parents or child abuse;
- disability, physical sickness or psychological affliction such as depression;

- frustration, bitterness etc.;
- crisis in partnership, divorce.

Some of these aspects such as illness, frustration or crisis in relationship might be caused partly or deepened by the professional work as well. Therefore, they are not only a private issue.

1.3.3 Job-related aspects

1. During the discussions, it was mentioned, and in literature it’s supported, that some of pastors’ wounds have to do with general social concepts. A contemporary myth is “growth and wholeness”, although in reality the living environments of a person are fragmented in sectors such as family, profession, free time etc. Even more so, we “are always as well like ruins of our past, fragments of broken hope, of trickled off wishes for the own life, of refused opportunities, of chances lost or gambled away. We are ruins because of our failures and our guilt as well as because of wounds inflicted to us and suffered or befallen losses and defeats.”¹⁰⁵ Therefore, fragmentation, fragility, incompleteness, discontinuity and ambivalence are necessarily elements of personal identity.¹⁰⁶ But the myth does not allow showing vulnerability. Instead, the social imperative demands: “Be perfect! Push yourself! Be strong! Suit everybody! Don’t lower your guard!”¹⁰⁷
2. In former times, the pastor as a person was sustained by his ministry. In our modern society this relation has been inverted: The pastor as a person has to fill and sustain his/her ministry. This creates enormous expectations towards the personal performance of pastors. The congregation in its fragmented world expects that the minister is a symbol of wholeness, that he/she is strong, represents the ideal person, always has answers etc. With this, pastors are permanently overburdened. At the same time it is difficult for them to show their wounds and their weakness in the belief that, if they do so, people will not be able to come to them with their problems.
3. The necessity to fill and sustain the ministry through personal performance creates expectations and demands within the pastor towards him-/herself as well. They tend to overburden themselves, to develop an exaggerated sense of duty and to overestimate themselves. So they find themselves in the gap between their own fantasy of omnipotence and their experience of impotence.

¹⁰⁵Luther, Henning: Religion und Alltag. Bausteine zu einer Praktischen Theologie des Subjekts. Stuttgart 1992. p.168f.

¹⁰⁶cf. Klessmann, Michael: Pfarrbild im Wandel. Ein Beruf im Umbruch. Neukirchen-Vluyn 2001. p.26. 16.

¹⁰⁷Heyl, Andreas von: Zwischen Burnout und spiritueller Erneuerung. Studien zum Beruf des evangelischen Pfarrers und der evangelischen Pfarrerin. Frankfurt/Main 2003. p.199.

¹⁰⁴www.netzwerk-kirchliche-aidsseelsorge.de

The pressure through expectation comes partly from outside (congregation, church leadership), but is mainly produced by the pastor's inner concept of how to be a pastor. A congregation can and will learn to accept the fact that its pastor lives with an illness, had a burn out, takes a free day per week or whatever. The major problem is often the pastor's self-perception.

4. A special aspect is that pastors often don't like to be counselled. Maybe they don't feel any wounds, doubts, failures, maybe they think they have to heal themselves, maybe they are ashamed to show their weakness even to a confidential person. Supposedly not to need counselling shows strength, but in fact it is weakness.
5. Additionally, pastors wound each other, struggling to appear better than the others, to receive more appreciation, to have more influence and power. When there is more than one pastor in a congregation (as it happens frequently in Germany), competition often arises between the colleagues, each one plays the own strong points off against the other's and plays on the other's weaknesses.
6. Finally, church structures, organization and laws promote the concept of the strong, perfect pastor. Before getting the chance of an employment, young pastors have to pass through an assessment centre. In their application and during the process they have to profile themselves with their strengths, capacities and mature character. There is no space to show wounds, weakness or fragility. This will continue later when applying for a job in congregations. Church laws don't even permit to concede the normal status of a pastor (Verbeamtung) to ill or disabled persons.

1.3.4 Spiritual aspects

A very special area where wounds can affect pastors and their ministry is the spiritual one. Such a spiritual woundedness may root in times before becoming a pastor, if the decision for this profession was taken by other reasons than feeling to be called.

Often it happens during the ministry that pastors neglect their personal praxis pietatis, don't care for the sources which nourish their faith, hope and love and by that easily experience a spiritual drought. Doubts about belief issues, even about the own vocation, loss of faith and spiritual burn out are consequences.

