
Evaluation of "Queergedacht" Chapters 1-2

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In the first two chapters of the book "Queergedacht," six individuals discuss how much they (or those close to them) have suffered discrimination within the Adventist community. This suffering is attributed, on the one hand, to misconduct by individuals in the church, but ultimately also to the official stance that the Adventist community takes on the topic of same-sex partnerships or transsexuality, which is perceived as inherently discriminatory.^{^1} The rejection of same-sex marriages, for example, is described as "narrow-minded patronization" that "causes great harm to large groups of church members."^{^2}

The personal testimonies contain interpretations of individual experiences and an implicit appeal for Adventist congregations to reconsider their theological and practical stance towards queer individuals and partnerships. The suffering of those affected can apparently only be alleviated by allowing and fully recognizing same-sex marriages. Not acting on one's own sexual orientation is portrayed as unrealistic and harmful to one's image of God and psyche.^{^3}

Thus, the personal testimonies add urgency to the overall concern of the book.

Value and Benefit of Personal Testimonies

Since personal testimonies play a central role in discussions about LGBTQ+ and the church, some fundamental considerations regarding their significance should be made:

Personal testimonies fulfill an important function. They show us that it is not just an abstract "topic," but about real people and their lives. Through personal accounts, these individuals become visible and closer to us. This increases our motivation to advocate for this group of people.

In the specific case of queer individuals, personal testimonies point to serious grievances, e.g., a long-standing taboo on homosexuality in the church.^{^4} Although there have always been individuals among us with homosexual feelings, there has apparently been a reluctance to engage with them. The experiences testify to helplessness and a lack of understanding within the congregations, but also to shameful lack of love and empathy.

The fact that affected individuals break their silence and share their experiences can and should be an opportunity to learn and to handle homosexual siblings and outsiders better in the future.

This also includes understanding and conveying to others that no Adventist has chosen their homosexual feelings. Those who discover them in themselves experience inner distress and a crisis of faith for which the church has so far offered too little understanding and help. There is an urgent need for education and training.

Limitations of Personal Testimonies

Personal testimonies must be taken seriously. However, it should also not be forgotten what limitations they are subject to:

When two people experience the same situation, they often evaluate it very differently. Experiences are subjective. They do not represent "the truth," but a "perception." This does not make them lies. However, they show only one interpretation of what happened, while other individuals might have drawn different conclusions.

Personal testimonies are, by definition, irrefutable. No one can take away or deny someone else's experience. Nevertheless, we must try to place them in the right context. Especially when experiences emotionally impress us strongly, e.g., when individuals are hurt and we feel anger about it, this is important. They are not immediately suitable for deriving what is right or wrong.

We must consider that all around us and in the media, many personal testimonies and individual impressions are shared that suggest conclusions we cannot support. Not even regarding our own sensory perceptions can we have complete trust in our judgment. Even "signs and wonders" taken alone are not definitive. With this view, we follow a long Adventist tradition that places biblical teaching above individual experience (e.g., regarding appearances of the deceased or a supposed second coming of Christ).

Interpreting Experiences in the Light of the Bible

Individual life experiences challenge us to ask how we can interpret them in the light of the Bible.

Those who recognize homosexual feelings in themselves should not consider this an indication that they were created by God and are good.^{^5} Experiencing temptations or having certain inclinations is in itself not a sin – it is a consequence of sin, which all humans suffer in one form or another. But, as with other temptations in the sexual realm, the Bible does not permit us to act on them, such as entering into a same-sex partnership.^{^6}

It is helpful to also consider testimonies from individuals who interpret their experiences in a biblical light. This group of people is often insufficiently included in the discussion, especially since their interpretations are not tolerated in our secular culture.^{^7}

Accepting People – What Does It Mean?

