

Theology Matters

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Also included in this special issue are: “*The Bible and the Practice of Homosexuality*” by Dr. James R. Edwards, p. 10 and “*Why We Believe in Heresy*” by Dr. Thomas C. Oden, p. 15.

Keeping Faithful: Homosexuality and Ordination

by Jack Haberer*

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lifestyle from which one should repent and renounce in order to be able to serve in the leadership of the church?” By keeping faithful to the message handed to us by the apostles and prophets, the church’s call to repent and believe speaks a healing and redeeming word to the homosexual, rather than one of painful resignation.

But note: the facts to be presented are not impersonal: neither pronouncements nor diatribes. Rather they help the church define how to address the personal issue: how shall we minister to and among homosexual persons?

This article is structured for quick reference, even while in the midst of debate. After overviewing a resolution presenting the homosexual cause, every one of the major arguments proposed by the homosexual community is briefly explained, the *Keeping Faithful* response is given, and quotable quotes from qualified sources follow. The manuscript concludes with a counter resolution.

Preface

Ever since the days of the apostles, the three prerequisites for active church life have been, “Repent, believe and be baptized.”

When addressing the question of homosexuals in membership, ministry and ordination, the real question is, “Shall this lifestyle be accepted as a natural and acceptable alternative way for a Christian to express his or her sexuality, and shall the church, in turn, cease to consider it a

As they might put it...

A Resolution Summarizing the Gay and Lesbian Cause

1 WHEREAS, when creating all life, almighty and loving God declared good the whole creation including those created homosexual as well as those created heterosexual, and

2 WHEREAS, homosexual desire is not chosen but rather is an orientation that is inherited at conception, and

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3 WHEREAS, rejection by the larger heterosexual population has forced homosexuals to try to do the impossible, namely, to suppress or transform their own natural sexual desires, and

4 WHEREAS, Christians historically have quoted a few isolated verses of Scripture with sledge-hammer force against homosexuals, all the while disregarding the personal experience of countless victims of such repression, and

5 WHEREAS, those Scriptures' seemingly scornful references to homosexuality, when properly understood, actually condemn not same-sex intimacy but inhospitality, infidelity and promiscuity by persons of all sexual orientations, and

6 WHEREAS, the Bible's call to fidelity means maintaining faithfulness to one's present intimate partner in a relationship that reflects justice-love, not necessarily the lifelong heterosexual marital relationship espoused by the church through its centuries of xenophobic chauvinism, and

7 WHEREAS, according to the Book of Order, membership in the Presbyterian Church (USA) is open to all who profess Jesus Christ as Lord, and one of the rights guaranteed all Presbyterians is that of being ordained to serve the church as minister, elder and/or deacon as called by God and the church, and

8 WHEREAS, numerous sincere Presbyterian gays, lesbians and their families have suffered deeply due to years' long discrimination and hatred in spite of the church's historic commitment to overthrow discrimination in all its forms, including that of homophobia,

RESOLVED, that the 208th General Assembly declare invalid any impediment to the ordination of those practicing homosexuality and affirm the full exercise of the right and responsibility of presbyteries and congregations to discern, elect, ordain and install ministers, elders and deacons.

1 *Whereas, when creating all life, almighty and loving God declared good the whole creation including those created homosexual as well as those created heterosexual . . .*

Pro-gay position

A theology of creation provides the fundamental basis for the acceptance of homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle. Simply put, God made all things good—and many species of animals exhibit homosexual behavior.

Since, in fact, all of creation is good in God's eyes, and since many sexual beings were created to be homosexual, they are just as good as their heterosexual counterparts. How can others condemn some for living according to their own created nature?

Keeping Faithful response

Indeed, God created the world good. But the entrance of human sin brought the fall of creation. Not only do we see natural catastrophes like hurricanes and earthquakes, not only do we suffer birth defects and unexplained diseases, but we also bear in our human nature the guilt, pollution and estrangement brought on the human race by original sin. Accordingly, natural human instincts and desires do not intrinsically bear evidence of God's approval and design. Unfortunately, contemporary culture would have us believe that we should just follow our natural desires and fulfill our needs. But Scripture teaches the opposite.

Authorities speak

Presbyterian General Assembly's Definitive Guidance of 1978: "We conclude that homosexuality is not God's wish for humanity. In many cases homosexuality is more a sign of the brokenness of God's world than of willful rebellion. In other cases homosexual behavior is freely chosen or learned in environments where normal development is thwarted. Even where the homosexual orientation has not been consciously sought or chosen, it is neither a gift from God nor a state nor a condition like race; it is a result of our living in a fallen world."

Presbyterian Elder Tim Stafford: "The gay movement is a logical result of the modern belief that desire—all desire, and particularly sexual desire—is natural, unchangeable, healthy. If that is so, then there is nothing wrong with homosexuals. They are merely different. Their desires reveal their basic make-up, just as surely as a person's desire for food reveals that he must have food or die. ...Yet as we have seen, Jesus did not treat desire as purely natural. Christians can never presume that a desire—any desire, whether for sex or possessions or glory—is normal and naturally good. Our 'natural self' as we know it is out of kilter with its true created nature."¹

Dr. Marion L. Soards, Professor of NT, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, regarding Romans 1: "Paul singles out homosexual intercourse for special attention because he regards it as providing a particularly graphic image of the way in which human fallenness distorts God's created order. God the creator made man and woman for each other, to cleave together, to be fruitful and multiply. When human beings engage in homosexual activity, they enact an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality: the rejection of the Creator's design. They 'embody' the spiritual condition of those who have 'exchanged the truth about God for a lie.'"²

2 *Whereas, homosexual desire is not chosen but rather is an orientation that is inherited at conception . . .*

Pro-gay position

Scientific research (studies of hormone balance, the size and shape of the hypothalamus and the existence of a “gay gene”) has proven that homosexual orientation is built into the very fabric of individuals from the moment of their conception. If God created such people with no choice but to be homosexual, how could we possibly condemn them for fulfilling their natural destiny?

Keeping Faithful response

Several scientific studies have been published and touted broadly as evidence of the genetic origin of homosexual orientation. However, the media largely has overlooked the fact that every one of the studies has since been refuted or discredited. In fact, attempts to substantiate the original research consistently have ended up overthrowing the very conclusions originally claimed.

Authorities speak

Drs. Wm. Byne & Bruce Parsons, Professors of Psychiatry, Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons: “Recent studies postulate biologic factors as the primary basis for sexual orientation. However, there is no evidence at present to substantiate a biologic theory.”³

Dr. John Money, “The dean of American sexologists,” Professor of Psychology, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and Director of Psycho-hormonal Research Institute: “Whatever may be the possible unlearned assistance from constitutional sources, the child’s psychosexual identity is not written, unlearned, in the genetic code, the hormonal system or the nervous system at birth.”⁴

“Regarding Dr. LeVay’s research on the hypothalamus in the brain: ‘Of course it (sexual orientation) is in the brain. The real question is, when did it get there? Was it prenatal, neonatal, during childhood, puberty? That we do not know. ...Other problems with [LeVay’s] findings include: (1) all 19 of the homosexual men [whose corpses were used in the study] had died of AIDS, something that many researchers believe could very well account for or contribute to the differences; (2) there was no way to know the sexual history of the “heterosexual” men; (3) there is no way to determine if the smaller hypothalamuses were the ‘cause’ or the ‘result’ of homosexuality; and (4) Dr. LeVay, a homosexual himself, admitted that his study was not entirely a dispassionate scientific endeavor.”⁵

Sexologist Wm. H. Masters, Co-director of the Masters & Johnson Institute: “The genetic theory of homosexuality has been generally discarded today. Despite the interest in possible hormone mechanisms in the origin of homosexuality, no serious scientist today suggests that a simple cause-effect relationship applies.”⁶

Dr. Charles Socarides, Attending Psychiatrist and Professor at Albert Einstein College of Medicine: “The major challenge in treating homosexuality from the point of view of the patient’s resistance has, of course, been the misconception that the disorder is innate or inborn.”⁷

3 *Whereas, rejection by the larger heterosexual population has forced homosexuals to try to do the impossible, namely, to suppress or transform their own natural sexual desires . . .*

Pro-gay position

A person’s sexual orientation is not chosen but discovered. One’s only real choice is to accept that orientation or to fight in a vain attempt to suppress the way God intends to be revealed through that person. In fact, all such attempts by homosexuals have utterly failed. Once gay always gay.

