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Divine Revelation and Human Reasoning:

Young Norwegian Muslims' Reflections on Homosexuality

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# **Divine Revelation and Human Reasoning:**

## **Young Norwegian Muslims' Reflections on Homosexuality**

### **Summary**

*This article is based on qualitative interviews with 20 heterosexual and 4 LGBT Norwegian Muslims, aged between 18 and 32 years. It explores how the respondents correlate divine revelation and human reasoning in reflecting about questions such as: Did God create homosexuality? Is homosexuality a test from God? Is homosexuality a problem for society? Will non-hetero sexuality be punished in the afterlife? Is it possible to interpret the Quran in a LGBT-friendly way? The various kinds of correlation between divine revelation and human reasoning is analysed using a two-dimensional typology specifically designed for this purpose: double set of consequences (a), afterlife consequences (b), progressive interpretation (c) and eclecticism (d). This typology is empirically-grounded, based on coding of the interviews.*

*The typology contributed to clarifying the internal differentiations within respectively restrictive and affirmative attitudes concerning homosexuality. A minority regarded homosexuality to be a problem – both for this life and life after death. The majority regarded afterlife consequences for LGBTs to be the sole problem. Two LGBTs interpreted the Quran progressively, and experienced harmony between their religious and sexual identity. Two other LGBTs read the Quran restrictively, partly disagreeing with – and not implementing – the perceived Quranic rules.*

Key words: Islam, homosexuality, lesbian, gay, typologies, compartmentalisation

## Introduction and research question

The current Islamic discourse on homosexuality ranges from the utmost restrictive, to genuine progressive approaches. Within the Muslim world, the vast majority hold restrictive stances, derived from traditional interpretations of various passages in the Quran – primarily relating to the story of Prophet Lut (4.15 -16; 7.80 - 84; 11.77 -83; 26,160-173; 27.54 -58; 29.28 -34). Added to this, there are certain Hadiths that prescribe the death penalty for sexual intercourse between men. There also exists a small, progressive wing, who interprets the Quranic texts in a LGBT-friendly way. They hold the position that LGBTs – as well as heterosexuals – have the right to live according to their God-given sexual identity (Ahmed 2006; Jaspal 2014; Jaspal and Siraj 2011; Kugle 2003; 2010; Qaradawi 2001, 164-65; Rahman 2014; Shannahan 2010; Siraj 2009; Zollner 2010, 199-200). An outline of the various stands in the Muslim debate is given in my article *Is gayness a test from Allah?* (Eidhamar 2014).

During the period 700 – 1900 sexual relationships between men used to be relatively accepted and openly practised within most Muslim societies. Normative approaches based on traditional interpretation of the Quran may have been the main cause for a radical turnaround within the Muslim world during the 1900s. The Western part of the world has made a similar turn, only in the complete opposite – and more LGBT-friendly – direction (Eidhamar 2011; Murray and Roscoe 1997).

The Norwegian Muslim youth of today may experience a tension between increasingly homo friendly outlooks within Norwegian society and more restrictive attitudes rooted in their understanding of Islam. This is the background for the research question on how young Norwegian Muslims correlate divine revelation and human reasoning when reflecting about homosexuality. The research question is highlighted by interview questions like:

Did God create homosexuality? Is homosexuality a test from God? Is LGBT predilection a sin in itself? Will non-hetero sexuality be punished in the afterlife? Is homosexuality a problem for the society? Is it possible to interpret the Quran in a LGBT-friendly way? How should one reply a hypothetical son, telling he was a gay?

One previous study is based on interviews with eight LGBT Muslims in Norway (Narvesen 2010). Narvesen found that progressive discourses within Islam could create new ways of understanding, in order to combine same-sex sexuality and Islamic beliefs. This is a parallel to my findings. At the same time none of the heterosexual respondents in my study supported these progressive discourses.

Several studies based on interviews with LGBT Muslims have been conducted internationally. They focus on how the respondents theoretically and practically relate to, and combine their religious and sexual identity. (Jaspal 2014; 2015; Jaspal and Cinnirella 2012; 2014; Jaspal and Siraj 2011; Kugle 2013; Whitaker 2011; Yip 2005; Yip *et al.* 2011; Yip and Khalid 2010). What is new in this study, is specifically exploring the above mentioned correlation – added to including LGBTs, as well as heterosexuals, as respondents.

