

# Homosexuality: a comparison of western and eastern viewpoints assignment

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## HOMOSEXUALITY: A COMPARISON OF WESTERN AND EASTERN VIEWPOINTS

The purpose of this paper is to shed a positive light on homosexuality. The paper will also look at how religion has shaped the views that people have regarding homosexuality. It will be seen that, for the most part, Christianity in the West has encouraged people to take a negative attitude on the subject. By contrast, the Eastern religion of Buddhism has taught people to have a more tolerant attitude toward homosexuality.

It will be argued that the negative view of homosexuality which is frequently encountered in the West is actually based more on political reasons than on moral reasons. It will also be argued that once the political reasons for opposing homosexuality are removed, it becomes possible to view the subject in a more positive light. The beliefs of the Christian religion make homosexuals feel that they will be condemned to hell for all eternity if they do not change their sexual orientation. Although both Catholics and Protestants are opposed to homosexuality, the Catholic religion is a bit stricter on the subject.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (a book that explains Catholic beliefs), homosexual activities are seen as “acts of grave depravity,” and “under no circumstances can they be approved.” [1] The reason that Catholics and other Christians believe this is because of certain passages in the Bible which condemn homosexual behavior. In her book *Different Drummer: Homosexuality in America*, Elaine Landau points out that “there are direct and explicit condemnations of homosexuality in the Bible.

[2] Some of the passages that condemn homosexuality are found in the Old Testament of the Bible. For example, in Leviticus 20: 13, it says: “If a man  
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lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them. “[3] Another Old Testament passage concerning homosexuality is found in the Book of Genesis, with the story of the town of Sodom. In that passage, it is said that a group of homosexual men were punished by being struck blind. Later, the entire town of Sodom was destroyed by God because of its immorality.

It is interesting that the name of the town, Sodom, has survived to the present day as the root of the word “sodomy.” Sodomy may be defined as anal sex, an activity that is mainly associated with homosexual behavior. There are other passages in the Bible that condemn homosexuality, including some which are contained in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 6: 6-10, for example, Saint Paul says that “male prostitutes” and “sodomites” are among those who will never be able to inherit the Kingdom of God. [4] Saint Paul also condemns homosexuality in Romans 1: 26-27.

In that passage, he not only condemns male homosexuality but also condemns female homosexuality (or lesbianism), as well. Yet another New Testament passage that claims homosexuality to be evil can be found in 1 Timothy 1: 10. Although homosexuality is condemned in the Bible, the view of many Christians is that homosexuals, like all sinners, are to be accepted as members of the church. Of course, some branches of the Christianity are more accepting and tolerant than others. However, even the Catholic Church, which is very strict in its moral rules, realizes that there is a need to accept homosexuals.

The official Catholic view, as contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church is that homosexuals “ do not choose their homosexual condition; for most of them it is a trial. ” Because of this point of view, the Catechism also says: “ They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. “[5] This point of view does not change the fact that homosexuality is seen as a sin by the Catholics. It is simply hoped that, by being included in the church, homosexuals will eventually overcome their condition and become good Christians.

In fact, as in the case of people who are not married, the Catholic Church teaches that homosexuals should avoid having sex at all. Christianity sees homosexuality as being immoral because it is considered to be “ unnatural. ” This perspective is expressed in the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “ They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. “[6] The Catholics are not the only group of Christians to see homosexuality as unnatural.

For example, the members of the Protestant group known as the Presbyterians also feel this way. The writers of the Christian magazine The Plough also see homosexuality as being unnatural. In an article in The Plough, it was said: “ By unnatural we simply mean behavior which is contrary to the intent of nature. “[7] According to this article, there are two reasons why homosexual activity should be seen as being unnatural. The first reason is because of the anatomy of the human reproductive system. In

other words, the sexual organs of men and women are apparently designed for the purposes of heterosexual, rather than homosexual, sex.