When we talk about "accepting" individuals with homosexual feelings, it is often understood that such a relationship must also be recognized. Unfortunately, the personal testimonies in the book "Queergedacht" do not differentiate here. Either one shows acceptance and love, which then forbids criticism of same-sex partnerships, or one does not endorse the relationship, which is portrayed as unloving and backward. Here, a supposed contrast is established between our church and a God who is "much more generous than [our] church leaders."^{^8}

This latter intent is unfair given that our exceedingly generous God loves sinful people in unique ways but still clearly condemns their sinful behavior. In our Adventist practice, differentiating between orientation/inclination and behavior is therefore essential, even if it has indeed become more difficult to communicate this sensitively and appropriately today.

Countercultural Views

We live in a secular culture that unreservedly affirms same-sex partnerships and views sexual activity as a basic right of every human. Individuals with homosexual feelings usually see these as a core characteristic of their identity. For them, their feelings are inseparably linked to the pursuit of same-sex partnerships.^{^9}

When individuals are advised against entering (or continuing) a same-sex partnership or their church membership is contingent upon it, many perceive this as discrimination or as "I cannot be who I am."

In this context, it will not always be possible to avoid irritations, as a perspective on homosexuality that deviates from secular understanding must first be established, e.g., the realization that our identity as believers is not to be sought in our sexual orientation, but in Christ, and that the Bible also endorses abstinence and single life.

It is important to remain in relationship and conversation despite differing opinions on the topic.

Lack of Alternatives in Interpretation

In line with our official position as an Adventist community, we are called to lovingly nurture relationships and to unconditionally accept the person. This means that our care and neighborly love are not conditional, e.g., on the person ending existing relationships or living abstinely.

We should approach queer individuals – regardless of church membership – with love and be a family to them, even if they make different decisions than we would wish. At the same time, we should trust the Word of God that a homosexual partnership is not right and not be swayed by the spirit of the times. This approach is not presented as an option in the book.

There is also a lack of personal testimonies from individuals who choose to remain single for the sake of Jesus Christ and experience God's guidance in that. There are also no reports from individuals who have experienced a change or shift in their sexual orientation or who have entered into a mixed-orientation marriage despite maintaining the same orientation. The selection of personal testimonies is therefore one-sided and does not represent the feelings and experiences of all Christians affected by homosexual feelings.

Holding Tension

In light of the real suffering of the affected individuals, their experiences should not be dismissed. We can take seriously the subjective experiences of queer individuals and their

relatives and respect their subjective individual evaluation of events, even if we would have drawn different conclusions from the experiences based on our biblical worldview. As much as experiences emotionally move us, we must endure this tension.

A responsible handling of personal testimonies means that we do not instrumentalize them (neither in one direction nor the other). We can learn from experiences, but we must allow ourselves to be guided by a higher authority – namely the Bible – in interpretation. We cannot derive a moral from experience itself.

It is regrettable that the experiences in the book not only raise awareness of the suffering of queer individuals but also include extensive interpretations that ultimately present the biblical-Adventist viewpoint on homosexual relations as discriminatory.

1. Werner E. Lange, Dennis Meier, and Reinder Bruinsma (Eds.): "Queergedacht: Beiträge für eine offene Diskussion über gleichgeschlechtliche monogame Beziehungen," (Adendorf: STAB-Verlag, 2023), pp. 32, 45, et al.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-28, 32, 34.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 42.
5. See e.g., the interpretations made by those affected in these publications: Ed Shaw, "Vertrautheit wagen! Gemeindebau hautnah. Und wie die Kirche sexuelle Vielfalt biblisch integrieren kann," *Chapter 3* (pp. 39-51; Basel: fontis, 2018).
6. Ed Shaw, "Vertrautheit wagen," *Chapter 5* (pp. 67-79), Sam Allberry, "Is God anti-gay?" p. 63-64.
7. Markus Hoffmann (Ed.) *Weil ich es will: Homosexualität – Wandlungen – Identität.* 39 Lebensberichte. (Basel: fontis, 2023); David Bennett, "A War of Loves: The Unexpected Story of a Gay Activist Discovering Jesus." (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).
8. "Queergedacht," p. 46.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 32.