Keeping Faithful response

Orientation does not mean license. All people are predisposed to behaviors contrary to God’s design, from food addictions, to lust, to kleptomania. Nevertheless, Scripture repeatedly affirms the necessity of bringing our behaviors and desires into conformity with biblical standards of morality and ethics. Moreover, the power of redemption applied by the Holy Spirit, has enabled numerous homosexuals to be liberated from that behavior in order to live out God’s true intentions.

Authorities speak

Confession of 1967 from the Book of Confessions part of the Constitution of the PCUSA: “The relationship between man and woman exemplifies in a basic way God’s ordering of the interpersonal life for which he created [humankind]... Reconciled to God, each person has joy in and respect for his [her] own humanity and that of other persons; a man and woman are enabled to marry, to commit themselves to a mutually shared life, and to respond to each other in sensitive and lifelong concern; parents receive the grace to care for children in love and to nurture their individuality. The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by humans when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time.”⁸

Dr. Philip Turner, Dean of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale University: “...the chief problem with the view of the new reformers is that it fails to recognize that a sexual self, liberated from undertakings that have a moral claim upon it prior to any of its particular intentions and choices, has no satisfactory way to make moral judgments about what it intends, chooses, promises and then undertakes. The loss connected with the modern view of the

self is that ...the self has only the option of following the prompting of its own depths. It therefore appears in the unattractive guise of a dog chasing its tail. ...It need not search out the nature of the undertakings God has appointed for it and then struggle to conform its desires, intentions, choices, promises and undertakings to those appointed ends. ...To take this view is to adopt the very dubious proposition that if one has desires and inclinations and they are powerfully presented from the depths of the self, they are, by virtue of the strength of their presentation, both 'natural' and 'good.' To take this view is to condemn the self to what Auden once called 'promiscuous fornication with its own images.'"⁹

Dr. Stanton L. Jones, Chair of Psychology Department, Wheaton College: "But the existence of inclinations, orientations or preferences have little to do with God's moral call upon our lives. Social science is finding many powerful factors that shape character and influence morally laden choices. Alcoholism, anxiety-proneness, ill-tempereness, and even the propensity to violence are made more likely by the presence of genetic and family variables. Is it unfair, then, for God to hold up sobriety and moderation, restraint and respect, as moral values?"¹⁰

Dr. Marion L. Soards, Professor of NT, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary: "God's purpose for humanity as Paul and others knew it from created order, scripture, and perhaps the words of Jesus, was for man and woman, male and female, to find fulfillment in the complementary sexual union that guaranteed the continuation of God's own creation."¹¹

Dr. Reuben Fine, Director of NY Center for Psychiatric Training: "I have recently had occasion to review the results of psychotherapy with homosexuals, and been surprised by the findings. It is paradoxical that even though the politically active homosexual group denies the possibility of change, all studies from Schrenck-Notzing on have found positive effects, virtually regardless of the kind of treatment used...Whether with hypnosis..., psychoanalysis of any variety, educative psychotherapy, behavior therapy, and/or simple educational procedures, a considerable percentage of overt homosexuals became heterosexual. ...If the patients are motivated, whatever procedure is adopted, a large percentage will give up their homosexuality. In this connection public information is of the greatest importance. The misinformation spread by certain circles that 'homosexuality is untreatable by psychotherapy' does incalculable harm to thousands of men and women."¹²

Dr. Irving Bieber, former President of the American Academy of Psychoanalysts: "We have followed some patients for as long as 20 years who have remained exclusively heterosexual. Reversal estimates now range from 30% to an optimistic 50%."¹³

Dr. Edmund Bergler, Assistant Director of Freud Clinic and lecturer at Psychoanalytic Institute in NY: "The homosexual's real enemy is... his ignorance of the possibility that he can be helped."¹⁴

4 *Whereas, Christians historically have quoted a few isolated verses of Scripture with sledge-hammer force against homosexuals, all the while disregarding the personal experience of countless victims of such repression...*

Pro-gay position

Homosexuals are people who hurt. No, it is not due to anything intrinsic to being homosexual. It is due to the persecution, the gay-bashing that is inflicted upon them by the heterosexual community. And many of the most hateful homophobes are Christians who quote a few isolated verses of Scripture to accuse homosexuals of all kinds of wickedness, thereby heaping undeserved shame and recriminations upon them. If God loves us all just the way we are, how can so many—in the name of Christ—act so shamefully and hatefully toward such a minority as the homosexual population?

Keeping Faithful response

Indeed, the pain felt by homosexuals deserves a compassionate response. The gay-bashing to which many have been subjected is unchristian and despicable. However, their pain, in large part, originates from living contrary to God's design for them. More significantly, while listening to the experiences—including hurts and suffering—of homosexuals, no one's personal experience can take precedence over Scripture when attempting to analyze and prescribe human behavior. Only God's Word can have prescriptive authority, and anything that contradicts Scripture is in error.

Authorities speak

Rev. James R. Edwards, Ph.D., Chair, Dept. of Religion & Philosophy, Jamestown College: "The Reformed tradition has been a vital tradition, ...not because of a professed dogma of the authority of Scripture, but because of its practice of obedience to Scripture. It is meaningless and gravely injurious to faith to assert the authority of Scripture, and yet to ignore (or worse, to seek to repudiate) the claims of that authority that stand at variance from the social or ideological context in which the church finds itself. ...We believe that the church is particularly tempted in our time to grant normative status to changing social conditions in sexual matters and to the latest conclusions from the social sciences. From its inception, however, the Reformed tradition has held that sin results not only in moral error but also in intellectual error. This means that contemporary conclusions from the social sciences, no matter how "objective" they appear, and from changing social conditions, no matter how compelling they seem, which countermand the revealed will of God in Scripture, cannot be either true or according to God's will.

...While all available pertinent knowledge and experience should inform thinking about such matters, the

priority accorded to what is known of God through the Holy Scriptures cannot be surrendered.”¹⁵

Donald W. McCullough, President, San Francisco Theological Seminary: “In our recent debate about human sexuality, we seem to be flirting with a new partner. Until recently we were faithfully married, through our confessional commitments, to the *sola Scriptura* of our Reformed heritage; we understood the Bible to be uniquely authoritative, both in witnessing to Jesus Christ and in guiding us in faith and practice. Though we have not yet filed for divorce, we show the signs of being seduced into a new liaison: we seem ready to jump into bed with *experience*.

...Now, listening to the experiences of others may lead to understanding, certainly, and may help us grow in the grace of compassion. But we need to be careful. Guidance for faith and practice must come from God’s Word, not from human experience; it’s a one-way street and we ignore the flow of traffic at our own peril.

...Thank God for a relentless Word that will not compromise with our feelings! We need so much more than the fulfillment of our desires; sometimes we need deliverance from our desires. Only a transcendent, transforming Word can do this, and this is why our Reformed parents remained committed to *sola Scriptura*.

Have we basically given up finding biblical guidance for sexual practice? ...have we now retreated to the more comfortable arena of shared experiences? Have we turned our backs on the hard work of theological reflection in favor of listening to one another tell stories? If so, we can only hope it’s a brief affair. For nothing any General Assembly ever decides about anything will be half so significant as a divorce from *sola Scriptura* in order to run off with *experience*.”¹⁶

5 *Whereas, those Scriptures’ seemingly scornful references to homosexuality, when properly understood, actually condemn not same-sex intimacy but inhospitality, infidelity and promiscuity by persons of all sexual orientations . . .*

Pro-gay argument

For centuries the church has promoted the view that the Bible condemns homosexuality. They have supported that condemnation by holding up a half-dozen passages of Scripture, in much the same way that people once held up Bible verses to support keeping slaves. However, properly understood, those Scripture passages do not actually condemn homosexuality. Rather, the sins were violence, rape, idolatry, inhospitality, prostitution and sexual exploitation. Also, while the writers of Scripture appropriately condemn homosexual behavior by heterosexuals, those writers did not address the issue of homosexual orientation and the homosexual behavior that naturally issues from it.

Keeping Faithful response

The Scriptures do not speak often about homosexuality, but when they do, they are absolutely united in one response: it is a horror before God. In OT passages, homosexual behavior brings absolute condemnation. In the NT era, when homosexual behavior was widespread, its mere existence is cited as proof-positive of how terribly far humanity has fallen in its rebellion against God.