2. Biblical reflections

In the following, we'll have a look primarily at biblical persons. Nearly all of them are not described as heroes, but as human beings with all their strong points and weaknesses. To try to survey a general biblical concept of a pastor's ministry or of a wounded healer runs the risk of fixing certain aspects and reducing the multiple facets of biblical stories. To talk about persons has the advantage that you can relate yourself to some of their experiences and attitudes, but you are neither expected nor able to identify with the whole person.

2.1 Peter

In the Bible, Peter is described as healer. He heals the lame at the Beautiful Gate of the temple (Acts 3); and he overcomes religious discrimination and taboo and contributes to the healing of relations between separated groups (Acts 10). At the same time, Peter is shown as a vulnerable and wounded person. In Gethsemane he falls asleep together with James and John. "It is the sleep of those who have arrived inwardly at the conclusion that nothing can be done any more, because all explanations have failed."¹⁰⁸ Peter doesn't succeed in what Jesus had asked of him and his colleagues: to share the affliction, to accompany him in his suffering. Without any hope he is not able of compassion, of suffering with the suffering, not able of sympathy, of feeling with the wounded. "Desertion and denial are nothing else then the consequence of their destroyed relation to their master, revealed by their sleeping"¹⁰⁹

Peter as a wounded person called to healing is most clearly described in Jn 21:15-19.¹¹⁰ Jesus asks him three times "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" And Peter becomes hurt, grieved, sad, when Jesus asks him the third time, not because of the question, but because he remembers and feels the reason: It was he who fell asleep three times and denied three times. He recognises his woundedness and is able to show that he suffers by it. Now he is asked to reconsider his relation to Jesus, to become really clear whether he loves him or not. And Peter overcomes his own bitterness and is able to answer positively to Jesus' offer to re-establish the relation. In consequence, Jesus charges him with being a shepherd, a pastor, a leader: "Feed my sheep." But this task is a broken leadership from the beginning. Against any temptation to

¹⁰⁸Krieg, Gustav A.: Gefangene Gottes. Auf der Suche nach pastoraler Identität. Stuttgart 2000. p.111.

¹⁰⁹Feldmeier, Reinhard: Die Krisis des Gottessohnes. Die Gethsemaneerzählung als Schlüssel der Markuspassion. WUzNT 2/21. Tübingen 1987. p.249.

¹¹⁰Cf. Nouwen, Henri J.M.: Seelsorge, die aus dem Herzen kommt. Freiburg i.Br. 31990. p.69f.

lead others with power and force, Peter is called to be aware that it is God who leads; and he leads “where you do not wish to go”.

2.2 Jesus

Here it is not necessary to go into details about Jesus as healer (Heiler) and saviour (Heiland).

We find Jesus as wounded especially in Gethsemane. All his godliness, his proclamation of the Good News and his messianic praxis didn't succeed, and so he is now confronted with his own ending: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” (Mk 14:34) He finds himself between two walls of silence, abandoned by God who doesn't answer and abandoned by his disciples who sleep. But out of all his desperation he is able to accept the fragility and incompleteness of his living and dying: “What you want.”

From the Gethsemane narration we can learn an important distinction: Peter possibly – it is not for us to judge – could have behaved differently, and it was a human failure, weakness, which might have been avoided. But what Jesus suffers, is not his failure: it is part of suffering of a human person, it can't be avoided; this woundedness belongs to the *conditio humana*, the situation and condition of human beings. At the cross, Jesus can be seen “as embodiment of a burned out”: abandoned, failed and deprived of his dignity.¹¹¹ And yet, he heals the loss which his mother is confronted with: “Woman, behold, your son!” (Jn 19:26)

Living and dying of Jesus was soon read in the light of the biblical figure of the Servant of God. It is an open question whether the Servant of God refers to the whole people of Israel, or to a group (those who came back from exile) or to a single person (Deutero-Isaiah himself); and the relation between the woundedness of the Servant and the healing of the “we” is not quite clear from the Hebrew text. Nevertheless, the first Christians were convinced that it refers to Christ: “We found healing because of his wounds.” (Is 53:5)¹¹²

2.3 Paul

Paul, like Peter, is described as a healer: He brings a young man back to life (Acts 20:9f), and more than Peter he works to overcome the stigma against the gentiles.

At the same time, Paul passes through many dangers, calamities and adversities. He is wounded by “countless beatings and often near death”, he was “beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, adrift at sea, in toil and hardship, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure” (2 Cor

11:23-27). His deepest wound is caused by “a thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7). He asks God three times to be liberated from it, but doesn't succeed.

