

Same-Gender Relationships

The Holy Bible, despite heterosexist assumptions and homophobic prejudice, approves and even praises multiple variants in human relationships. Indeed the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures exhibit a positive view of same-sex love, without genital expression, at noteworthy moments in biblical history.

What are the examples of same-gender relationships in Scripture?

Ruth, a direct ancestress of Christ, was different from her sister-in-law Orpah when faced with identical circumstances. Ruth made an extraordinary pledge not only to share her life with Naomi but even after death to lie inseparably by her side. “Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord’s just punishment come upon me, if I let anything, even death, separate me from you!” (Ruth 1:16-17; cf.4:15,16-17).

Jonathan, immediately after the defeat of Goliath, “became deeply attracted to David and loved the youth as dearly as his own life” (1 Sam.18:1). David in turn asserted that Jonathan’s love was for him “more wonderful than the love of a woman” (2 Sam.1:26). The two men openly made a lifelong pact together, even met later in secret despite parental objections, embraced and kissed and wept shamelessly upon separation (1 Sam.18:3 to 20:42). Ever afterwards David remembered their truly unique bond because of its intense physical passion and great emotional tenderness (2 Sam.9: 1-13; 21:7).

Jesus himself cherished a very special love both for his friend Lazarus (Jn.11:3,5,36) and for the apostle John (Jn, 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20). Jesus also affirmed the close same-gender relationships of others, such as the pagan Roman centurion, who was more than ordinarily concerned for his sick male servant (Mt.8:5-13; Lk.7:1-10). Finally, St. Paul manifested a strong intimate attachment to such men as Timothy (2 Tim.1:4; 4:9,21), Titus (Tit.1:4; 3:12), and Onesimus (Phm.8-21).

Are there examples of same-gender relationships in Church history?

A brief survey of subsequent Christian history reveals further examples of devoted same-sex relationships: St. Perpetua and St. Felicity, St. Sergius and St. Bacchus, St. Brigid of Ireland and St. Darludach, St. Anselm of Canterbury and Gilbert Crispin, St. Bernard of Clairvaux and William Thierry, St. Hildegard of Bingen and Richardis von Stade.

St. Gertrude of Nivelles, according to her biographer, “was bound familiarly to St. Modesta in divine friendship... They were always lovingly together in their hearts and minds...” (*Acta Sanctorum*, March, II:590). St. Gregory Nazianzen preached about his association with St. Basil the Great: “We became everything to each other... We shared the same desires, the same goal...Our love for each other grew daily warmer and deeper... We seemed to be two bodies with a single spirit...” (Patrology, Greek Series, 36:519,522).

Other Church figures asserted the positive value of gay/lesbian sensibilities and gave homosexual love a profound Christian expression. St. Paulinus of Nola described his passionate affection for Ausonius in poetry of exquisite tenderness: “In whatever world I am found, I shall hold you fast, Grafted onto my being, Not divided by distant shores or suns...”(*Corpus Scriptorum* [CSEL], 30:41-42).

St. Aelred of Rievaulx, who undoubtedly was homosexual, idealized same-sex attachments: “It is a great consolation in this life to have someone to whom you can be united in the intimate embrace of the most sacred love...with whom you can rest, just the two of you, in the sleep of peace, away from the noise of the world, in the kiss of unity, with the sweetness of the Holy Spirit flowing over you...” (*De Speculo Caritatis* 3:109-110).

In the light of such scriptural and historical examples, we begin to grasp the full dynamics of “natural attraction and desire” in the lives of predominantly homosexual persons, as noted in 1979 by both the Dutch and English/Welsh hierarchies. We come to appreciate their “deeper need...for stable friendships...and abiding relationships...rather than genital expression,” as the U.S. bishops stated in 1973 in *Principles to Guide Confessors in Questions of Homosexuality*. Thus, we learn to perceive lesbian women and gay men as really quite ordinary people like ourselves.

“Love between two persons, whether of the same sex or of a different sex, is to be treasured and respected... When two persons love, they experience in a limited manner in this world what will be their unending delight when one with God in the next... To love another, whether of the same sex or of a different sex, is to have entered the area of the richest human experience...”

(Cardinal Basil Hume, *Note on the Teaching of the Catholic Church*, 1995).

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