

Different in More Ways Than One.

Providing Guidance for Teenagers on Their Way to Identity, Sexuality and Respect

9 Different Religions

- <Teresa> *Are we going to talk today about religion today?*
- <Aaron> *Yes, that's the topic.*
- <Almira> *I think it's great that you've chosen this subject*
- <Julie> *Before we really start – and also because it's part of the subject: who wants to go to the next Europride among you?*
- <Koray> *If you tell us what it's about, I could think it over *:-)**
- <Julie> *Gays and lesbians from all over Europe meet within the framework of the Gay Pride Parades and organise an intercultural week, on different subjects. One of them could be religion, I think. But I don't want to go there without you.*
- <Koray> *You mean, that we would prepare a given topic, and then organise an event together there?*
- <Julie> *That's right.*
- <Aaron> *Through Internet, without knowing each other?*
- <Almira> *I don't have the feeling, that I don't know you. Think about Elsa and Chloé – they really found each other through the chat.*
- <Aaron> *I'm convinced. *:-)* So, who starts ?*
- <Kristin> *I come from a very religious family. I think that's why I never found the nerve to tell my parents that I am a lesbian.*
- <Koray> *What would happen?*
- <Kristin> *I have no idea. Strict Christians refuse homosexuality.*
- <Julie> *My parents feel that God must have had a reason when He created homosexuality – they think that everything has been created by God, and that's the explanation.*
- <Kristin> *Could be, but God has also allowed evil, my parents would say. Adultery for instance is forbidden, and so is murder.*
- <Julie> *In any case homosexuality is not formally forbidden in the ten commandments*

to be continued on page 9 and 10

Framework

First of all

It is widely believed that all religions are against homosexuality. Although some religious texts seem to condemn homosexuality, in practice it is mainly fundamentalist and other traditionalist believers who denounce homosexuality. Non-fundamentalists, on the other hand, often have a more tolerant attitude. Many religious texts usually denounce specific forms of male homosexual behaviour. Lesbian behaviour, however, is seldom mentioned. This is linked to the de-sexualisation of lesbians which is part of the specific prejudice against female homosexuality (because of the sexist notion that women “don’t matter”). Lesbians, gays and bisexuals often have problems with the church or with religious beliefs while they are growing up. But many will remain religious, although they sometimes leave their church because of discrimination.

Basic information

The attitude of the Christian Churches towards homosexuality

In its official statements the Roman Catholic Church condemns homosexuality. In its eyes homosexual acts are in contradiction with the Church’s official attitude towards the deeper sense of sexuality which is to procreate life. In this opinion catholic moral theology even today is strongly influenced by a concept of nature that has been fully developed in the 19th century. The current Catechism of the Catholic Church states that there is a predisposition to homosexuality that is not changeable. From this point of view one is supposed to consider people who have this tragic predisposition with “sympathy and respect”. However, concrete homosexual acts are still rejected as they are regarded as a serious sin. Homosexuals should – “perhaps also by means of a selfless (i.e. not sexual) friendship” – live in sexual abstinence.

In the past years in some of the Protestant Churches in Western and Northern Europe a process of discussion on the question of dealing with and pastoral care for lesbians and gays has started. Some national sections of the Protestant Church (including one American branch of the Church of England) are very open and choose lesbians or gays as priests or celebrate blessings of two women or two men. However, there are also so-called evangelical Free Churches and parishes that take a strictly conservative position similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church.

In both confessions there are always single persons, groups or theological directions that differ from official positions and statements – both being more conservative or more liberal (e.g. theology of liberation). One should therefore be very careful in judging a church and take into account the diversity within the institution.