Authorities speak

Dr. Thomas Gillespie, President of Princeton Theological Seminary in his introduction to the Presbyterian General Assembly’s Definitive Guidance of 1978: “Our interpretation of the Scriptures in this regard is thus predicated upon the central biblical theme of creation, fall into sin, and redemption in Jesus Christ into the fellowship of His Spirit. We have attempted to understand the Scriptures not legalistically but evangelically, that is, not as a law-book of proscriptions but as a message-book of God’s re-creation of [God’s] fallen world. We believe that all human sexuality, both heterosexual and homosexual, stands in need of this redemption.”¹⁷

Dr. Bruce Metzger, NT Professor, Princeton Theological Seminary: “Naturally the original documents of the Bible do not use this modern term (homosexuality), but it does not follow that the biblical writers were unacquainted with those who indulged in homosexual practices. The occurrence of same-sex activities in the ancient Near-Eastern cultures and, still more, in the Greco-Roman empire was notorious, and both the Old Testament and New Testament writers are forthright in condemning such practices.”¹⁸

Dr. Marion L. Soards, NT Professor, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary: “As Paul discerned and declared God’s relationship to humans, homosexual acts were outside the boundaries of God’s intentions for humanity. Homosexuality was one vivid indication of the real problem of sin, and Paul states bluntly that all humans are sinners. On the matter of homosexuality, we should see clearly that the biblical understanding of homosexual behavior is univocal (although this issue is at most a minor concern): homosexual activity is not consistent with the will of God; it is not so much a sin as evidence of sin, but there is no way to read the Bible as condoning homosexual acts.”¹⁹

Dr. Elizabeth R. Achtemeier, Adjunct Professor of OT, Union Theological Seminary, VA: “In short, all six of the texts in the Bible that deal with homosexuality express unqualified disapproval of it, and there is no legitimate way in which the Bible can be used to support the practice. Only if one turns to other authorities besides the Scriptures can one approve the practice, but then, of course, the church’s one authority for faith and practice, namely the Bible, has been abandoned, and we are adrift on every sea of fancy and folly...”²⁰

6 *Whereas, the Bible's call to fidelity means maintaining faithfulness to one's present intimate partner in a relationship that reflects justice-love, not necessarily the lifelong heterosexual marital relationship espoused by the church through its centuries of xenophobic chauvinism . . .*

Pro-gay position

Homosexuals have often been accused of being promiscuous, having multiple relationships. On the other hand, promiscuity thrives in the heterosexual community. Moreover, heterosexuals have made an idol out of the one husband-one wife lifelong covenant, as if that were the only way to express one's sexual self. What is fidelity? It is the keeping of promises to whom you make them.

As *More Light* Presbyterian Minister Chris Glasser suggests in his book *Come Home! Reclaiming Spirituality and Community as Gay Men and Lesbians*, fidelity does not mean being sexually exclusive and monogamous; fidelity really means only keeping your promises. So if a gay Christian companion promises to have only five other lovers per year, he is being faithful if he stays within those limits.²¹

Keeping Faithful response

Promiscuity is rampant in the homosexual community. Lifelong monogamous relationships are uncommon among lesbians and are extremely rare among gay men. Homosexuality by its nature is non-fulfilling, so an endless pursuit of a new partners is the natural result. Further, to minimize the concept of lifelong fidelity by narrowing it down to the "keeping of promises" totally distorts the whole biblical teaching on fidelity.

Authorities speak

Researchers Bell and Weinberg: "The famous Bell and Weinberg study (*Homosexualities*) suggested that about a third [28%] of gays have had over 1,000 sexual partners in their lifetimes. Very few gays are in committed, long-term relationships; Bell and Weinberg found that less than 10 percent of gays are in such relationships. Those who are in stable relationships do not tend to be sexually monogamous."²²

Researchers McWhirter and Mattison: "McWhirter and Mattison (*The Gay Couple*) found that 0 percent of the 165 stable male couples they studied were sexually monogamous after being together for five years. The authors of that study, themselves a gay couple, said that to be gay is to be non-monogamous, and that monogamy is an unnatural state that some gay men attempt because of their internalized homophobia; so when you finally grow to accept your own gayness, 'you shed monogamy like a butterfly sheds a cocoon.'"²³

Dr. William Foege, Director of the Centers for Disease Control: "'The average AIDS victim has had 60

different sexual partners in the past twelve months.' In contrast with this, 'the average heterosexual male has—throughout his life—from five to nine sex partners.'"²⁴

7 *Whereas, according to the Book of Order, membership in the Presbyterian Church (USA) is open to all who profess Jesus Christ as Lord, and one of the rights guaranteed all Presbyterians is that of being ordained to serve the church as minister, elder and/or deacon as called by God and the church . . .*

Pro-gay position

The *Book of Order* explicitly states that one of the rights of all church members is that of holding church office (G-5.0202). There is nothing in the *Book* that says that a murderer cannot be a church officer. Neither does it single out thieves, rapists or prostitutes. It is absolutely arbitrary and unconstitutional to single out a whole class of Presbyterians as being ineligible for ordination. You might as well deny them the right to become members, because the present policy creates a two-class membership system: full-members and half-members. If the *Book of Order* does not shut out homosexual Presbyterians, how can the church itself shut them out?

Keeping Faithful response

The Presbyterian Church has always ordained contrite, repentant sinners to its offices but also has always forbidden self-avowed practicing sinners of all kinds from serving as its officers.

The first half of the Presbyterian Church(USA)'s Constitution, *The Book of Confessions*, states many of these kinds of sins, including that of homosexual practice. In so doing, the Church reflects the standards established in Scripture. The only reason homosexual behavior has been specifically prohibited by the Presbyterian Church(USA) is that ever since the mid-1970's, a small number of Presbyterians have been challenging the Church's standard in this one area.

Authorities speak

Presbyterian General Assembly's Definitive Guidance of 1978: "As persons repent and believe, they become members of Christ's body....There is room in the church for all who give honest affirmation to the vows required for membership in the church. Homosexual persons who sincerely affirm 'Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior' and 'I intend to be his disciple, to obey his word, and to show his love' should not be excluded from membership.

"To be an ordained officer is to be a human instrument, touched by divine powers but still an earthen vessel. As portrayed in Scripture, the officers set before the

church and community an example of piety, love, service and moral integrity. Officers are not free from repeated expressions of sin. Neither are members and officers free to adopt a lifestyle of conscious, continuing and unresisted sin in any area of their lives. For the church to ordain a self-affirming, practicing homosexual person to ministry would be to act in contradiction to its charter and calling in Scripture, setting in motion both within the church and society serious contradictions to the will of Christ.”

Book of Order part of the Constitution of the PCUSA: “The General Assembly constitutes the bond of union, community, and mission among all its congregations and governing bodies. It therefore has the responsibility and power... to warn or bear witness against error in doctrine or immorality in practice in or outside the Church.” (G-13.0103)

Kenneth Sawyer, Assistant Professor of Church History and Reference Librarian at the Jesuit-Krauss-McCormick Library at McCormick Theological Seminary: “Our history shows that we have often inverted the wise counsel of our own tradition, often losing sight of the biblical mandates of generosity and hospitality. But within this denomination, our discussions must speak more often of obligations, constraints and responsibilities, rather than of freedom from obligation and restraint.

Issues of leadership provide an excellent example of restraint: serving the people of God is less an outworking of the charter of freedom, than the taking up of one's cross. In our deliberations concerning leadership, our tradition has always made sharp distinctions between freedoms of membership and the constraints and costs of leadership.

We are counseled to judge with special charity all those who confess our Lord, though they may be very different from us. And we are counseled to judge with special severity all those who seek ordination, though they may be very similar to us.”²⁵

8 *Whereas, numerous sincere Presbyterian gays, lesbians and their families have suffered deeply due to years' long discrimination and hatred in spite of the church's historic commitment to overthrow discrimination in all its forms, including that of homophobia . . .*

Pro-gay position

The Presbyterian Church (USA) makes lofty pronouncements against discrimination and class hatred. However, Presbyterians in the past have actually been defenders of slavery, racial discrimination and gender discrimination. It is time for the church to take the lead in the justice issue of the 1990's, the acceptance of homosexuals and lesbians as our brothers and sisters. If we are committed to pursuing justice and mercy, then can anybody think that such a pursuit can bypass the homosexuals among us?