In this situation, his illness lets him see more clearly the limits which belong to human life, and he understands that God's project is realized amidst these limitations: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor 12:9). So he succeeds in giving his weakness a positive meaning. Against the “super-apostles” (2 Cor 11:5) he emphasizes that he is “called to the work of the Lord as a ‘weak’ apostle, i.e. as an apostle who stands in the midst of the troublesomeness of this world and temporality”.¹¹³ Paul correlates his own weakness and the life of Jesus who “humbled himself” (Phil 2:8) and “was crucified in weakness” (2 Cor 13:4). So he is able to understand his own destiny as a wounded healer in the light of the wounded healer Jesus Christ.

2.4 others

2.4.1 Sarah

Sarah is deeply wounded by her infertility in her appreciation as a woman and by Abraham who substitutes her as mother by Hagar. And yet she becomes the mother of God's people. In her weakness God proves to be strong, and he proves her to be strong.

2.4.2 Moses

Through his work of judging the people, Moses runs the risk of being burned out, because the task was too heavy for him. In this situation, Moses is capable to hear and accept the counsel of his father-in-law Jethro. He alleviates his burden and assigns the task of judging to competent people who bear the burden with him (Ex 18:13-26).

2.4.3 Elijah

In 1 Kings 19:1-15 the way, suffering and salvation of Elijah are described naming all the phases of a burn out:

„The collapse, which activates the crisis; the panic, which drives one to attempt to escape and finally escalates to a paralyzing fear of death; the fall into the nothingness: the desert, the emptiness and resignation, the depression; the end: death wish and death-like sleep; in the end the salvation: the angel, the feeding, the return of strength; the way into life: the pilgrimage of forty days; the turn inwards: the stay at the cave; the encounter with God: the ascent to the mountain and the experience of the totally different God: and finally: the way back into everyday life: the journey into the city.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹Heyl, Burnout (note 107), p.289.

¹¹²Translation according to Blenkinsopp, Joseph: Isaiah 40-55. A new translation with introduction and commentary. New York 2002. p.345.

¹¹³Aejmelaeus, Lars: Schwachheit als Waffe. Die Argumentation des Paulus im „Tränenbrief“ (2. Kor 10-13). Göttingen 2000. p.402.

¹¹⁴Heyl, Burnout (note 107), p.128.

2.4.4 The disciples on their way to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35)

The disciples, they know, and they ask the unknown stranger: Are you the only one who does not know? They knew the hopes of the Old Testament for freedom, for liberation from pressure and bondages, because that they had lived with Jesus. In him, their hope got a concrete form.

But three days ago, they had to bury this hope together with him. They are wounded, stricken, frustrated. They talk with each other and don't realise who walks next to them. Doubts attack them: What kind of God is it who permits that the embodiment of his will dies?

It is essential to gain a new vision. Suffering opens up to life. Stress can be creative and encourage changing one's attitudes. Illness opens a new view. The old texts have to be interpreted in a new way. It seems that their hearts still are dull, but later they remember: Did not our hearts burn?

Such a person, they want to keep with them. Stay with us, they ask the "stranger!" He touches their hearts, opens new perspectives. Again they were near to each other. And then to part ...

Once again they sit down at the table, eat and drink together, and not until now eating together they see and recognize. It is the Resuscitated, the Plagued and Crucified one, who eats with them. It is a basic Christian attitude: To take, to thank, to give.

Buried hopes are raised to life. Those who wanted to retire stand up. Those without hope get new hope; those who are sad or ill in their heart experience their resurrection in the encounter with the Resurrected. And they go off, recount their experiences and in doing so, help others to rise. Though the encounter with the wounded healer the wounded disciples become healers.

3. Consequences

3.1 Theological aspects

Crisis, suffering and experiences of boundaries are part of human life as it was and is created by God. Human beings are always wounded and broken, and although it is obvious it seems sometimes necessary to remember that pastors share the conditions of all human beings. "God doesn't want pastors as supermen/superwomen, holy persons, untouchables; he created us as human beings, accepting our limits: limits of power and limits of love."¹¹⁵

In spite of that, in their self-perceptions pastors often project themselves as perfect and almighty. The desire for omnipotence is the "most secret and concealed sin" of ministers.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵Pastors' workshop in Namibia, September 2010.