The attitude towards homosexuality in Judaism

In Judaism as with the Christian religions, there is on the question of homosexuality a strong divide between orthodox and liberal movements. On the whole, orthodox movements tend to ban homosexuality, on the basis of the condemnation seemingly expressed in Leviticus XVIII,22, and in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. However, even with some orthodox movements, it is unclear whether this ban applies to homosexuality as such: some commentators have argued that the ban concerned only prostitution, rape, or sexual intercourse with a man and a woman at the same time. Some American and Israeli Jews have contested, even within orthodox movements, the received interpretation of the texts quoted above. Reform synagogues are generally more open about homosexuality, and some European Reform rabbis celebrate blessings for gay and lesbian couples (some are even openly gay or lesbian themselves). There are many Jewish LGBT groups, such as Beit Haverim in France and Belgium, Sjalhomo in the Netherlands, Re’uth in Austria (Vienna) and Yachad in Germany, that can offer information and support and defend gay and lesbian rights within Jewish institutions.

The attitude of Islam towards homosexuality

Although Islamic law condemns homosexuality there are many allusions to (male) homoeroticism in Islamic literature. Close body contact, holding hands or kisses between persons of the same sex in the public, often misunderstood by strangers as signs of a homosexual orientation, are a usual behaviour and more likely a result of the segregation between the sexes that leads to the fact that a close contact to one's own sex becomes a matter of course while the other sex stays distant. Because of stronger social restrictions women rarely say anything about sexuality in public and we therefore have very little historical traces concerning this aspect.

Orthodox Islamic notions on homosexuality are nearly always very negative. They contain clear condemnations or awful threatening speeches against this "great sin" that must be punished. But the Koran can also be interpreted in a more liberal way. From no quotation a clear statement on same-sex love as it is known today can be justified. The Hadith, however, mostly take a condemning tone. They are a collection of traditional reports, of which only a few can be attributed to the prophet Mohamed himself, and not all of them have to be respected.

Islamic law (Sharia/ fiqh) poses a problem. Most Islamic schools of law provide death penalty for anal intercourse among men (liwat). This is executed in some Islamic countries. Islamic legislation, at least the criminal law, does not necessarily have a religious value for Muslims, because it has been written by men and not by God. This argumentation may help some Muslim lesbians and gays to reconcile their sexual orientation with their belief. In the last consequence individual belief and personal way of life is a question of individual decision.

Hinduism

Indian culture is marked by a strong social division. Social behaviour is defined by what one may and must do within the limits his or her own caste. Practically no-one is allowed to differ from the norm. In all strata and castes of society, a patriarchal and heterosexist order is predominant, although this order is being eroded in urban centres. Even in the Kamasutra, a courteous erotic manual, the homosexual practices which are described are clearly ranked lower than the straight ones. One must also realise that the majority current of Hinduism assigns sexuality to the realm of the Maia, the world of appearances and illusions, and therefore does not hold it in high esteem. Tantrism, however, offers different perspectives.

Buddhism

The aim of buddhism is to free oneself of dependence. The less one has sex, the less one depends on the world, and therefore the freer one is to discover one's true Self. But this path to the self is something that depends on every individual's choices for him or herself. The only prescriptions concerning sex are exclusively directed towards monks, and not to others. The main recommendation, the basic ethic principle is that one should not harm others—including through sexuality. In the Pali-Canon, the "bible" of Buddhism, homosexuality between monks is condemned, but it is apart from that not conceptualised.

What does this mean for me?

Religion is an important aspect of one's own values system and cultural background. Often a person's religious identity is mainly formed before they become aware of their sexual orientation. Religious belief can be one of the deepest aspects of an individual's personality.

Religious spokespersons sometimes give one-sided views of religion or of the meaning of sacred texts, which can serve to spread social and internalised homophobia. If a fundamentalist way of thinking is expressed one has to reply that constitutionally guaranteed human rights such as the right to develop one's own personality have precedence.

In counselling and education, it is important to show the diversity of different views and to explore what religion means to young people on a personal level.