## **Research method**

This article is based on qualitative interviews with 24 respondents aged 18-32 years, and conducted between 2006 and 2014. The respondents, who are both first and second-generation immigrants, represent the approximate 4.4% of the Norwegian population that has a Muslim background. Norwegian Muslims have their roots in a number of countries, with Pakistan, Somalia and Iraq being the main three (Leirvik 2014). The respondents in this study had their roots in 11 different countries. Within the group, there were 16 females and 9 males, 20 Sunnis and 4 Shiites, 20 heterosexuals and 4 LGBTs. Unless stated otherwise, the

correspondent is Sunni and heterosexual. Most LGBT Muslims hide their sexual identity and are hard to find. Originally 10 LGBs were asked to take part, but 6 refused due to fear of being recognized within the small Muslim community in Norway. In spite of their small number, the 1 Sunni lesbian and the 3 Sunni gays represented a wide spectrum of varying views. The ethnic affiliation of these 4 LGBTs is not revealed, in order to respect anonymity. The selection criterion was maximum variation within the framework of relevant respondents (Repstad 2007, 57-60).

## **Construction of a new typology**

In searching within the existing body of theories and typologies, I have not been able to find any suitable tool constructed for analysing the correlation between divine revelation and human reflection as sources for ethical stances and practices. I have therefore found it necessary to construct a new typology that is particularly tailored for this purpose. I found it appropriate to use the methodology developed within constructivist, informed grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; 2010; Gibson and Hartman 2013; Thornberg 2012; Thornberg and Charmaz 2013), combined with general theories of typology and methodology for constructing typologies within qualitative research (Marshall and Rossman 2011, 214-17; Patton 2002, 457-65).

The coding of the interviews uncovered that the dichotomy between transcendent and immanent sources of ethics constituted a fundament for their reasoning. On the basis of the respondents' own parlance, the terms 'right' and 'good' were selected to cover the mentioned dichotomy, and given these delimiting *ad hoc* definitions:

- *Right*: That which is perceived to be right on the basis of divinely revealed rules and values, based on the authoritative sacred writings within Islam. Compliance with these rules is normally considered to have implications for the afterlife.
- *Good*: That which is perceived to make life here on earth good according to purely human reflections, stretching from high moral ideals to egoistic lusts. This reasoning is not motivated by possible consequences for the afterlife.

Because these definitions are designed inductively and *ad hoc*, they differ from classical definitions within philosophical ethics.<sup>1</sup> The content of the two terms are individual constructions which may vary over time. Their internal correlation may essentially be boiled down to two dimensions. One dimension represents the axis ranging from harmony to conflict between the two domains. The other dimension depicts the relative weighting within the axis between the primacy of respectively divine *right* and humanly *good*.

These dimensions gave rise to a two-dimensional typology – which generates four types: *double set of consequences* (a), *afterlife consequences* (b), *progressive interpretation* (c) and *eclecticism* (d). *Afterlife consequences* (b), is the only type with the ideal of not selecting what is humanly *good*. Due to that a third dimension depicting the degree of implementation into practice, may be relevant: *success in implementing rules* (b1) and *failure in implementing rules* (b2). The typology is summarised schematically in **Fig 1**.

This is an empirically-grounded, analyst-constructed typology containing types and categories with permeable limits, not being mutually exclusive or exhaustive. The typology illuminates patterns and trends – not absolute conditions (Gerring 2012, 144-51; Gibson and Hartman 2013, 66-69; Marshall and Rossman 2011, 214-17; Miles *et al.* 2014, 12, 82, 87; Patton 2002, 457-61).

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<sup>1</sup> Within ethical theory, the concept of "right" is usually associated with deontological thinking, and 'good' is usually associated with teleological thinking.

This *right-good*-typology has some commonalities with other relevant typologies. Compared to Woodhead and Heelas' typology depicting modern religious life, there are obvious similarities between *double set of consequences* (a)/*afterlife consequences* (b) and *religion of difference*, while there might be some similarities between *progressive interpretation*(c)/*eclecticism* (d) and *religion of humanity* (Heelas and Woodhead 2000). Compared to typologies within Islamic studies, there might be similarities between *double set of consequences* (a)/*afterlife consequences* (b) and Voll's *fundamentalist* type while there might be some similarities between *progressive interpretation*(c)/*eclecticism* (d) and Voll's *adaptationist* type or Shepard's *modernism* (Shepard 1987; Voll 1994).