¹¹⁶Heyl, Burnout (note 107), p.198.

It is the sin par excellence: to want to be like the Creator, perfect and almighty, and not to accept the condition as a creature, imperfect and weak. On the other hand, to talk as a creature about the Creator is part of the healing ministry of pastors.

But we can even go a step further relating the human condition of pastors (like all human beings) as created in God's image to the God who humbled himself and died at the cross. "If the God-likeness of man is conceived from the theology of incarnation (and from the crucified Christ), weakness and imperfectness are not contrary to it, but its essential core."¹¹⁷

It is important to see the relation and the difference between the ministry of a pastor and his/her person. The ministry can't exist without the ministers, but it neither stands with the healing capacities of a pastor nor falls with his/her woundedness. It doesn't depend on his/her performance, but on the will by God. The pastor's ministry is a broken instrument of Christ to call people to the Kingdom of God. People will hear this call sometimes because of us, sometimes despite of us. And yet, the pastor's performance does matter.

3.2 Aspects referring to pastors as person

3.2.1 Acceptance

If in our times always identity is fragile, fragmented, ambivalent, a first necessary step is to recognize and accept this brokenness. On one hand it is essential for a realistic self-perception of pastors which avoids permanent excessive self-demands and by this way hinders that the pastor wounds him-/herself again and again. On the other hand it is a prerequisite for the healing ministry. A wounded pastor who represses his wounds will not be capable to heal others. If we don't listen to ourselves, we can't hear others. Only if we understand our own affliction, can our actions alleviate the afflictions of others.

So we should not hide our wounds and weaknesses before ourselves, but accept them and be open to go a way of healing. But to this acceptance and openness nobody can be obliged by others. It has to be a free process of self-awareness and self-understanding which each pastor should pass through by his/her own will.

3.2.2 Dangers

Before continuing with the chances of such a process, it is advisable to indicate the peril of such a vision. To emphasize vulnerability, brokenness, weakness, limitations carries the dangers of glorifying suffering as a positive value of human life or sinking into self-pity or mystifying failures or excusing

¹¹⁷Luther, Religion (note 105), p.176.

misdoings. Invoking that “I’m just imperfect” can mean longing for cheap grace (Bonhoeffer).

3.2.3 Chances

The own woundedness of a pastor can be a chance for his/her healing work, a task that should not be understood in the sense that the pastor is the one who ‘makes’ the healing, but that he/she is a person who helps others on their way to find their own healing. This may be when he/she lives constructively with their own vulnerability and handles their own brokenness or imperfectness in an authentic and credible way. And it happens that while dressing one’s own wounds, one helps others to dress their wounds, when exposing oneself to the very deep questions of life, it helps to lead others to ask such questions. To see the pastor’s woundedness can also encourage parishioners to disclose their own wounds. A colleague told me that after he was divorced, a lot of men came to him to talk about their matrimonial problems.

But we have to be careful: Woundedness can be converted into a resource of pastoral healing, but again we can’t oblige anybody to do so. This would turn a chance into a burden, a grace into a law. Every pastor is free to decide whether they want to disclose or hide their own brokenness or failure, to whom they disclose or hide, when they do it and how, i.e. how to live their “selective authenticity”.

3.2.4 Ways

Depending on the type of woundedness, crisis or failure, the ways of healing are different. They also depend on the age, experience and gender of the pastor.

With regard to healing job-related woundedness or avoiding it, there are some suggestions on how to do it. To care for oneself and to refill one’s own energy is an important step. In a more technical sense, it can mean having a fixed time during the week, free from work, just to do whatever you want. But it also means to identify and recognize what your source of energy is. What is especially needed is to care for one’s own spiritual life. It seems strange, but spirituality even for pastors is a taboo, maybe even more than sexuality.¹¹⁸ But to develop a consistent praxis pietatis is essential for the own healing. It is helpful, but not imperative to have one or two really good friends to talk with.

3.3 Institutional aspects

Pastors as wounded healers are part of the Church as an institution. Therefore, to avoid or to heal their woundedness also has its institutional side.

3.3.1 Church leadership

It is up to the church leaders, bishops, deans and others to care for the pastors, also in their woundedness. But very often the same person is responsible both for the administrative supervision as well as the pastoral counseling of the pastors. These two functions should be separated so that a pastor has not to fear that in consequence of disclosing a weakness he/she will suffer an administrative disadvantage.