It is never wrong to clarify personal feelings. Teenagers need to be supported in their choices despite contexts that may morally condemn homosexuality. The difference between religious and cultural specific opinions should be made clear to them. If they do want to take a stand which condemns homosexuality they should bear in mind that tolerance and respect are cardinal human virtues and a basic law of society. Explore how to deal with different views of norms and values and empower teenagers to define their own sense of morality.

Education

Bear in mind

Belief takes many different forms. Fundamentalists believe the holy texts give literal guidelines for a moral life. Non-fundamentalists also take into account that the texts collected in the Holy Scriptures reflect the ideas, opinions and moral judgements from the times in which they have been written. Liberal groups place more emphasis on the personal responsibility of each man and woman to define “proper” and “improper” behaviour. These very different points of view are reflected in the different approaches to teaching about religion. Fundamentalists (and to a lesser degree other traditionalists) tend to teach in an authoritative way. Liberal groups permit more personal choice and may even denounce the role of priests, rabbis or imams who presume the right or duty to tell others what is right and what is wrong. Many people will try to find a middle road between these visions, one which incorporates the rules of the Holy Scriptures with cultural-religious norms and their own personal needs.

Where would you place yourself on this continuum? Where do you think your students fit? What does this imply for your relationship with the young people?

What is your moral view on homosexuality? How do you deal with students who don't agree with you on such issues?

Note that in many religions, believers have different opinions on many moral questions, e.g. on war and peace, on environmental affairs, on the treatment of refugees, etc., even within more traditionalist groups. When dealing with such topics, people usually show a certain degree of tolerance or acceptance for the different choices of others. Why then is there less room for different choices in matters that have to do with sexuality?

Education

Tools

Write to Christina

Aim: to initiate a discussion about the relationship between homosexuality and the Church and to promote empathy with people's problems.

Method: Tell the pupils this story: "Christina is Catholic and deeply religious. At the same time, she feels very attracted to women. Recently she fell in love with Mary-Ann, and now she has no more doubts about her feelings. But she finds it very difficult to combine these feelings with her religion and the reactions of her parents and some of her friends. She writes anonymously to the Question & Answer column of a national magazine: 'My parents and my own Church condemn lesbian relationships. But I read that in some protestant churches, lesbians can marry. What should I do?'"

Have the students write a letter to Christina where they try to offer help and ideas. Discuss the merits of the different types of advice given.

Please note: The pupils will probably come up with several different types of advice for Christina, ranging from denying her feelings to accepting them. Focus on the pupils' letters. Discuss their opinions about personal feelings and the relation between religion and cultural/social intolerance. This exercise will work best in multi-religious groups.

Tolerance

(you may choose to use another title like Universal Human Rights, Humanitarianism)

Aim: to encourage mutual respect and tolerance in a religious context.

Method: Begin by telling the pupils that the concept of "neighbourly love" is an important virtue in all world religions. Ask them first if they share this value. If they do, ask them to discuss how this relates to lesbians, gay and bisexuals.

Please note: It is advisable to know the arguments and counter-arguments pupils may use in the discussion (for instance, loving your neighbour can imply that you not let her/him sin – the care for your neighbour shouldn't limit her/his freedom of choice). Do not allow the discussion to concentrate on religious texts or on religious rules. Focus instead on the spiritual and 'warm' aspects of religion. It is important to treat pupils as equals in this discussion and not to 'preach tolerance'. Accept negative feelings about homosexuality and explore how pupils deal with these feelings, even if the pupils feel that respect and tolerance are in principle important virtues.

The “Cure”

Aim: To explore the myth that homosexuality can be “cured”.

Method: Start by telling the pupils that some fundamentalist Christians think that homosexuality is a mental disorder that can be “cured”. Ask them what they think of this idea. Let them research this viewpoint as well as alleged therapies for homosexuality by searching the Internet and have them write a paper describing their findings (if you use the search term “gay cure” on the Internet, you will find a range of recent debates on this issue).