The typology may be relevant to varying issues within Islamic ethics. One example could be the classic discourse from the 900s between the schools of *Ash'ari* and *Mu'tazila*. *Ash'ari* emphasized the omnipotence of God. Good is good because God has ordained it. This corresponds primarily to *double set of consequences* (a), but parts of the ideas also seem close to *afterlife consequences* (b). *Mu'tazila* emphasized the justice of God. Theological stances must reflect God's moral and righteous way of ruling. This is closer to the type of *progressive interpretation* (c) (Campanini 2012, 43-47; Hourani 1985, 57-59, 67-98, 104).

## **The Reflections of the Respondents**

The diverse kinds of correlation between divine revelation and human reasoning are presented according to the four types, which indicate four categories of stances. Each type is introduced by a general description based on encodings of the interviews, followed by a short depiction of the related Islamic discourse. Then the reasoning of the respondents is outlined.

**A) *Double set of consequences: Same-sex acts are destructive for this life and will be punished in the next***

According to *double set of consequences* (a), divine *right* has primacy over what is humanly *good*. At the same time there is harmony between the two domains. This logically implies that divinely *right* defines what is humanly *good*. Living according to God's revelation is considered to be rewarded, both in life here on earth and in the life after death. In the same way – breaking His commandments entails negative consequences, both for this life and eternity. The Holy Scriptures should then be understood rather literally according to traditional interpretation (*tafsir*) – with the least possible human reinterpretation.

According to this line of reasoning, heterosexual relationships within marriage between a man and a woman are regarded as the only kind of sexual activity that gives a *good* life here on earth. Conversely, a similar same-sex relationship will have negative consequences for those directly involved, for the affected families and for society as a whole. Due to this, homosexuality is generally regarded to have negative impacts on society. Moreover, same-sex acts will be punished in the afterlife. These are the two basic arguments against homosexual activity.

One of the foremost Islamic scholars of our time, Yusuf Qaradawi, argues that homosexuality has severe, negative consequences for this life: "This perverted act is a reversal of the natural order, a corruption of man's sexuality, and a crime against the rights of females." (Qaradawi 2001, 164-65). The same is stated by the famous Egyptian sexologist and TV presenter Heba Kotb:

According to common sense, society, science, logic, psychology and religion – i.e. all those aspects of present society, that have contributed to its civilization, homosexuality is irrational, illogical, abnormal and an immoral behavior (Kotb 2004, 169).



Qaradawi and Kotb therefore support the punishment of homosexuality, according to their interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.

In several Muslim countries, homosexuality is considered a social problem, i.e. a problem for life on earth. This view is supported by large proportions of the population: Jordan 97%, Egypt 95%, Indonesia 93%, Pakistan 87% and Turkey 78% (PewResearchCenter 2013, 1-2).

Compared to these figures, relatively few of the respondents in this study considered homosexuality a problem for life here on earth. The one who expressed the biggest concern regarding homosexuality's harmful consequences for society was a respondent who arrived to Norway as a young adult:

What if everyone was gay? How would life go on? How would we evolve? There is a Hadith I love (...) The Prophet said: When you indulge in too much – non-marital sex, alcohol, homosexuality – you will have more diseases. I have seen diseases in Europe and in Norway you will not find in Muslim countries. OK – freedom is good, but this freedom is being abused. (Abdullah, man with a Saudi Arabian background).

The view of homosexuality as a problem for life here and now, connotes the belief that no one is born with a LGBT identity. If God had created homosexuality, he would not at the same time have ordained heterosexual marriage as the only auspicious cohabitation. This stance was expressed by a few of the respondents:

When God has said in his book that homosexuality is not accepted in Islam, it becomes clear that Allah did not create homosexuality. He would not create something He Himself refuses. (Zahra, Shiite woman with an Iraqi background).

I think homosexuality is a deviation. No one is born homosexual. (...) On this point my faith is crystal clear (...). Homosexuality does not exist. In Islam there is not even a discussion about that. It is clear (Aima, Woman with a Pakistani background).