It is also necessary to revise church laws and by-laws if they reflect the reality of pastors as wounded healers or if they ex- or implicitly presuppose the concept of pastor as a strong, nearly perfect person.

Often church leaders react when things are at the boiling point, the wounds so deep, the crisis so advanced, the failures so insupportable that healing becomes difficult or even late. We need a climate of constructive openness towards failures in the church including a program to prevent extreme situations as far as possible.

3.3.2 Offers

Pastors need a service to recognize their wounds, opportunities to say “I need help”, safe spaces where they can disclose. Supervision (not in the sense of control, but of monitoring, counseling and coaching) is helpful. This applies of course in a special manner to pastors living with HIV and Aids. Pastors need a space free for a personal spiritual learning as well. Both, supervision and spiritual accompaniment have to be understood as an essential part of a pastor’s ministry and should be services implemented by the church.

The persons in charge of it, the supervisors and spiritual guides, should be paid by the church, but should other than that be independent from the institution, i.e. with the right and duty to professional secrecy, not submitted to orders, not involved in administrative tasks.

You can discuss if the attendance to such offers should be voluntary or compulsory. Taking seriously the condition of pastors as wounded healers, it should be obligatory, although we know that to some pastors because of their resistance against being counseled it might not bring so much profit as to others.

3.3.3 Congregation

In some congregations it is still necessary to open the eyes of parishioners that their pastor is not a superior, but a human being like themselves, all equal before God, especially in their woundedness. Therefore pastors should talk – within

¹¹⁸Heyl, Burnout (note 107), p.340.

the limits of their own decision – about themselves, their wounds, suffering, crisis, struggles, showing that they are not the ones who know everything, who always go ahead, who heal, but who are on a journey together with the congregation. By that, especially a congregation will learn to accept the free time a pastor takes for him/herself, the absence for supervision, the spaces reserved for spiritual learning. But more than that, it might bring up the question if the congregation itself is a burden for wounded people (including the wounded pastor) or if it is on the way to become a healing community.

3.3.4 The concept of a pastor's ministry ("Pfarrbild")

We end with a question. Will it be possible in a not too distant future that a congregation which looks for a pastor publishes the following announcement?

"The congregation xx looks for a pastor who offers this, that and the other special ability and who enjoys doing this and that (to specify). We want a pastor who knows about his/her wounds, failures and limitations, and we would be glad if he/she is able to convert some of them in a constructive way into a resource for his/her pastoral work, considering his/her woundedness and vulnerability not as a defect, but as qualification for his/her healing work. Applications should be sent until ... to ..."

5.2 A pastor as a wounded healer (a Namibian perspective)

The word “pastor” usually refers to an ordained leader of a Christian congregation. The word itself is derived from Greek word *poimene* means shepherd. A *poimene* is someone who dedicates all his life to his flock. Jesus referred to himself as being “a good shepherd” (Jn 10:11) with the same understanding, a shepherd whose life is dedicated to the flock. Christians adopted this word with the same meaning.

A wounded healer refers to a pastor, Is 53 is in line with the calling of Jesus. Jesus is the Wounded Healer, pastors are wounded healers, together they are fellowship of a wounded healer, Jesus Christ. The pastors have their own wounds and their wounds are profoundly important to the healing process because in this way they can provide an awareness of the pain, torments, and confusion underlying any affliction. They need to acknowledge their brokenness and bondage (sin) as the first step to healing and freedom and salvation. Serving God is not confined to one calling neither to pastoral ministry only. It has to do with all good works and God’s work. Following Jesus command to “make disciples of non-believers of all nations”, pastors are required to go and leave their comfort zone and serve the people of God. To do the works that please God and to not do any harm to any human being neither to the nature which God saw was good.

A pastor is not someone who fell from heaven. Pastors are not immune to any life challenges. They are human beings with all the human nature. They get hungry, thirsty, cold, and lonely and even get infections of virus or get sick from diseases. They get tired from the works of their callings. They can be addicted to alcohol and gambling. Some pastors could even be challenged to fall in love affairs beyond their partners. These are some of few things one could mention to confirm that a pastor is not an angel. Therefore pastors in such cases they should use their own brokenness as a tool for guiding others to the main Healer Jesus Christ.