Please note: Only try this exercise if the subject has been raised in class because you expose students to fundamentalist propaganda. Provide pupils with balanced information on the so-called cures for homosexuality. Basic information should at least make clear that “changing” homosexual feelings into heterosexual feelings is not possible.

Education

F.A.Q.s (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the F.A.Q.s for the counselling and health care sector.

What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

The answer to this question depends on the interpretation and on how one understands the Bible. Two main directions to interpret the Bible have developed. One of them understands the Bible as influenced by its historical, cultural and religious context. Not all interdictions and rules of the Holy Scripture are considered as relevant today: for instance the interdiction to wear textiles of mixed fibres (Lev 19,19) or various rules regarding the obligation to make sacrifices. This school of thought acknowledges the fact that the Israelites kept aloof from other religious cultures by banning everything that was connected with those religions. In this perspective many quotations that are used to denounce homosexuality appear in a different light. The other way to interpret this is a fundamentalist one that takes “literally” even today every word in the Bible, although this way of thinking is not consistently followed throughout the text but only if it fits ideologically and if it helps to support a conservative perception of the world. Regardless of the traditions of interpretation it must be said that it is in theory problematic to ask the above-mentioned question to the bible because the term “homosexuality” and the concept itself date from modern times. The knowledge about a constitutional sexual identity that concerns the whole personality of a person didn’t exist in biblical time.

Two frequently quoted sections in the Bible have been misunderstood for a long time in Christian tradition. The history of Sodom in the book of Genesis is about violating the rights of hospitality and the readiness to resort to violence and not about a manifest homosexual orientation of all inhabitants: it deals with the “sin of xenophobia”. Likewise, the relevant passages by St. Paul (1 Cor 6,9-11; Rom 1,26-27) cannot any longer be construed as an explicit condemnation of same-sex lovers given that St. Paul’s crucial values include humanity and respect for every single person and the acceptance of God’s universal grace.

What does the Koran say about homosexuality?

Contrarily to current opinions, the Koran is not a book of law. In the “holy book” there is no expression for “homosexuality” and also no word for women or men that feel attracted or have sex with partners of their own sex. However, many Muslim scholars and laymen are convinced that the Koran clearly condemns and forbids homosexuality. To prove this, the story of Lot (Arabian: Lût) and his people is often quoted (this story also appears in the bible namely as story of Sodom). However, the Koran does not explicitly mention sex or homosexuality, pederasty or anal intercourse. The men accused are married and can not be compared to gay men (lesbian women) like we understand these words today. As has already been remarked concerning the story of Sodom in the bible, one must realize that the story of Lot is about offences and rape, and about injustice, and violation of the right of hospitality but not about anal intercourse. The subject of the story is therefore not (homo-)sexuality and in no way love and relationship. It follows therefore that this story cannot be used to condemn homosexuality.

How should I deal with religious prejudice in my classroom?

Explain that there is a wide diversity in religious beliefs and attitudes, between fundamentalist and more liberal beliefs, and between religious and cultural beliefs. Start a discussion about diversity in the group. Promote respectful conduct between the pupils and encourage self-reflection and dialogue.

How do I deal with the religious opinions of parents?

Explain to them that the school has the task to give an overview of religious views and to stimulate mutual understanding and respect among the pupils. Tell them you will help the young people to define their own personal relationship with God, Allah or their church and that you will encourage them to discuss this with their parents. Ask the parents for suggestions on how you can effectively deal with topics of religion, diversity and respect with their sons or daughters.