Says lesbian minister, Jane Spahr, “We are not sub-human. The holocaust is over. They killed three-quarters of a million of us that they know. ...I must be in that church that says ‘Yes’ to people, no matter what their color, no matter what their race, no matter what their sexual orientation. Now that's what I know. And that's the God I know. So maybe we're talking about a different God.”²⁶

Keeping Faithful response

The homosexual community would have us believe that denial of ordination due to their sexual behavior is comparable to denying ordination due to undeniably genetic differences, like race or gender. In fact anybody who disagrees with them is, by definition, homophobic. That is like saying that anybody speaking out against drunkenness hates all people who drink alcohol.

As has been already shown, the claim that homosexual behavior is genetically predetermined has not been substantiated. The Scriptures compel us to speak the truth in love in order that we all might grow up into Christ. Certainly, that is a tall order. It is easy to shout out truth with no care to be kind, and it is easy to speak lovingly while neglecting the facts. But *to speak the truth in love* demands, in this instance, that the church embrace the homosexual person, invite him or her to walk the Christian pilgrimage in the church, and to invite that person to begin to discover that there is a freedom available, such that they can walk away from the homosexual lifestyle. When Christ sets free, we are free indeed. To proclaim anything less, truly would be unjust.

Authorities speak

Dr. Stanton L. Jones, Chair of Psychology Department, Wheaton College: “The current movement to see gay persons as a social group that must be loved and accepted as they are is the latest form of an old challenge—the challenge to diminish the authority of God's revelation, to understand people on their own terms rather than by God's view of them, and fundamentally to amend the nature of Christ's call to take up our crosses and follow him.

In this difficult time, there are two things that we must do. They are two things that do not naturally go together. We must exhibit the very love and compassion of Jesus Christ himself. And we must fearlessly proclaim the truth that Jesus Christ himself proclaimed and embodied. ...A certain degree of natural revulsion to homosexual acts per se is natural for heterosexuals. ...But a revulsion to an act is not the same as a revulsion to a person. If you cannot empathize with a homosexual person because of your fear of, or revulsion to them, then you are failing our Lord.

[...However,] if we truly love, we will not shrink from speaking God's view of homosexual behavior. Do not be deceived: increasingly today we are defined as unloving, solely for viewing homosexuality as immoral, regardless of the compassion we exhibit. Nevertheless, we must strive to be loving when we voice our opposition. Compassion in no way entails an acceptance of the gay lifestyle, any more than it entails affirming an adulterer's infidelity.”²⁷

Resolved, that the 208th General Assembly declare invalid any impediment to the ordination of those practicing homosexuality and affirm the full exercise of the right and responsibility of presbyteries and congregations to discern, elect, ordain and install ministers, elders and deacons.

Pro-gay position and *Keeping Faithful* response

As stated throughout this paper, this resolution is untenable.

Epilogue

So what's the big deal? We have long acknowledged that nobody is perfect; nobody is sinless. Even if we admit that homosexuality is not God's will for humanity, why has this one sin been singled out as so significant?

The answer is *truth*. Presbyterians take seriously the study of science, psychology and other academic disciplines. However, we have always treated with utmost importance our commitment to truth, and specifically, our need to be faithful to a well-reasoned biblical theology. Those who urge the church to endorse the practice of homosexuality as a legitimate, alternate lifestyle, do violence to theological themes that are central to the truth revealed by God.

Creation

In the biblical account of creation, God's first command to humanity is "Be fruitful and multiply..." Then, however, God acknowledges that the first man is alone, lacking a good "helper as his partner." After presenting all the animals to the man, none of whom is deemed suitable to fill the need, God creates the woman. As is observed in the text, she is the perfect complement to the man, such that through posterity, they shall leave father and mother and cling to one another, thereby becoming one flesh. In other words, as is so obviously demonstrated in human physiology, the man and woman are created with a potential for partnership, capable of reproducing—and all by God's decree.

The practice of homosexuality overthrows the significance of God's intention for creation. It disallows the possibility of reproduction. It denies the physical—and by implication, the psychological—complementarity of male and female. Instead, it treats the experience of pleasuring as the only purpose for human sexuality. Ultimately, it disregards God's intention for sexuality.

A doctrine of creation that is faithful to Scripture and the Confessions of the faith cannot abide the legitimization of homosexuality any more than it could abide polygamy or bestiality.

Fall and Sin

When humanity chose to rebel against God, all manner of human relationships and desires were corrupted.

The lack of daily communion with God leads to moral and ethical wretchedness, with humans developing an almost insatiable desire for sensuality, violence and greed. Accordingly, God instituted the Law, providing an objective standard that defines human sin in ways that one's own conscience cannot, and calling humanity to live by that Law, rather than the laws of fallen human nature.

In contrast, when homosexuals say, "I just feel these feelings, so they must be all right," they are rejecting the objective standard of God's Law. In its place they are merely approving one of the many corrupted feelings that tend to result from human fallenness.

The historic doctrines of the fall and sin look skeptically at the appropriateness of human desires and hungers, and admit that only the dictates of Scripture can accurately and objectively determine right from wrong. Indeed, Scripture states that faithful, monogamous male-female marriage is right. It also states that homosexual and adulterous sexual relationships are wrong.

Redemption

The central biblical doctrine is that of redemption. The whole purpose for the incarnation, cross, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ is that of redemption. That is to say, the whole Christ-event transpired in order to forgive the sinner, to heal the sick, to free the oppressed, and to break down the alienation between divinity and humanity—all toward the purpose of granting people the knowledge of God. The gracious work of the Lord toward those ends, presumes humanity's helplessness against sin but offers the gift of salvation which is powerful enough to change damaged persons into the children of God, and progressively, into the image of Jesus Christ.

When the homosexual says, "This is what I am, I cannot be otherwise," she or he is saying that redemption is powerless against such a lifestyle. Homosexual desires and behaviors, so to speak, are irredeemable.

The church must never allow any limitation to the power of redemption. If Christ can forgive the prostitute, can heal the leper and can free the demoniac, he certainly can lead the homosexual to sexual freedom. The reshaping of habits may call for therapy and effort and self-discipline, but the power of redemption makes it all possible.

So what's the big deal? The big deal is the need to keep faithful to the Christian gospel. We could be debating other lifestyles, such as polygamous marriage or the dumping of toxic wastes. Regardless of the issue at hand, either we acknowledge that all things were created by God for God's purpose, that human sin has led to the corruption of human desires and behaviors, and that Christ can redeem that corruption, setting people free from its bondage—or we declare the gospel null and void. That is the big deal.

As we might say it...

A Resolution on *Keeping Faithful*

I WHEREAS, from the beginning, almighty and loving God has created human beings male and female in order to

provide suitable and complementary partners capable of and empowered to procreate the race within the God-ordained covenant of marriage, and

2 WHEREAS, homosexual orientation tends to develop as a result of emotional trauma and/or deprivation, and

3 WHEREAS, the Scriptures teach the need for people to exercise control over their sexual desires and

4 WHEREAS, the Holy Scriptures, being studied on their own terms, must always be given priority in all formulations of Christian doctrine and practice, even at the risk of alienating sincere individuals whose personal experience and practice does not conform to the teachings of Scripture, and

5 WHEREAS, those Scriptures consistently speak of sexual acts between any individuals outside the heterosexual marriage covenant as unnatural, aberrant, contrary to God's design and sinful, and

6 WHEREAS, the Scriptures call upon husbands and wives in such marriage covenants to maintain fidelity to one another for as long as they both shall live, and

7 WHEREAS, the Presbyterian Church(USA)'s Constitution, namely, the Book of Confessions and the Book of Order, affirm that the offices of minister, elder and deacon are open not simply to all church members but particularly to those who live an exemplary lifestyle, especially as regarding fidelity to God-ordained relationships, and

8 WHEREAS, the Presbyterian Church (USA), who in its attempts to defend the plight of those victimized by discrimination, nevertheless has never confused the defense of basic human rights with that of endorsing aberrant lifestyles nor with granting the privilege and calling of serving in the offices of church leadership,

RESOLVED, that the Presbyterian Church(USA) reaffirms its practice of proscribing from the office of minister, elder and deacon those persons engaging in unrepentant sexual behavior outside of the one husband-one wife covenant of marriage.

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³ Wm. Byne, MD, PhD, and Bruce Parsons, MD, PhD, "Human Sexual

Orientation: The Biological Theories Reappraised," in *Archives of General Psychiatry* published by the American Medical Association, vol. 50, Mr. '93, pp. 228-39.

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⁵ Joseph Gudel, "Homosexuality: Fact and Fiction," *Christian Research Journal*, Summer, '92, pp. 22ff.