The basic duty of a pastor is to take care of a congregation holistically. Jesus commanded Peter to feed His lambs and to take care of his sheep, Jn 21:15-17, this is how the pastoral ministry started. The church continued with the same succession to date. However the role of pastor changes as time goes. It has to respond to the needs of the people and fit the context, but it should represent the Gospel of Christ. Pastors have a critical role to play in poverty reduction because poverty is a trigger to most infections of HIV. The pastor as wounded healer should always encourage people to work on voluntarily basis and to serve their community without rewards.

Just as all true leaders influence their environments more

than their environments influence them. Pastors have a big influence in the community. Every generation needs pastors. The whole world needs them. Pastors should take it that, the fact that they are on planet earth is evidencing enough that they possess a unique pattern that the world needs.

Pastors are the instruments of God just as other servants of good will. Although the world is giving thanks to God for having doctors and medical professionals, the fact remains that medicine can’t do everything. There are many times when we need a miracle of healing. That is the power of healing that God invested in His servants. Jas 5:14-15 says: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven”. Pastors are not immune to the world challenges therefore the needs of all people are their needs as well.

It should be clearly stated that it is not only sicknesses that are wounding the societies. There are lots of issues that can hinder the well-being of a human being. Things like rejections. Pastors are sometimes rejected as they are proclaiming the good news to the wounded societies. They get wounded as they are trying to rescue other sheep from the captivities of the fallen world. This goes without saying, if you are willing to accept the call to be a wounded healer in the surrounding generations, then you must also willing to be rejected and misunderstood by many. The experience of pastors rejection in their society is not something new. Even the ultimate wounded healer, Jesus Christ, had his fair share of rejection, as recorded by His disciple John, “He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him” (Jn 1:11).

But in Jesus Christ they can overcome the pain, because they share their pain in Christ’s and so also through Christ they share in God’s great help. Further it says if we suffer, it is for help and salvation of the societies; and if they are helped then pastors are helped and given strength to endure with patience the same sufferings that they also endure together with their society. So their hope should be in Christ’s and their faith will never be shaken because they know that Jesus shares their suffering, they also share the help they receive (2 Cor 1:5-7).

In Acts 3:6-8 Peter said to the lame man: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk”. This is the testimony that pastors have no human power to heal any sick, but it is the power of Jesus’ name that brought healing and by prayer that directs the power, the pastor can heal.

V. Pastors as wounded healers

5.2 A pastor as a wounded healer (a Namibian perspective)

Pastors are not on holy ground or on a holy island. They are born of flesh fully. In the Lord's Prayer we all say "lead us not into temptations..." this is a clear indication that we are all vulnerable to weakness of the flesh. Pastors could be tempted either by the societies of their surroundings or even by their parishioners. Therefore they (pastors) need God's intervention in their daily duties. Pastors should use the words of God to lean on when the temptations are getting higher, but still they need the Holy Spirit to lead and guide them.

In some societies pastors are given a holy position and people look up to pastors as angels in the world. This caused pastors to ignore their really feelings and drive them into pretend to be free from challenges of life. But pastors should not be seen as kings but rather as servants of the kings, because it says, whoever wants to be a leader among its community he / she must be they servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the servant of all. Further it says, even for the Son of Man, came on earth not be served but to serve others.

The pastors need to acknowledge the life they are living as well to be an authentic witness and minister of Christ. In order to be a humble wounded healer, pastors first need to recognize and embrace their brokenness; must accept and apply God's grace to every one of the wounds in life and lastly must then go forth as wounded healers into the world ministering to those around them.

It is very important to recognize and embrace your own brokenness. Paul wrote in Rom 7:21-25, where he shares his struggle between living in his broken carnal state and the Spirit-filled life. He wrote "when I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's Law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members". Here, Paul recognized the struggle with his carnal sinful nature, but he did not stop there. In the very next verse he continued to shout out his marvelous declaration of independence and he continues believe that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

In the real world pastors are wounded healers as they follow in Jesus footsteps. Jesus suffered on the road of the world because of the world to be saved. There it requires pastors to be effective ministers in Christ and must continue recognize their brokenness; Paul was a testimony of this. He worked hard, was frequently imprisoned, was flogged and exposed to death many times. Many pastors faced the same challenges, for example in Namibia, pastors were torched during the Apartheid time because of the spread of peace and freedom of the society, many were jailed and their congregations were disturbed during

church services but they never stopped. The voice of the church in Namibia was heard all over the world and pastors became wounded with own wounds.