<Kristin> *I should tell that to HuK. Good argument, Julie!*

<Aaron> *What is HuK?*

<Kristin> *The organisation Homosexuelle und Kirche (Homosexuals and the Church). I have been there a few times. They are nice people. They fight for equal rights. They argue for instance, that Jesus never specifically said anything about homosexuality. Neither in a positive nor in a negative sense. They also say that for example Saint Paul could not speak about homosexuality because the concept only appeared in the 19th century. In any case he supported the freedom of choice of partner. *;-)**

<Koray> *Sounds reasonable.*

<Kristin> *Of course, but the strict Christians interpret it differently.*

<Koray> *My parents also don't know that I'm gay – but for me it's not so important and I have other problems, that I think are much harder to cope with.*

<Aaron> *and do they have anything to do with religion?*

<Koray> *It's more about the relationship of the non-Muslim homosexuals with us, as also with the whole Muslim world's reaction to me being gay.*

<Aaron> *Does that mean that you don't belong to any group?*

<Koray> *Yes, that's the way I see it. Just imagine, what would happen if told a non-Muslim gay man that I'm Muslim. He'd be baffled and reply "that can't be: either you're gay or you're Muslim".*

<Kristin> *Why's that?*

<Koray> *I'm afraid it's the same all over the world In Austria in any case I am first and foremost a foreigner – who could never be gay anyway – that's the way many people see it in the gay community . But if I added, on top of it, that I'm Muslim, that's it, there's no way for them I could still be gay.*

<Aaron> *Yes, I can understand that. There are bad stereotypes even in the gay and lesbian community, aren't there?*

<Koray> *I don't know how it is with you Jews. With Christians, at any rate, I have the impression that the family isn't all that important. That's why for most Christians coming out isn't as difficult. But my family is really very important for me, and I for them. The social ties are simply too strong and important for us all – especially if we've been brought up in a different culture. I think that's good. A family should always stick together.*

<Aaron> *@Koray: A Yiddische Mamme should not be underestimated *;-)*. We'll talk about it later. What are you aiming at?*

<Koray> *I think that my family is more important than the nicest gay community (but please don't take it personally). I'll probably get married and still keep my partners. Tell us, Aaron, what happened to your yiddische Mamme?*

<Aaron> *The yiddische Mamme can hardly be ignored. There is this syndrome of over-protection. She always wants the absolute best for her child. Cannot possibly be contradicted. But back to you once again Koray – is there no Muslim gay group near you? Surely you're not the only one?*

to be continued

<Koray> *No, of course I'm not the only one. But I think there is no such organisation here.*

<Aaron> *A friend in Germany told me that he's an activist in the Türk-Gay group – check the Internet as well – they have their own Website.*

<Koray> *Good idea, thanks*

<Almira> *I'm also Muslim; but a Bosnian Muslim. In Kosovo, where I am to be deported, I would probably have to wear a headscarf, and marry. Homosexuality there can even mean death.*

<Koray> *Oh dear, you'd better stay here, then, shouldn't you?*

<Almira> *Yes, I think so. My parents know now that I'm a lesbian. At first I was convinced that they would disown me forever, but they didn't, Koray. Maybe your fear is a bit exaggerated?*

<Koray> *I'll chat with these people of the "Türk-Gay" group and keep you posted, okay?*

<Julie> *Okay Koray – next year, will you go to the Europride?*

<Koray> *I'm working at it *;-)**

<Aaron> *Aaron, now tell us, it's your turn I'll tell my parents in any case, and I also think that they'll understand. For me it's important to be able to keep on trusting them, and for them to trust me. Secrets would have terrible consequences in the long run. Neither one of them would ever want that. And about Jewishness – it's not a nationality. Just to be clear. Some in our gay-lesbian group are religious, others not. But we're still Jews, because our parents are Jews.*

<Kristin> *Would you like to say something about homosexuality and faith, anyway?*

<Aaron> *Of course. Orthodox people of any religion are against homosexuality, I think. The three religions do not differ at all. But in the Jewish world there is a very strong liberal-progressive current, which makes up about 60%, or perhaps more of all Jews. I suppose it's the same for Christians, and I hope that there is a similar evolution in Islam. But I'm no great expert on the other religions, as I said earlier on, so I think it would be better if the others said something about that, because I can only talk about what happens in Judaism, okay?*

<Kristin> *Sure thing, I'll take care of the liberal Christian enlightenment, shall I? *;-)*. I've also read something about liberal Islam. Many Muslim feminists are fighting for a liberal turn.*