⁶ William H. Masters, Virginia E. Brown and Robert C. Kolodny, *Human Sexuality*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1982, p.319.

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⁸ Confession of 1967, *The Book of Confessions*, 9.047.

⁹ Philip Turner, "Sexual Ethics in the Life of the Church", *VA Sem. Jnl.*, Mar, '91, p. 24.

¹⁰ Joseph Gudel, "Homosexuality: Fact and Fiction," *Christian Research Journal*, Summer, '92, pp. 22ff.

¹¹ Soards, op. cit., p. 11.

¹² Dr. Reuben Fine, "Psychoanalytic Theory," in *Male and Female Homosexuality: Psychological Approaches*, ed. , Louis Diamant, Hemisphere Pub., 1987, pp 84-6.

¹³ Irving Bieber and Toby B. Bieber, "Male Homosexuality," *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 24, No. 5, Ag '79, p 416.

¹⁴ Dr. Edmund Bergler, *Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life?*, Collier Books, 1962, p 277.

¹⁵ James R. Edwards, "The Holy Scripture is Authoritative in Sexual Matters of the Church" in *PFR reSource*, May, 1993, pp. 3,4.

¹⁶ Donald W. McCullough, "A Brief Affair or a New Marriage?" *Presbyterian Outlook*, Se. 6, '93, pp. 8,9.

¹⁷ Thomas W. Gillespie, introducing the *Definitive Guidance* to the General Assembly of 1978.

¹⁸ Bruce Metzger, "What Does the Bible Have to Say About Homosexuality?" in *PFR reSource*, My, '93p. 6.

¹⁹ Marion Soards, op. cit., p. 11.

²⁰ Elizabeth R. Achtemeier, "Homosexuality: What Does the Bible Say?" in *PFR reSource*, My, '93, p. 15.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Stanton L. Jones, op. cit., p. 23, 24.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Joseph Gudel, op. cit., p. 32.

²⁵ Kenneth Sawyer, "Questions of Presbyterian History and Polity," *Perspectives*, McCormick Theological Seminary, Winter 96, p. 3-4.

²⁶ "Maybe We're Talking About a Different God: The Church and Homosexuality," (a video) Downtown Presbyterian Church, Rochester, NY.

²⁷ Stanton L. Jones, op. cit., p. 24, 25.

ONE-BY-ONE MINISTRY: The new Presbyterian ministry, *One-by-One's* mission statement is, "to educate and equip the church to minister the transforming grace and power of Jesus Christ to those who are in conflict with their sexuality." The way this is done will vary from helping churches set up formal support groups to teaching individuals how to reach out to others within their congregations who are in conflict with their sexuality. Kathy and Jim Moore, co-directors of the ministry, can be reached at P.O. Box 10055, Rochester, NY 14610.

AN IMPORTANT BOOK: *Straight & Narrow? Compassion & Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* by **Thomas E. Schmidt**, Presbyterian professor of NT and Greek at Westmont College. "I welcome Tom Schmidt's *Straight & Narrow?* with enormous gratitude and the deepest appreciation. It is remarkably informative on medical and behavioral questions, as well as expertly incisive on the biblical evidence. It shirks no issue and evades no counter arguments. The author goes to extreme pains to be fair to revisionist viewpoints, and the whole is set in a person-focused pastoral frame. It is in my judgment without equal as an indictment--as devastating as it is calmly and lucidly argued--of the pro-gay case as not only unbiblical and unreasonable but also socially and medically highly irresponsible. A book that deploys accessible scholarship with prophetic power." David F. Wright, University of Edinburgh. Reprinted with the permission of InterVarsity Press

The Bible and the Practice of Homosexuality

by James R. Edwards*

The English word "homosexual" is a derivative of two words, the Greek word *homo*, meaning "same," and the Latin word *sexus* meaning "sex." "Homosexual," therefore, means same-sex activity, male with male, or female with female. In contemporary parlance male homosexuals are often called "gays," and female homosexuals "lesbians." The word "homosexual" is of relative modern origin, having been first coined about 1890. English translations of the Bible naturally do not use this modern term. The Scriptures are nevertheless acquainted with same-sex activity, and on each occasion where it is referred to it is condemned. The following is an examination and evaluation of the relevant Biblical evidence on the subject.

Old Testament

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

The most explicit and important reference to homosexuality in the Old Testament occurs in the Holiness Code of Leviticus. Leviticus 18:22 specifically states, "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable." The commandment is repeated in Leviticus 20:13, with the prescription of the death penalty for its infraction, "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads." In the Leviticus 18 passage the mention of homosexuality occurs in contexts of gross immorality: the verse preceding the prohibition of homosexuality in 18:22 forbids child sacrifice, and the verse following forbids bestiality. Moreover, in both passages male homosexuality is called an "abomination." The Hebrew word for "abomination," *tohehvah*, means an object of loathing. It is the strongest condemnation in the Old Testament for violations of an ethical and religious nature.

Objection: Some argue that *tohehvah* refers to ritual (i.e., Jewish cultic infractions) as opposed to moral violations incumbent on all persons. They argue, for example, that the prohibition against homosexuality in Leviticus is analogous to the prohibitions against eating pork or having sexual intercourse with a woman during her menstrual period. If these commandments have lost their

validity for us today, why should the prohibition of homosexuality be maintained?

Response: The Old Testament does not place homosexuality in the category of ritual or cultic infractions. *tohehvah* occurs in Leviticus only in 18:22, 26, 27, 29, 30, and 20:13, where it refers to the gross immorality of the Canaanites. The Greek translation of the term in the Septuagint, *bdelygma*, also means something detestable, arousing God's wrath. It too is reserved for grievous moral offenses. Moreover, the same word for "abomination" occurs in a list of *Gentile* sins in the Apocrypha in *Wisdom of Solomon* 12:23, which indicates that *bdelygma*, like *tohehvah*, is used with reference to human moral offenses, not Jewish cultic violations. (For further examples, see Deut. 12:31; 18:9, 12; 20:18; 1 Kings 14:24; 2 Kings 16:3; 21:2; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:2; 36:14; Isa. 44:19.)

The Reformed theological tradition, in particular, differentiates between cultic laws and moral laws in the Old Testament, the former being fulfilled in Christ, the latter retaining their moral force. This is evident in Scripture itself. Jesus, for example, permitted the eating of unclean foods (Mark 7), but he upheld the heterosexual model of creation (Mark 10:6-9). It is equally significant that although ritual prohibitions in the Old Testament are often ignored or violated by the early church, the prohibition against homosexuality is never questioned, but repeated and maintained in the New Testament and early church.

Other Old Testament Texts

In addition to these explicit prohibitions of homosexuality, the Old Testament elsewhere describes homosexual acts in equally reprehensible terms.

Genesis 19 and Judges 19

Genesis 19 and Judges 19 describe attempted homosexual gang rapes. Genesis 19:4-8 reads,

Before the men lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot,

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'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.' Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, 'No, my friends. Do not do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never known a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But do not do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.'

Similarly, Judges 19:22-24 reads,

While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, 'Bring out the man who came to your house so we may know him.' The owner of the house went outside and said to them, 'No, my friends, do not act so wickedly; seeing that this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But to this man, do not do such a disgraceful thing.'

Objection: Despite the plain meaning of these passages, a revisionist interpretation argues that the sin described here is not one of homosexuality but one of inhospitality. The supposed inhospitality consisted either in Lot's having received and entertained two foreigners whose intentions might be hostile toward the community (since Lot was himself a foreigner), or in the inhospitality of the men of the town toward the strangers, or in both. The verb "to know," it is argued, does not carry sexual connotations in Genesis 19 and Judges 19, but only the intent to become acquainted with the strangers.

Response: This interpretation is unpersuasive. It is highly questionable, first of all, whether inhospitality was forbidden as a sin in the Torah, and its punishment was certainly not ordained in the destruction of a city. More importantly, context and vocabulary in Genesis 19 and Judges 19 clearly indicate an attempted homosexual assault on the guests, since both stories indicate that the aggressors were (or would have been) satisfied by the surrendering of women to be sexually molested. The verb "to know" is a translation of the Hebrew **יָדָע** (*yada*), which in Genesis 4:1, for instance, carries sexual connotations. That is the clear meaning of the verb in Genesis 19:8 in reference to the "daughters who have not known a man"; the context of Genesis 19:5 likewise demands the meaning of a (homo)sexual assault. In Genesis 19:7 Lot begs the men of Sodom not to do this wicked (**רָעָה**, *tareu*) thing. These observations vigorously deny the suggestion that the men simply wanted to become acquainted with the strangers. Finally, in Genesis 19:13 the outcry of God against Sodom is so great that the city is destroyed. The same is also true in the Judges passage. In Judges 19:22 the Hebrew verb is also **יָדָע** (*yada*), again with homosexual connotations. And in v. 23 the deed is called (**רָעָה**, *tareu*), "a wicked thing."