The second reason is that homosexuality leads to “ a host of strange infectious diseases. “[8] Thus, the writers of *The Plough* feel that homosexuality is unnatural because it can lead to diseases such as AIDS, syphilis and gonorrhoea. What the writers don't mention is that heterosexual behaviors can also lead to these diseases. Some Christians are especially opposed to the homosexual practice of anal sex (or sodomy). They believe that anal sex is unnatural because it goes against the natural purposes of what the anus is designed for. Many Christians are also disgusted by the idea of anal sex because they consider it to be “ dirty. There are also some Christians who feel that homosexuality is unnatural because it does not occur among non-human creatures. However, Matthew A. Coles, a law professor, points out that this argument is “ simply wrong,” because there are indeed some animals that engage in same-sex activities. [9] In their book *Sexual Secrets*, Nik Douglas and Penny Slinger claim that “ science has recorded numerous instances of exploratory ‘ homosexual’ advances between animals such as rats, mice, bats, hedgehogs, dogs, goats, pigs, sheep, horses, lions and monkeys. [10] Douglas and Slinger say this even though they themselves are actually opposed to homosexuality. This shows that even if a person is opposed to homosexuality, it cannot necessarily be argued that the practice is “ unnatural. ” In contrast to the Christian view of homosexuality as unnatural and immoral, there is an entirely different viewpoint to be found among the religions of the East, such as Buddhism. As

in the case of Christianity, homosexuality is not officially accepted as part of the Buddhist religion.

In fact, Buddhism has its own list of moral rules which teach its followers not to lie, steal, or hurt others. In addition, these rules teach that people should not engage in sex for any purpose other than having babies. Yet, there has traditionally been greater tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality in the East than in the Western World. This is because the philosophical point of view of Buddhism is more open and tolerant, and it accepts the idea that there are many different ways for people to be human. Regarding the influence of religion on how people view homosexuality, the authors Ellen Bass and Kate Kaufman say:

Because Buddhism emphasizes a way of being rather than prescribing a set of laws, Buddhist groups are generally accepting of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. Buddhist teachings don't condemn sex between people of the same gender. They speak only of not misusing sexuality in any way that harms another. Gays and lesbians can be married, ordained as priests, and hold positions of influence within most Buddhist organizations. [11]

Therefore, in contrast to what it says in the Christian Bible about the subject, Buddhist groups are clearly more accepting of homosexuality.

Again, it needs to be emphasized that homosexuality is not officially accepted as part of the Buddhist belief. Yet, " although it may have been officially proscribed, homosexuality in fact flourished in Buddhist monasteries throughout the centuries. "[12] In fact, homosexuality is still tolerated in many Buddhist monasteries today. A Westerner named Heinrich Harrer

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traveled through Tibet and wrote a book about his experiences, called *Seven Years in Tibet*, in which he wrote about the practices of Buddhism that he observed during his travels.

Harrer was surprised by the open-minded attitudes that the Buddhists had toward sexuality in general. Among other things, he noticed that “homosexuality was an accepted practice in the monasteries. “[13] Buddhism began in India, but later spread into China and Tibet. From there, it also reached Korea and Japan. The tolerance for homosexuality found among the Buddhists also spread to these other nations. Thus, John Stevens writes in his book *Lust for Enlightenment: Buddhism and Sex* that “male love is said to not have existed in Japan until it was introduced by Buddhist monks in the ninth century. [14] In Japan, Buddhism developed into a unique form known as Zen Buddhism. Like Buddhists in other countries, the Zen priests and monks of Japan had a tolerant attitude toward homosexual behavior. Because of this, Stevens says that “homosexual passion” was a “matter of course” in the Zen Buddhist monasteries. [15] Regarding the medieval period in Japan’s history, Stevens writes that although Zen Buddhist monks were not allowed to marry, few of them actually practiced celibacy. Instead, “conveniently, most monks actually preferred the companionship of young boys to that of women (a trait they shared with the samurai of that era). “[16] Because Buddhism accepts homosexuality as part of human nature, homosexuals who belong to the Buddhist religion have more positive experiences than those who belong to a Christian church. Ellen Bass and Kate Kaufman claim that the emphasis of Buddhist teaching is on “honest self-reflection” rather than on being saved from sin. [17] Therefore,