<Aaron> *Thx Kristin. Apart from the fact that men and women have equal rights in liberal Judaism, there is also a great openness with respect to homosexuality. In New York for instance, there are LGBT communities with 3000 members.*

<Julie> *Wow – sounds nice 😊*

<Aaron> *Yes, and in London there is a College in which are trained only those men and women Rabbis who do not have any problems with homo-sexuality. They are carefully checked before they can start.*

<Almira> *Sounds wonderful. Will you tell us about it at our great event at the next Europride?*

<Aaron> *I'd love to, I'll be there.*

the end

Counselling and Health Care

Bear in mind

Physical health

Some people consider that counsellors should be able to partially dissociate themselves from their own religious convictions. What do you think – is this ‘objectivity’ possible for you?

If a counsellor tacitly condemns a client’s moral position, what effect does this have on the ability to listen to a client’s questions? To what extent do you think your religious convictions influence your behaviour towards a client (for example, do you think it is acceptable or viable to advise a client to totally abstain from sexual relations)?

As a counsellor or school doctor, you are probably seen as an authority figure and you may have a strong psychological impact on a young person. Even though you may think this is not very relevant because you mainly take care of physical health, this may be more important than you realise. Consider how you interpret signs of stress, how you deal with questions about (gay or lesbian) safer sex. It is important to be aware of your own religious background and of how religion influences our own morality, even when caring for a person’s physical well-being.

Mental health

Religion becomes part of our moral code in the course of our development; it plays a role in helping us learn what we should or should not do. When religious topics or issues enter the counselling process, it is of the utmost importance for counsellors to recognise their own religious convictions; attempts to appear “neutral” can question the client/ counsellor interaction. The counsellor should ensure that their personal beliefs do not influence the counselling process. For instance, if a client’s conflicts with respect to homosexuality derive from their religious convictions, and if these are echoed by the counsellor’s own beliefs (consciously or unconsciously), this could cause damage to the client’s mental health. Are you able to recognise your own religious convictions? What moral codes are important to you? What role do these codes play in your counselling?

Every counsellor carries her/ his own set of norms and cultural expectations. If in the course of the discussion conflicts around cultural or religious values arise the counsellor might want to discuss them openly. Do you recognise possible unresolved inner conflicts you may have concerning your own religion? How do you deal with them in your sessions? How do you deal with a client who is of another religious denomination than your own? In which situations is it better to continue working with a client who may be difficult to coach, and when is it better to refer them to a colleague of the same religion?

Counselling and Health Care Tools

The Spiritual Guide

Aim: To provide a starting point for exploring religion in the client's life and to identify the problems she/ he is facing. The exercise could provide some possible solutions.

Method: Ask the client to imagine a situation in which, together with a friend, they meet a priest, rabbi, imam or a spiritual guide. Give clients some time to imagine the situation on their own and afterwards ask them to talk about it. What happens during the meeting?

If the client is not able to imagine how the spiritual leader may try to guide them, have them imagine instead that their close friends are asking them critical questions about their life and their needs.

Please note: This exercise can be used in a group as well as in individual counselling. Be aware that for some, the image of a priest, rabbi or imam may evoke negative rather than positive feelings. Let the client choose a character which they consider to be a real spiritual guide.

Balancing Sex and Religion

Aim: To explore the role religion plays in an adolescent's life. The exercise tries to help the client establish a personal balance between the expression of their sexuality and the profession of their religion and values.

Method: Ask the client to talk about the place of religion in their life. Next, investigate the attitude held by relevant religious figures towards homosexuality. Discuss the historical and cultural relativism of religion as a mix of spiritual and social aspects as well as a means of providing social control.

Explore if religion is an important aspect of a person's identity. When religion is a strong and undeniable part of the client's personal identity, suggest they make contact with homosexual religious groups (if possible). This may help the client find a support network and social identification.