The vast majority of respondents did not support punishment of same-sex practices. Only one of the respondents clearly supported state penalties for homosexual acts. He reasoned that Islam and Islamic law are perfect, while homosexuality is described in negative terms. Surprisingly, this respondent Zulfikar, was himself gay:

The Quran is quite clear (in the condemnation of homosexuality). (...) And then you have the Hadith that confirms how dirty and disgusting it is to be gay. As the Prophet said: 'If you discover two men having sex, kill the one who receives and the one who gives.' Both should be killed. Each time someone has homosexual intercourse, the throne of God shakes in heaven. The punishment for gays – in addition to death – is one hundred lashes. All scholars of Islam agree that gays should be killed, but disagree on the method of execution. Islam is very clear. We are committing the worst sin one can commit. (...) Islam is perfect and I stand by it. I cannot change sharia laws, even if I thought them to be brutal and barbaric. If I thought so, I would not be a Muslim anymore, because then I am trying to 'fix' God. (Zulfikar, a gay living secretly according to his predilection)

Answering a hypothetical question, he confirmed that he himself would have accepted punishment according to sharia laws, if he were ever caught acting out his sexuality in a Muslim state like Saudi Arabia. Later in the interview Zulfikar went on to contradict these lines of reasoning.

Even though Zahra, the shiite woman quoted above, opposed homosexuality, she also clearly opposed punishing same-sex acts: 'Only Allah can judge. How can they judge when they themselves are sinners?' She also argued that many judges will misinterpret the laws and that any punishment would therefore be misplaced. This perception was representative for almost all respondents.

## **B) *Afterlife consequences*: Same-sex acts may be perceived as good in this life, but will be punished in the next**

Sometimes *right* and *good* may diverge. In these cases – according to the type of *afterlife consequences* (b) – one should follow what is *right*. This differs from *double set of consequences* (a), with the notion that implementing certain commandments will not implicate a *good* life here on earth. Doing what is *right* is regarded to be an investment in eternity, and a valuable investment habitually commands a substantial price. Several respondents considered life on earth as a test for eternity. The point of the test is not to experience pleasure here and now, but to withhold from pleasure in the present, in order to achieve rewards in the afterlife. Some respondents connoted *afterlife consequences* (b) with the great *jihad* – the continuous combat against one’s own ego. This test or combat may have two outcomes with regard to practical implementation. They are depicted by the two subtypes *success in implementing rules* (b1) and *failure in implementing rules* (b2). According to the last subtype, one tries to comply with rules one accepts as divine, but fails in doing so. The experience of *failure in implementing rules* (b2) will normally generate a guilty conscience. Also within *afterlife consequences* (b), one adheres to traditional interpretations of the scriptures.

According to this type, one argues that, even though abstaining from same-sex activity may be very hard for LGBTs, the point still stands in order to avoid punishment in the afterlife. In contrast to *double set of consequences* (a), the type of *afterlife consequences* (b) acknowledges that some people are born with a LGBT predilection, and that implementing God's commandments in this area may be extremely difficult for them. The consolation is that

this effort will provide an additional reward in the hereafter – if one manages to abstain. On the webpage "Islam Awareness" Zafar Khan writes:

We know that this life is a test. (...) then we have to believe that a man or a woman with homosexual feelings (...) should resist his/her feelings (...). He (God) assigns the tests to suit each one of us and we believe that He will never burden any soul beyond its means (Khan 2013).

This position seeks to combine a restrictive view of homosexual practice as sin, with a caring message to LGBTs. Several of the heterosexual respondents agreed with the view that homosexuality is a test from God. Abstinence may be burdensome, but the reward will be correspondingly great:

The Prophet says that anyone who falls in love without being overpowered by emotion is like a martyr. You fight against your desires and, if you conquer them, God's bright light will shine on you. (...) Homosexuality is a test from God. Only gay acts are sinful, not the emotions (Zemir, man with a Bosnian background).

None of the four LGBT respondents supported this view. Zulfikar, the gay quoted above, criticised it repeatedly:

If I ask God: 'Why did you create me to be gay, if it's a sin?', and He answers me: 'I wanted to test you.' Well, then my response would be: 'Who told you I could handle such a test? Why test somebody in such a way?' Sexuality is not something that should be tested. No one should be forced to change their sexual predilection. Yes, the Quran talks about tests, but I wouldn't give you an exam in medicine if you were reading to become an engineer, would I? Then you would fall flat on your face (...) I don't think God created me only to test me. I don't believe God is that cruel.