Further references to Sodom's sins frequently allude to or mention the sin of homosexuality. Jude 7 castigates the Sodomites who "indulged in sexual immorality and pursued

unnatural lust (Greek = "other flesh"). Second Peter 2:7 refers to Genesis 19 with the expression, "the licentiousness of the lawless." The Greek word for "licentiousness," **ἀσελγεία** (*aselgeia*), is a strong term describing debauchery, sexual excesses, and brutality. In Ezekiel 16:46-50 Sodom is cited as a model of moral corruption, whose sin is called "abominable."

Extra-biblical texts similarly refer to Sodom's homosexual sin. The *Testament of Naphtali* 3:4-5, in the Pseudepigrapha, warns not to "become like Sodom which departed from the order of nature." The first century Jewish philosopher Philo (*On Abraham* 133-136) vigorously condemns Sodom, where "men mounted males without respect for the sex nature." The Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 1.200-201) speaks of the "Sodomites" . . . outrage to the youthful beauty" of the men Lot had received under his roof. The homosexual attack is alluded to in 3 Maccabees 2:5, where "the people of Sodom . . . were notorious for their vices," and in Jubilees 16:6, which refers to "the pollution of Sodom."

The church fathers, likewise, regarded the "Sodomites' offense, like that of the men of Gibeah (Judg. 19:22) [as a] demand for carnal knowledge of a neighbor's guests" (M. Pope, "Homosexuality," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* [Supl], 415). The divine displeasure with Sodom is signaled by its annihilation, which, incidentally, appears throughout the Biblical tradition as the symbol *par excellence* of divine vengeance (e.g., Matt. 10:15; 11:23-24; Luke 10:12, Rom. 9:29, and elsewhere in Philo and Josephus).

The attempted homosexual assaults in Genesis 19 and Judges 19 were not the extent of the sins committed, of course, as the subsequent rape of the women indicates. In the corrupt moral climate of Sodom, however, the rape of women was viewed as the lesser of two evils in comparison to a homosexual assault.

Deuteronomy 22:5

Deuteronomy 22:5 also bears a relationship to our subject. The text reads, "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination (**תּוֹהוֹוֹת**, *tohavvath*) to the Lord your God." The mention of transvestitism and its association with "abomination" is likely a reference to sexual inversion (see M. Pope, *IDB*[Supl], 416).

Deuteronomy 23:17-18

Deuteronomy 23:17-18 is also a relevant text.

Let there not be a female temple prostitute among the daughters of Israel, and let there not be a male temple prostitute (**כַּהֲדֵשׁ**, *kahdesh*) among the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot (**זוֹהֲנָה**, *zohnach*), or the wages of a dog (**כֶּהֱלֵב**, *kehlev*) into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow; for both of these are an abomination (**תּוֹהוֹוֹת**, *tohavvath*) to the Lord your God.

Objection: It is sometimes suggested that this text does not refer to homosexuality, but only that it forbids Israelites from participating in Canaanite fertility cults.

Response: The rabbinic tradition was agreed that Deuteronomy 23:17 referred to passive sodomy (*Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin* 54a-54b), although opinions varied whether it was punishable by death. Deuteronomy 23:17-18 must be read in conjunction with 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46, and 2 Kings 23:7, all of which allude to the presence of cultic prostitution, including male prostitution, in Jerusalem in the ninth, eighth, and seventh centuries B.C. These texts, along with 1 Kings 15:13, suggest that the queen mother maintained a fertility cult to the goddess Asherah in the Jerusalem temple (see S. Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult of Ancient Israel," *JBL* 112/3 (1993) 385-401). The following points are worthy of mention in connection with this evidence. First, since temple worship in Israel was limited to males, male cult prostitutes or "dogs" would have to refer to homosexual cult practices. Second, although homosexual practices were obviously infertile, homosexual copulation (along with heterosexual copulation) was apparently believed to effect fertility in a magical way. Finally, and most importantly, the reform effort associated with King Josiah (and Deuteronomy is generally associated with that reform) strenuously and systematically uprooted these sexual cult practices.

Note I:

Homosexuality and the Order of Creation

The argument that homosexuality is a God-given orientation or lifestyle, as is commonly asserted today, cannot be considered apart from reference to the order of creation in Genesis 1-2. Genesis 1:26 states that humanity is created in the image of God, and that being male and female reflect that image. The argument is frequently heard today that a sexual act is moral in so far as it expresses true affection between consenting individuals and gives pleasure to them. This is, however, neither a Biblical nor a moral argument, for as such it can be used to justify, in addition to homosexuality, adultery, group sex, sex with children, and even sex with animals. It defines a human person simply as a sentient being, which leads to a disembodied kind of love, whereas the image of God that is expressed in maleness and femaleness assumes a distinctiveness and continuity of self, sexual nature, and moral activity. The Apostle Paul, as we shall see, in fact appeals to this design in creation when he discusses the aberration of homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27.

God created the human race not in uniformity, but of complementary sexes, male and female, whose union is described as "one flesh." Heterosexual union, as guarded and preserved in the covenant of marriage, is not simply a human choice or one variety of sexual union among many, but an order of creation. It is a holy vocation in the sense that only this form of union allows humanity to fulfill God's command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Male and female thus find their mutual fulfillment, as well as their

procreative function, in their complementary opposite, a teaching that is reaffirmed in the New Testament in Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:6-8; and 1 Corinthians 11:7, 9.

It is often observed that Jesus made no pronouncement regarding homosexuality. It is sometimes inferred from this that homosexuality was therefore of no moral concern to our Lord. It should be noted, however, that on the question of marriage in Mark 10 Jesus corrected the liberal divorce policy of the tradition of the elders, which appealed to the Torah (Deut. 24:1,3), by citing God's design and purpose for marriage between one man and one woman in Genesis 1-2. If, according to Mark 10:6-12, the only alternative to faithful heterosexual marriage that Jesus permitted was that of celibacy, how probable is it that he would have accepted homosexual marriage, which was unequivocally repudiated in the Old Testament and Judaism?

Note II:

Cultural Attitudes toward Homosexuality in the Ancient Near East

It is often asserted that ethical teachings in the Bible, and specifically teaching regarding homosexuality, are culturally conditioned, i.e., that they were biased by the culture(s) in which the Israelites and early Christians lived, and hence cannot be regarded as absolutes for our day. The following evidence dispels this notion in the case of homosexuality.

In Mesopotamia, legal texts virtually ignore homosexual acts;

Among the Hittites, there was apparently no prohibition of homosexual acts;

In Ugarit, no information is available on the subject;

In Egypt, pederasty (adult males engaging in sexual intercourse with boys) was disapproved, but otherwise homosexuality was evidently not proscribed;

In Greece, homosexuality was as a rule viewed (and promoted) as a higher form of sexuality (e.g., Plato's *Symposium*).

In Rome, the Greek norm was adopted and carried to more decadent extremes, although the Stoic ideal of monogamy attempted to counterbalance otherwise widespread moral degeneracy.

As this review indicates, the Ancient Near East was ambivalent or permissive regarding the issue of homosexuality, and sometimes affirmative of it. The Biblical position on homosexuality does not reflect cultural norms, but more often than not opposes them. It is thus erroneous to assert that the Bible's position on this question is culturally determined.

New Testament

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

The earliest New Testament text bearing on homosexuality is 1 Corinthians 6:9-10,

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Neither fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Two terms in the above text deserve attention. The first is *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*), which the NRSV translates "male prostitutes." The denotation of *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*) in Greek literature is "soft," such as soft garments worn by fastidious people (Luke 7:25). It can, however, carry a connotation, as it does here, of "soft" persons or passive homosexual partners, specifically "men and boys who allow themselves to be misused homosexually" (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 489 [including a list of references in secular Greek literature where *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*) carries the same meaning]). The recent *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (2:381) defines *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*) in 1 Corinthians 6:9 as "reprehensible examples of passive homosexuality." The translation of this term in the Latin Vulgate, *mollis*, carries a corresponding sense. The presence of *πορνοι* (*pornoi*, fornication) and *μοιχοι* (*moichoi*, adultery) in this passage clearly indicates that *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*) is to be understood in the sense of sexual immorality.