Please note: This exercise can be used in group as well as in individual counselling. In a group session, religion can be a central theme and be dealt with by having a discussion with only one client or by discussing the theme among the whole group. Involving the whole group can be useful when religion is a main issue for all the clients.

In this discussion, it is vital to distinguish between religious norms and spirituality. Norms usually address the relationships between humankind, spirituality and its relationship with the divinity. In cases where religious norms are very uncompromising, emphasis should be put on a personal relationship with the divine, without crushing hope or trying to alter norms.

Role Playing in Group Counselling

Aim: to explore possible ways of solving personal dilemmas relating to religion and homosexuality.

Method: Have one client play the role of a lesbian girl and another play the role of priest. The girl wants to talk about the conflicts she is facing and goes to ask for spiritual guidance. (Naturally, a boy can also play this part, or you can vary the exercise by using a bisexual role.) After a few minutes, change roles. The rest of the group observes. Have as many clients as are willing play one of the roles. When the discussion between the girl and the priest seems to offer no new viewpoints, ask the group what they noted and felt as players and as observers.

Please note: If the clients are hesitant to play a lesbian woman or a gay man, take the role of the homosexual yourself first. It will help if you play the role somewhat 'inadequately'; this may encourage others to improve on your performance.

Counselling and Health Care

F.A.Q.s (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the F.A.Q.s for the education sector.

How should I approach the situation where a client's religion prohibits homosexual acts?

It is fundamentally important to understand the place that religion occupies in the life of that client in order to understand whether it is possible to distance her-/himself from traditionally outlined behaviour patterns, especially if these are opposed to homosexuality. There is a need for solid therapeutic support to work on conflicts relating to homosexuality. A counsellor needs to understand how many conflicts originate from religious prohibitions and/or from the wider parental and cultural expectations. Explain to the client that not all the texts in the sacred books should be taken literally.

My religious beliefs condemn homosexuality. Should I agree to counsel a lesbian or gay client?

Religious convictions enter into therapy as do all aspects of a counsellor's personal background. If a counsellor has religious convictions that go against homosexuality or homosexual behaviour, he/she should probably abstain from treating homosexual clients and rather refer them to an appropriate colleague. The therapist needs to be aware of ambivalent feelings towards homosexuality.

Is it possible to practice your religious belief and live openly as a lesbian or gay man at the same time?

Yes, it is. Many lesbians, gays and bisexuals are able to reconcile a happy private life and a peaceful relation to their religions. Some have even joined particularly progressive churches or groups (this is especially true for some protestant denominations and liberal Judaism). Sometimes these churches can have blessings for lesbian or gay couples or have openly homosexual priests. There are also secular lesbian and gay organisations, which care about the reconciliation of homosexuality and religion.

“On the topic of homosexuality there is still a wide gulf between everyday life and traditional clerical teachings. I personally find the disapproving attitude of religious leaders towards gay lifestyles dispiriting. Very often I feel I am rejected just because I’m gay – that makes me both angry and sad.”

Imprint

Different in More Ways Than One.
Providing Guidance for Teenagers
on Their Way to Identity, Sexuality
and Respect

Editor

Ministerium für Gesundheit,
Soziales, Frauen und Familie des
Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen,
D - 40219 Düsseldorf

Internet version

www.diversity-in-europe.org

Authors

Pascal Belling, Flora Bolter,
Peter Dankmeijer, Martin Enders,
Margherita Graglia, Karen Kraan,
Stefan Timmermanns,
Wolfgang Wilhelm

Stories

Adriana Stern

Evaluation

Rutgers Nisso Groep, Floor Bakker,
Ine Vanwesenbeeck

The copyright of all texts belongs to
the editor. Duplication or re-print-
ing, also partially, is only permitted
if the source is mentioned.

Produced with the contribution of
the European Community Action
Programme to combat discrimina-
tion.

Düsseldorf, August 2004