The view of homosexuality as a test was intended to convey caring and compassion, but according to the case above it functioned in the opposite way. When you feel that you don't pass the test – and you don't have any realistic chance of ever passing it – it may be perceived as the worst of two unpleasant alternatives: If God created me gay and then punishes me for it, then it is God's responsibility. If I fail a test, it is my sole responsibility.

When viewing homosexuality as a test, the respondents also made a distinction between predilection and practice. Most heterosexual respondents supported this; while a few initially believed both were equally bad. After some further questioning they changed their views: emotions by themselves would not be penalised in hell in the same way as sexual practices.

Zulfikar shared the belief that gay sexuality is defined as a sin by the Quran. He tried – unsuccessfully – to implement the Islamic temperance ideals in his own life. This may come close to *failure in implementing rules* (b2), as described above:

Gay sex is a sin. (...) But, no intentional sin – believe me! (...) I have no choice. I have tried, but I'm too weak to resist it. (...) Oh my God! Will He punish me when he knows I'm born weak and sinful?

The vast majority of heterosexual respondents reasoned in the area near the type of *afterlife consequences* (b). Many of them were simultaneously clear that they would be careful expressing these viewpoints when facing LGBT Muslims. Several believed it was up to the individual to decide. They wanted to combine their own restrictive reasoning with respect for the right to free choice for Muslims with a non-hetero identity. A woman expressed it in this way:

I think your own moral stances should apply only to yourself. I have no idea what it's like to be gay. In the same way I have no idea what it's like to be male. Although I regard it as a

sin, I will never condemn anyone. If they believe what they are doing is OK, who am I to tell them otherwise? (Anne, female convert, with a Norwegian ethnic background)

### **C) A *progressive interpretation* of the Holy Texts may imply conciliation between LGBT and Muslim identities**

The type of *progressive interpretation* (c) connotes harmony between *right* and *good*, yet the *good* has primacy. That might occur when humanly *good* – consciously or unconsciously – operates as a principle of interpretation in understanding what is divinely *right*. One may be aware that the reading of sacred writings always involves human interpretation. The actual principle of interpretation may then be based on the argument that God wants the best for human beings – including in their life on earth. Thus, the human experience of what is *good*, functions as a legitimate principle of interpretation in understanding divinely *right*. Such recognition of autonomous human reflection may lead to the legitimisation of progressive principles of interpretation and *ijtihad* adapted to our time.

This type presumes that what LGBTs regard to be *good* for their life here on earth, constitutes a legitimate basis for interpreting the relevant texts in order to understand what is divinely *right* in these matters. This opens up a progressive re-interpretation. The American convert Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle has explored this as a deliberate program. He claims that the real sin in the Lut story is rape and not same-sex practice. He interprets the intention of the Quran as being that LGBTs not only can – but should – live according to the sexual identity God has given them (Kugle 2003; 2010; Kugle and Hunt 2012). According to qualitative studies, several LGBT Muslims state that this train of thought has been a precious aid in their effort to unify their sexual and religious identities (Abraham 2010; Boellstorff 2005; Hooghe *et al.* 2010; Jaspal and Cinnirella 2012; Narvesen 2010; Siraj 2012; Yip 2003; 2005; Yip *et al.* 2011; Yip and Khalid 2010).

Suha, a lesbian woman living openly with her girlfriend, held this view:

God has created me this way, and he doesn't make mistakes. He loves all His human beings, and I'm one of them. Then he cannot hate me for being who I am. (...) As soon as I accept who I am – included my sexual predilection and all that – then I can live on an equal footing with everyone else.

Suha had knowledge about progressive interpretations of the homo-relevant texts. This way of understanding had helped her to establish a positive harmony between her religious and sexual identity. This, combined with an ethical and theological coherent view, legitimised her own love affair with her girlfriend:

It all boils down to interpretation. I interpret the Quran in my own way (...) I am a lesbian and that is no sin. It's all about love and He (God) is all about love (...) I do not lead a double life, I think that it is a greater sin, if anything, to lead a double life.

Amir, a gay living with his boyfriend, shared a similar kind of approach. He did not believe that the Quran mentions homosexuality at all – including in the Lut story. His basis for believing that homosexual practice is not a sin was a firm belief that God is fair and loving. He would never punish anyone just because they were born LGBT.

None of the heterosexual respondents supported the progressive interpretation mentioned above. The respondents who accepted homosexuality did so without using the Quran to justify it. The one heterosexual respondent who already knew about the progressive interpretation was highly critical of it:

Within the Islamic faith there is total agreement that homosexuality is a sin. So when they (the homo-progressive interpreters) interpret it in this way – saying it's not a sin – there is never going to be any breakthrough. It is completely useless, what they're doing (to interpret the Quran in a LGBT-friendly way). (...). Perhaps for those who are not so religious, it

sounds good. (...) Even with my modest background, I could argue against the progressive interpretation very easily. (Anne, female convert, with a Norwegian ethnic background)

### **D) *Eclecticism*: LGBT Muslims may choose to live according to their sexual identity, even if it breaks with the Holy Texts**

According to *eclecticism* (d) it might be legitimate to choose what is *good* in a human sense, when there is diversion between divine *right* and humanly *good*. This differs from *failure in implementing rules* (b2), by not regarding implementation of the divinely *right* as the ideal. The breaking of the rule therefore takes place with a clean conscience. *Eclecticism* (d) differs from *progressive interpretation* (c) in that it reads a rule in a traditional way, and then chooses to refuse implementing it. In contrast, *progressive interpretation* (c) supports the relevant text and aims to implement it. The type of *eclecticism* (d) describes a way of reasoning and acting that accepts an eclectic and free approbation or disregard of various religious commandments.

In line with *eclecticism* (d), LGBT Muslims freely may choose to live according to their nature, no matter what the Holy Scriptures say. One may argue that the actual texts are time-dependent, or one may fundamentally disagree with the actual rule. The Kenyan-Canadian Muslim Amreen Jamal has written a thorough analysis of the relevant texts and concludes that it prohibits same-sex practices. At the same time she explores a radical solution, at least from a Muslim perspective: ‘Should the Quran – a text from the seventh century – govern LGBT Muslims of today?’



This then means that the reform movement within the Muslim homosexual community has to raise the question of the authority of the Qu'ran and whether a text from the seventh century should indeed be allowed to legislate the twenty-first century (Jamal 2001, 71).

Ariff, a gay living with his boyfriend, expressed similar views. He interpreted the Quran as condemning homosexuality as a sin. At the same time he was principally in doubt as to whether it was right to have a book as a religious authority. His positive belief in God did not correspond with the image of the anti- LGBT God he got to know through the Quran.

Abdi, a man of Somali origin, was asked how he would reply to a hypothetical future son if he told he was a gay, and wanted to live openly together with his boyfriend:

- *Abdi*: Any form of homosexuality is illegal according to Islam. But if my son had come to me and said that he was gay, I would have said that it is all right – it is not the end of the world.
- *Me*: Don't you think God would punish him?
- *Abdi*: I think He rather might punish me, for telling him that.
- *Me*: But you would still say it?
- *Abdi*: Yes, I think so. (...) I would want to support my son.

Abdi experienced a real conflict between what he perceived to be humanly and altruistically *good* here on earth, and what he considered to be *right* according to divine revelation. In this conflict, he prioritised humanly *good* over divinely *right*. He prioritised life on earth before life in eternity. Based on his desire to be a loving and devoted father, he would altruistically prioritise his hypothetical son's welfare ahead of his own. This stance corresponds with *eclecticism* (d). Still he believed it to be a sin provoking eternal punishment. This belief corresponds with the subtype of *failure in implementing rules* (b2). Collectively he expressed a disagreement with the divinely revealed norms and believed that, due to what is humanly *good*, it is within reason to break with the norms – even though there will be consequences in the afterlife (Abdi has read this article and validated the interpretations of his statements).

In answering the same question, another heterosexual respondent supported the rights of LGBTs to live according to their identity – without having any clear knowledge about what the Quran says on the subject:

I am very liberal compared to many Muslims. My boyfriend and I have discussed the topic, and we both agreed that if we come to have a gay son, we will accept his sexuality and support him (...) I've started to read the Quran in Norwegian. Currently, I have not read anything about homosexuality. (Saima, woman with a Pakistani background)

The gay respondent Zulfikar accounted for a complex reasoning that went in several different directions. He has already been cited as relating to *double set of consequences* (a) and *afterlife consequences* (b). The only stance he opposed directly was *progressive interpretation* (c). He regarded the Quran to be crystal clear in condemning same-sex acts as sinful. At the same time he had thoughts that went in quite the opposite direction. His complex reasoning mainly fluctuated between *eclecticism* (d) and *failure in implementing rules* (b2):

- *Me*: If you and a boyfriend are alone in bed (...) mutually enjoying the love you have for each other, is that a sin?

- *Zulfikar*: Absolutely not! There is no sin in love.

- *Me*: You just told me that according to the Quran, it's a sin?

- *Zulfikar*: But one has to differentiate between faith and homosexuality. My faith is one thing, and who I'm having sex with, is something else.

- *Me*: Does that mean that you have one Muslim identity and one gay identity and that these two are clashing?

- *Zulfikar*: Absolutely not! I only have one identity. (...) I understand that same-sex acts are wrong, but I cannot do anything about it. (...) My relationship to God is my own. And it's not His business who I sleep with, is it? Well, it isn't – because in some way he accepts it.

The quote expresses a way of thinking and acting known as *compartmentalisation* in studies of religious LGBTs (Gross 2008, 85-87; Yip *et al.* 2011, 13-14). This means that sexuality

and religious faith inhabit two separate compartments. As Zulfikar expressed: "one has to differentiate between faith and homosexuality". At the same time he believed that God condemns homosexual practices. He regarded it to be one of the worst sins, as quoted above: 'Each time someone has homosexual intercourse, the throne of God shakes in heaven.'

All four LGBT respondents had a positive image of God and experienced a good personal relationship with Him. Everybody regarded it to be paradoxical if a just and fair God should punish humans for living according to the sexual identity that He Himself has designed and given them. This point was made clear by Zulfikar:

The Quran says that one should fear God and blah, blah, blah, but why? Why should I look at God as one who has power over me – instead of regarding God as my mate? I can tell Him things without Him pointing fingers. (...) Punishment, is that the main thing for God? Is He a power-hungry bastard who just wants to punish people? Then He sounds like a spoiled brat! We are talking about God here. Get a grip! When people portray God in that way, I want no part of it.

The different ways of correlating divine revelation and human reflection is summarized schematically in **Fig. 3**.

## **Concluding remarks**

By using the *right-good*-typology, this article has attempted to illuminate the diverse correlations between divine revelation and human reflections regarding homosexuality. According to different kinds of human reflection, the divine revelation is interpreted differently within the different types. Even though the divine revelation is interpreted literally according to three of the four types, the interpretation is still based on human reflections.

Within *progressive interpretation* (c), the understanding of the divine revelation is governed by what is *good* according to the human reflections of the individual.

The *right-good*-typology has contributed to clarifying the internal differentiations within respectively restrictive and affirmative attitudes concerning homosexuality. According to the line of thinking within *double set of consequences* (a), homosexuality is destructive for life here on earth, as well for afterlife. The *afterlife consequences* type (b) recognizes that LGBTs actually may perceive living in accordance with their sexual identity, as something *good*. The problem with homosexuality then only applies to consequences for the afterlife. While the majority of Muslim societies regard homosexuality as a social problem, as depicted by *double set of consequences* (a), most of the heterosexual respondents in this study reasoned close to *afterlife consequences* (b). This is a qualitative study that cannot be analysed numerically. Yet quantity may indicate trends and tendencies. The supportive attitudes towards LGBT-rights that have emerged in Norway over the last generation may possibly have influenced the conception of what is humanly *good* for LGBT Muslims, according to the human reflections of the respondents. That means this influence might have contributed to a possible change from a kind of *double set of consequences* type (a), towards *afterlife consequences* (b). At the same time all heterosexual respondents interpreted the divine revelation as being restrictive regarding homosexuality. Most of them also agreed to the content of these interpretations. Due to the consequences for life after death, the majority of them therefore discouraged LGBTs to put their predilection into practice.

The distinction between *progressive interpretation* (c) and *eclecticism* (d) emerged quite clearly, which may be illustrated by the difference regarding the correlation attitude/practice between the two LGBT respondents Suha and Zulfikar. Suha interpreted the homo-relevant texts progressively. As a consequence she experienced full harmony between her religious and sexual identity. Zulfikar was convinced of interpreting the relevant texts in a

restrictive way. Due to this, the correlation between attitude and practice fluctuated in the area between *eclecticism* (d) and *failure in implementing rules* (b2). This reflected a conflict or compartmentalisation between religious and sexual identities. While one lives according one's sexual identity, one may at the same time experience a larger distance from the part of the religion seen to be condemning homosexuality.