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Buddhists who are homosexual are not made to feel persecuted or condemned. A young American Buddhist named Quang says the following about his experiences:

Buddhism has been good for me because the spirituality is not as prescriptive and not condemning of any particular way of life. It's a process that you go through to try to understand yourself and to be yourself - just a process of thinking and developing and changing. It's not about ' you can't do this' or ' you can't do this. ' I've gotten the benefit of spirituality without having to deal with some of the bigger conflicts or tensions that people have who want to find a spirituality or a faith within a religion that is more condemning of homosexuality. 18] It can be argued that the Christian condemnation of homosexuality is due to political rather than moral reasons. For example, it is obvious that the purpose of homosexual activity is not that of having children. This means that homosexuals do not take part in reproduction, which is necessary for the survival of the human species. This goes against the traditional Christian point of view, because " according to the Christian doctrine, sex was to exist for the purpose of procreation. "[19] Because of this view, many Christians feel that homosexuals are a threat to society.

In *Sexual Secrets*, Nik Douglas and Penny Slinger say that the story of the destruction of Sodom in the Bible is based on this threat. In addition, they say that " early Christianity took a strong anti-homosexual position, using Rome as an example of the effect of licensed homosexuality on a nation. "[20] Douglas and Slinger sum up their own anti-homosexual viewpoint with



the words: " An excessively homosexual society will quickly annihilate itself. "[21] However, not all experts agree with this opinion. Dr.

Thomas Szaz, a well-known medical authority, agrees that heterosexual behavior is necessary for the survival of the human species. However, he also states that: " Just because heterosexual behavior served to insure reproduction and the continuance of the species, this did not mean that homosexual behavior was immoral or a form of mental illness. "[22] Matthew A. Coles, a professor of law, makes a similar argument when he says: " That a group of people believe that God disapproves of another group of people is simply not a sufficient proof that the second group of people is a danger to the first. [23] The political side of the anti-homosexual arguments can also be seen in how many of these arguments are concerned with what is called the homosexual " agenda. " In *The Plough*, for example, it is claimed that homosexuals are not simply demanding protection from discrimination and physical assaults. Rather, they are insisting " that everyone must accept homosexuality as normal. "[24] The political conservative Carl F. Horowitz also expresses concern over the " gay rights agenda," and warns that accepting homosexuality will disrupt society as we know it.

Horowitz fears that, among other things, increased homosexual rights will restrict " heterosexual freedom of speech. "[25] In Horowitz's point of view, the gay rights activists are simply stirring up trouble and causing society to become divided against itself. Some people think homosexuality is a danger to society because they are afraid of the influence it will have on their children. For example, some people feel that if homosexuality becomes too

widely accepted, there will be a threat “ that gay people will ‘ recruit’ children, or subject them to sexual assault. [26] A similar fear is expressed in The Plough. There, it is claimed that the acceptance of homosexuality would result in “ attempts to subvert the minds of our children by means of curricula that portray homosexual activity as normal. “[27] These arguments show just some of the ways in which anti-homosexual views are based more on political, rather than moral, concerns. Throughout history, there has always been at least one group in society that has received this kind of prejudice and persecution.

In the Middle Ages of Europe, for example, “ witches” were hunted down and burned at the stake because of their way of life, regardless of whether they had committed any particular crimes. Today, homosexuals are receiving a similar kind of treatment. The arguments against homosexuality have been supported by traditional Christian beliefs. However, in nations where Buddhism is the major belief system, homosexuality has been accepted as part of life. This is true even though homosexuality is not officially accepted in Buddhism any more than it is in Christianity.

This shows that homosexuals can be tolerated, and that homosexuality can be viewed in a more positive light than they were in earlier periods of Western history. Hopefully, the people in the West will continue to debate this issue until an agreement can be found. Bibliography Bass, Ellen, and Kate Kaufman. *Free Your Mind*. New York: HarperCollins Books, 1996. Catechism of the Catholic Church. New York: An Image Book, 1995. Coles, Matthew A. “ Homosexuals Need Civil Rights Protection. ” *Homosexuality:*

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