The second term is *αρσενοκοιται* (*arsenokoitai*), which the NRSV translates, "sodomites," a term deriving from the infamy of Sodomy described in Genesis 19. Although this is the first occurrence of the term in Greek literature, there can be no doubt about its meaning. A compound word, *αρσενοκοιται* (*arsenokoitai*) means "(males) going to bed (or copulating) with males."

Objection: It is sometimes argued that the above two terms condemn only pederasty, i.e., sex between an adult male and a "call boy," rather than homosexuality between consenting adults.

Response: A number of scholars have argued convincingly that Paul coined *αρσενοκοιται* (*arsenokoitai*) from the presence of two adjacent words in Leviticus 20:13 (*αρσενος κοιτην*, *arsenos koiten*; see D. Malick, "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9," *Biblioteca Sacra* 150 [1993] 479-492). Leviticus 20:13, it will be recalled, is the strongest prohibition of homosexuality in the Old Testament. If, as appears likely, the Apostle Paul has this text in mind in utilizing *αρσενοκοιται* (*arsenokoitai*) in 1 Corinthians 6:9, then the term cannot be limited simply to the Greek practice of pederasty, as John Boswell and others argue, but must be seen as an all-encompassing condemnation of homosexuality (as in Lev. 20:13), including consenting adult homosexual relationships.

Hence, Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich (p. 109) correctly define the term as "a male homosexual, pederast, sodomite," as do Liddell, Scott, and Jones in the definitive *Greek-English Lexicon* (p. 246). The *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (1:158) defines the term as "referring to a male who engages in sexual activity with men or boys."

The term appears again in the New Testament in 1 Timothy 1:10 where it is paired with *πορνοι* (*pornoi*, fornicators), again establishing an illicit sexual practice. A century after Paul (about A.D. 155), *αρσενοκοιται* (*arsenokoitai*) was used by Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, in his epistle to the Philippians (5:3) warning young men "to cut themselves off from the lust of the world." Polycarp then quotes 1 Corinthians 6:9, and refers to the behaviors described therein as "iniquity" (*ατοπια*, *atopia*). The Latin Vulgate translates *αρσενοκοιται* (*arsenokoitai*) as *masculorum concubitores*, which, according to Cassell's *New Latin Dictionary*, means "the lying together or copulation of men." Cassell's includes passages from Cicero and Vergil where it carries this same sense.

Romans 1:26-27

The most unequivocal condemnation of homosexuality in the New Testament occurs in Romans 1:26-27,

Therefore God handed them over to dishonorable passions, their women exchanged the natural drive for the unnatural drive (*χρησις*, *chresis* = "relations" or "functions," especially of sexual intercourse), likewise also the men, having left the natural desire for women burned in their desire for one another, men for men, working out the shameful and receiving the just punishment that their error (or wandering) necessarily caused.

Objection: It is sometimes suggested that this passage is not a condemnation of homosexuality *per se*, but of persons who "exchange" their natural heterosexual orientation for homosexual acts.

Response: This view wrongly projects the modern concept of personality orientation onto the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul does not address the origins, motivations, or gratifications of homosexuality, including the modern concept of "sexual orientation." Arguments from such causes, whatever their biological, psychological, or sociological merit, would simply have been seen by the Apostle as further manifestations of the power of sin to confuse and blind human thinking (Rom. 1:28). The proscription here, as everywhere in Scripture, refers solely to *homosexual acts*.

Romans 1:26-27 actually broadens the Biblical condemnation of homosexuality to include the practice of lesbianism. In Romans 1:26-27 homosexuality is cited not because it is worse than other sins, but because it illustrates the problem of idolatry in 1:18-32. As Gentiles "exchanged" the truth of God for a lie and worshiped the creation instead of the Creator, so lesbianism and homosexuality "exchange" a natural relationship for an unnatural one. Idolatry and homosexuality, in other words, represent theological and

moral rebellion against God. The failure to worship and glorify God results in idolatry, and the failure to find one's sexual fulfillment in the opposite sex results in homosexuality. Idolatry and homosexuality inevitably result in an inversion or turning back on self for a fulfillment that God intended to be completed by the other. The result is alienation from God.

That "unnatural relations" (παρὰ φύσιν, *para phusin*) carries the sense of something contrary to the order of nature is evinced by its usage again in the analogy of the olive tree in Romans 11. There Paul writes that Gentiles "were cut off from their natural stock (κατὰ φύσιν, *kata phusin*) of the wild olive tree and ingrafted into the unnatural (παρὰ φύσιν, *para phusin*) cultured olive tree" (Rom. 11:24). Not surprisingly, παρὰ φύσιν (*para phusin*) becomes used for homosexuality in several subsequent Greek writers (see Athenagoras [13]; Philo [*On Abraham* 135-136, *On Special Laws* 3.39 preserves a stinging rebuke of pederasty as the "pursuit of unnatural pleasure," τὴν παρὰ φύσιν ἡδονὴν διώκει]; Plutarch [*Dialogue on Love* 751-752]; Dio Chrysostom [*Discourse* 7.135, 151-152]; Josephus [*Against Apion* 2.199, 273, 275]; and the *Testament of Naphtali* [3:3-4]).

Note III: Why are References to Homosexuality Relatively Infrequent in the Bible?

The frequency (or infrequency) of a statement is not necessarily an indication of its importance. Marriage vows, to take but one example, are said only once, but few will want to argue from this that they are of little importance. Nevertheless, it is often argued that because homosexuality is mentioned relatively infrequently in the Bible that it was relatively unimportant, and should be regarded so today.

This is an unwarranted conclusion. For one, the Hebrew tradition showed reticence and restraint with regard to explicit sexual references. Whenever possible, it employed euphemisms (e.g., the verb "to know") in order to avoid references to genitalia and to genital acts. This same reticence applied to acts of same sex intercourse.

Second, and more importantly, same-sex activity stood in obvious variance to the design of creation, wherein male and female become "one flesh," in both pleasure and procreation. The scarcity of references, in other words, is exactly what we would expect in a tradition that universally affirmed the God-giveness of heterosexuality and deplored deviations from that norm. Other acts that the Old Testament regarded as deplorable (e.g., child sacrifice) are mentioned no more frequently than homosexuality. This same argument, incidentally, applies to the relative infrequent mention of homosexuality in modern reference works. To cite but two examples. The fifteen-volume *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (1912; supplemental volumes, 1955) contains no entry on the subject of homosexuality. Again, Oxford University Press's two-volume *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (1992!) contains

no entry on the subject. Surely few will argue that the omission of the subject in these works is due to the fact that homosexuality is either widely approved, or of little moral importance. The answer, rather, is that it has been considered self-evident that the Judeo-Christian tradition always and everywhere condemned the practice of homosexuality. Hence the point needed not be re-established or elaborated. The reason homosexuality is under discussion today is not because the Scriptures are unclear on the subject, but because modern sexual practices have radically changed.

A third reason for the relative infrequency of the subject relates to the ethnic environment in which the Biblical writings arose and to which they were addressed. A general pattern can be observed. Where Biblical authors were writing to Jews living in a Jewish environment, references to homosexuality are relatively infrequent. The reason for this is because homosexuality was (and still is) a rare phenomenon in Jewish society, and hence posed little problem. The pattern changes, however, when Judeo-Christian authors began to address their counterparts in the Hellenistic Diaspora where homosexuality was widely practiced, and where it threatened the purity of faith and life. This explains the vastly increased number of condemnations of homosexuality in the extra-Biblical books of the Pseudepigrapha during the intertestamental period, which by and large were addressed to faith communities in the Diaspora (e.g., Pseudo-Phocylides 3; Sibylline Oracles 2.73; 3.185; 3.596; 4.34; 2 Enoch 34.2; Jubilees 13:18; 16:5-6; 20:5; 3 Maccabees 2:5; Pseudo-Philo 8:2; 45:1-6; and in the Testaments of Naphtali 3:5; Isaac 5:27; and Jacob 7:19-20). Each of these references expressly prohibits and condemns the practice of homosexuality.

A similar pattern is evident in the New Testament. Thus, Jesus, who moved in a predominantly Jewish milieu, made no reference to homosexuality, whereas Paul, who ministered in a Hellenistic milieu, makes specific reference to it in obvious places like Corinth and Rome. This pattern persists in the extra-Biblical books of the New Testament Apocrypha. The Apocalypse of Peter (32), for example, which probably arose in Egypt in the first half of the second century, contains the following passage: "There is no rest from torture, [for those] who defiled their bodies, behaving like women. And the women with them, these were those who behaved with one another as men with a woman."

A survey of the Biblical and extra-Biblical evidence regarding homosexuality results in a massive and unqualified condemnation of the practice. Richard Hays rightly summarizes the evidence thus: "Every pertinent Christian text from the pre-Constantinian period . . . adopts an unremittingly negative judgment on homosexual practice, and this tradition is emphatically carried forward by all major Christian writers of the fourth and fifth centuries" ("A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1," *JRE* 14/1 (1986) 202).

Note IV: Homosexuality and Idolatry

Along with the increase in references to homosexuality in Biblical and extra-Biblical works directed to the Diaspora, there is a similar tendency in the same works to refer to homosexuality in conjunction with idolatry. This is, as we have seen, the case in Romans 1:18-32, and is more often than not the case in the texts cited above. Idolatry was regarded as the single greatest threat to the Judeo-Christian tradition. The mention of homosexuality in conjunction with idolatry thus indicates its seriousness as a moral offense in the eyes of that tradition.

Note V: Homosexual Orientation and Moral Accountability

Many homosexuals claim that they have no awareness of having chosen homosexuality. A conclusion sometimes drawn from this is that the individual has no capacity to choose sexual orientation, and hence that sexual orientation is beyond moral prescriptions, including those of Scripture. "Sexual orientation," as noted earlier, is a modern concept that is alien to Scripture. The Biblical and extra-Biblical texts cited above refer solely to sexual practices. The gospel does not address sin at the level of creation, but at the level of redemption. That is to say, Scripture does not give conclusive answers as to why things are the way they are in the world, but it does speak of their transformation by the power of God. Thus, although human beings do not choose the state into which they are born, they do have a choice over how they respond to their state. Hence, a predisposition or orientation toward a certain course of action does not produce a "right" to do it, or justify acting upon it. The current state of behavioral research indicates that sexual orientation is more a function of post-natal psycho-social development than of biological constitution. Human sexual behavior is the product of a network of interacting factors, and *human choice cannot be eliminated as one of them.*

Whatever the ultimate causes of homosexuality, the church should not fall into the error of thinking of homosexuality as a behavior that cannot be resisted. "It must be made quite clear that the genuine invert is not necessarily given to homosexual practices, and may exercise as careful control over his or her physical impulses as the heterosexual"

(Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* [London: Archon Books, 1975], p. xi). This salutary statement was written by a scholar who *advocated* homosexual causes. To be human means to be able to make moral choices. The gospel does not make moral demands that believers cannot fulfill, and that includes the Biblical proscriptions against homosexual practices.

The gospel assures believers of forgiveness and grace as they struggle with sin. Paul establishes grounds for this hope immediately following mention of homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9, "And that is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." In 1 Corinthians 10:13 Paul states, "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it." Again, in Galatians 5:1, Paul speaks of Christian freedom as receiving God's gracious word of justification, and of a subsequent reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit and resistance to the works of the flesh.

Conclusion

Without fail, Biblical and extra-Biblical sources condemn the practice of homosexuality. There is no text in Judeo-Christian literature from Leviticus to Constantine that condones it. This should be sufficient and compelling evidence against accepting the practice of homosexuality as a gift of God, or as an alternative and morally justifiable lifestyle. Churches, particularly those whose creedal traditions assent to the authority of Scripture, must give full weight to the Scriptural position on this subject in both their teaching and in the ordering of their life. The above evidence argues that the church cannot ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals to the offices of ministry and maintain fidelity to Scripture and creeds.

At the same time, the gospel requires love and understanding of persons of homosexual lifestyle, and the offering of all available help to those who desire it. Persons of homosexual inclination who choose to remain celibate and resist their temptations through faith, prayer, and abstinence have every right to the sacraments and offices of the church, including ordination, that are open to every other sinner who, by God's grace, struggles against sin and relinquishes his or her life to the transformation of the gospel.

Why We Believe in Heresy

by Thomas C. Oden

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As this issue goes to press, the Episcopal Church is reluctantly trying one of its bishops (who flagrantly ordained

a practicing homosexual) for heresy. Already, the trial has been delayed by procedural moves, including changes of

venue and a call for a preliminary hearing on whether the Episcopal Church even has a doctrine that addresses the bishop's alleged misconduct and the false teaching on which it was based. If the court decides there is no such doctrine, the heresy trial will be aborted.

Excesses elicit correctives. Each new imbalanced approach to the faith gives the church the fresh opportunity to demonstrate the fine, subtle equilibrium of faith that makes it beautiful. Heresy occurs where some legitimate dimension of faith is so weighted out of equilibrium as to become a principle of interpretation for all other aspects, thus denying the unity and proportionality of the ancient always-everywhere-and-by-everyone consensus.

God allows heresies to challenge the church in order to bring us to a fuller understanding of the truth. We hope the Episcopal Church will discover that.

HUNTING FOR HERESY

The Greek word behind *heresy* means the act of choosing: the self-willing choice that departs from apostolic teaching. Marcion, Montanus, and Arius were all convinced they had a clearer picture. The current error does not proclaim a better truth, but that all truths are equal and none is superior. The old-time heretic had excessive regard for his own "truth." Nevertheless, the modern relativist may be every bit as willful in considering all truths "valid." Thus the difficulty for someone who wants to discuss heresy.

I have had the dubious honor of being tagged a heresy-hunter. I first considered calling myself a victim, an abused truth-seeker. Instead I have embraced *heresy-hunter* in an ironic sense: I am looking for some church discussion, even a bull session, in which heresy exists, at least in theory.

Today, the archheresiarch is the one who hints that some distinction might be needed between truth and falsehood, right and wrong. This is often treated incredulously by a relativist majority.

Oldline Protestantism at its tolerant and vulnerable zenith finally achieved what inquisitors and crusaders could not: the eradication of heresy. No heresy of any kind any longer exists within this pliable, smiling ecclesial ethos—except, perhaps, for offenses against inclusivism.

After centuries of struggle with the truth, heresy has finally been banished from the doctrinally experimental inclusive church. This unprecedented accomplishment is an ironic twist on the conservative search for the purity of the church: Rather than separate itself from the sinful and heterodox, the church now simply excludes sin and heresy from consideration.

Sadly, there is no way even to raise the question of where the boundaries of legitimate Christian belief lie when absolute relativism holds sway.

ABSOLUTE RELATIVISM

To proclaim generously that anyone's truth is as valid as anyone else's truth is to deny the existence of truth altogether. The early church could not proclaim its message without distinguishing that message from other messages. It is only when we begin to have the courage to specify the things that are not the faith clearly that our affirmations can be taken seriously.

It was not until Athanasius ruled out Arian excesses that he became a serviceable theologian. It was only when Luther said no to indulgences that he became a Reformer. Today the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord requires a decisive repudiation of views that demean the atoning work of God the Son. The worshiping community cannot in the name of inclusiveness honestly allow the implication that the salvation accomplished once for all on the cross is one among many salvations.

There is a fantasy abroad that the Christian community can have a center without a circumference. Since we gather around Jesus, it is argued, it is our center, not our boundaries, that matter. But this is the persistent illusion of compulsive hypertolerance. A community with no boundaries can neither have a center nor be a community.

A center without a circumference is a dot, nothing more. Without boundaries, a circle is not a circle. The circle of faith cannot identify its center without recognizing its margins. The debate about whether heresy can be defined is a struggle to specify margins, the legitimate boundaries of the worshiping community.

The rediscovery of boundaries will be the preoccupation of twenty-first century theology. Some cannot imagine any boundary-making work without becoming anxious. They recount the sins of the last five centuries: a history that left many dead and wounded. Rather than fixate on these *last* five centuries, we should instead reexamine the *first* five centuries, a time of flourishing consensus, as evidenced in the seven Ecumenical Councils and the most widely regarded Doctors of the Church venerated East and West.

Some think that specifying boundaries at all will be tainted by hubris and splattered with blood. The apostolic faith has learned under the guidance of the Spirit that when the boundaries are accurately stated, conflict and hubris are tamed and purified.

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