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# Divine Revelation and Human Reasoning:

## Young Norwegian Muslims' reflections on homosexuality

### Tables

Fig. 1:

	<b>Harmony</b>	<b>Conflict</b>
<b>Primacy of divine <i>right</i> over humanly <i>good</i></b>	<p><b>(a)</b> <i>Right</i> =&gt; <i>good</i></p> <p><u>Double set of consequences</u></p> <p>Divinely <i>right</i> defines what is humanly <i>good</i>.</p> <p>Obedience to traditional interpretations of the divine revelation is regarded to be rewarded both during this life and in life after death, while disobedience will be punished in both realms</p>	<p><b>(b)</b> <i>Right</i> ⇔ <i>good</i></p> <p><u>Afterlife consequences</u></p> <p>If there is conflict between divinely <i>right</i> and humanly <i>good</i>, one ought to do what is <i>right</i>. Obedience is sometimes hard to practice and not profitable for this life, but it is still regarded to be a valuable investment in life after death. The attempt of implementing rules may have two outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (b1) <u>Success in implementing rules</u>: One succeeds to adhere to what one accepts as divine rules. This is assumed to be rewarded in afterlife</li> <li>• (b2) <u>Failure in implementing rules</u>: Despite trying, one fails to adhere to what one accepts as divine rules. This is assumed to be punished in afterlife</li> </ul>
<b>Primacy of humanly <i>good</i> over divine <i>right</i></b>	<p><b>(c)</b> <i>Good</i> =&gt; <i>Right</i></p> <p><u>Progressive interpretation</u></p> <p>What is regarded to be humanly <i>good</i>, serves as a progressive tool in interpreting what is divine <i>right</i>. This is regarded profitable for this life and for life after death</p>	<p><b>(d)</b> <i>Good</i> ⇔ <i>right</i></p> <p><u>Eclecticism</u></p> <p>If humanly <i>good</i> and divine <i>right</i> conflicts, one might – in eclectic manners – choose to disregard some of the religious rules. This is regarded profitable for this life, and may be seen as irrelevant for life after death</p>

=> The first guides the second.

⇔ The two domains exist in contrast to one another.



Fig 2:

	<b>Double set of consequences (a)</b>	<b>Afterlife consequences (b)</b>	<b>Progressive interpretation (c)</b>	<b>Eclecticism (d)</b>
<b>The correlation between divinely revealed <i>right</i> and humanly <i>good</i></b>	Divine <i>right</i> defines humanly <i>good</i>	Divine <i>right</i> and humanly <i>good</i> may sometimes differ and one should then implement what is divine <i>right</i>	Humanly <i>good</i> should function as an interpretation key in understanding what is divine <i>right</i>	If divine <i>right</i> and humanly <i>good</i> differ, one may in certain cases implement what is humanly <i>good</i>
<b>What is perceived by the respondent to be divinely revealed <i>right</i> regarding homosexuality?</b>	The Holy Scriptures prohibit homosexual feelings and practices ↓	The Holy Scriptures prohibit homosexual practices ↓	A progressive interpretation of the Holy Scriptures approves LGBTs' right to live according to their God-designed predilection	The Holy Scriptures prohibit same-sex acts, but that should not govern the lives of LGBT Muslims today
<b>What is perceived by the respondent to be humanly <i>good</i> for LGBTs in their life here on earth?</b>	It is <i>good</i> for everybody to live in heterosexual matrimony. Homosexuality represents something evil both for this life and the life to come	For LGBTs it is humanly <i>good</i> to live according to their predilection, but this <i>good</i> should be sacrificed for what is <i>right</i> in order to obtain positive reward in the afterlife	↑ It is <i>good</i> for LGBTs to live according to their God-designed predilection	↑ It is <i>good</i> for LGBTs to live according to their predilection
<b>Did God create homosexuality?</b>	No	Yes, homosexuality is created by God as a test for the afterlife	Yes, homosexuality is created by God as part of a wonderful diversity	Yes
<b>Will same-sex acts be punished in life after death?</b>	Yes	Yes	No	No/no focus