Pastors are in danger from their own countrymen, in dangers from Gentiles, in danger in their towns and dangerous false brothers. They are aware of the situations surrounding them but do not go against with their society or brothers and sisters. They continue to serve their parish and continue to call Jesus and shout If God is for us, who can be against us (Rom 8:35-37). Therefore a pastor as wounded healer, he must look after his own wound but should also be prepared to serve and heal the society's wound. He/she must believe in Jesus Christ as a main wounded healer before he/she follows Jesus and start preaching Jesus scripts. In today's word people wants to see physical touch from pastors in order to believe. John Stott writes, "I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the cross".¹¹⁹ Thus it is for the pastors to believe in the cross before preach it to the world, because you need to believe in yourself before make other to believe.

In conclusion, a pastor as wounded healer should always follows in Jesus Christ footsteps and bow down to his instruction that says: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:18-20). Pastors as wounded healers should not compete with others to be able to heal because pastors were instructed to teach but not compete. They are individuals who were ordained by Jesus Christ because of their unique roles in the society, gifts and abilities to heal themselves and others. Be able to recognize and embrace their brokenness and of others. They should not judge their followers but should know the servants role and the valuable contribution they have to make to the world of humanity.

When pastors are walking, preaching in their congregations, in the street, work place and in family, they should know that there are people who are looking for answers and healing for different sickness or problems that they should acknowledge and be able to heal. Therefore all pastors and society should bowed their heads to Jesus' feet and accept their brokenness and belovedness as all know that there is a great wounded healer, the great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus Christ, the Son of God who gives mercy and finds grace to help his people in time of need. Paul wrote in Roman that the struggle that the pastors are going through and face are the same that the main wounded healer went through and this is to allow them to minister more effectively for Jesus Christ.

¹¹⁹<http://pixelpastor.com/2009/09/21/mit-leid/>, accessed September 18th, 2012.

Sexuality as a gift of God

Gen 1:27-28.31

Human beings are created as being in relation to one another. This relation includes sexuality. It is “very good“ in the eyes of God.

Eccles 9:7-9

Enjoy pleasure!

Song of Solomon 7:7-14

Proximity, tenderness, physical attraction, longing – lust, joy in the other sex and therefore sexuality, is celebrated in the Song of Solomon. The woman has an active, equal role in this book.

1 Cor 7:1-9

A text which shows the opposite: Paul’s resentment of the body and sexuality, which is traditionally predominant within the church. At least: men and women are seen as equal when it comes to sexuality.

God created us with different sexual orientations

Gen 1:27-28. 2:21-24

Homosexual love is not taken into account in the Bible. However, the texts on creation are open, they do not describe heteronormativity.

- Human beings are created as being in relation to one another. There is no talk of matrimony.
- Human beings are created „male and female“ (not: as man and woman). It could be interpreted that all human beings have both male and female parts.
- 2:24 makes it clear: the texts on creation describe what was socially accepted at the time, not a generally valid norm.

Gal 3:26-29

Natural and cultural differences, for instance in connection with gender, lose their character of segregation in Christ. All are God’s children and “heirs according to the promise”.

A new understanding of what it means to be a strong man

Gen 2:21-23

The woman is a side (not: rib, as is explained in the Bible in just language (Bibel in gerechter Sprache)) of Adam, who is the human being made by God. The remaining side is the man. In verse 23, one can already see the text has been taken in by patriarchal views of the human being a man: “for out of Man this one was taken”.

Phil 2:5-11

Strong men are courageous and take an example in Christ, who humbled himself and lived to serve.

Pastors as wounded healers

Jn 21:15-19

Peter, wounded and feeling “hurt” by his sleeping in Gethsemane, his escape and denial is asked by Jesus to be a shepherd (pastor) of the congregation: “tend my sheep”, even though his leadership will be broken “take you where you do not wish to go”.

2 Cor 12:5-10

Before the super-apostles (2 Cor 11:5) Paul stresses that he, being „weak“, being an apostle living in the midst of the problems of this world and the times, is called by the Lord.

Imprint

Published by:

MÖWe – The Institute for Mission,
Ecumenism and Global Responsibility of
the Evangelical Church of Westphalia

GMÖ – Parish Service for Mission
and Ecumenism of the Evangelical Church
in the Rhineland

Editorial team:

Matthias Börner
Ute Hedrich
Thea Hummel
Eberhard Löschcke

Layout:

studiofuergestaltung.net
Cover: Christian Bauer
2013



Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen

