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Editorial

The Church in the West is in deep turmoil on the issue of sexual integrity. The misuse of contraceptives, abortion, adultery, divorce, remarriage and homosexuality are hotly debated. Secular humanistic values and post-secular forms of spirituality are challenging the basic assumptions of historic Christianity. Modern media are their chief weapons. Practising homosexuals and their sympathizers are demanding equal rights with those engaged in heterosexual lifestyles. The eye of the storm for the Church is the ordination to the ministry of practising homosexual men and women.

On one hand the issue is the exegesis and interpretation of the few biblical texts that speak directly to the subject; on the other, it is the fundamental doctrine of humanity created in the image of God, the nature of marriage and the family and ultimately the being of God in trinitarian relationship. Some see it as a theological crisis comparable to the Christological crisis of the early Nicean era.

So far, homosexuality is not a major issue in the 'Third World' except in urban contexts impacted by secular modernity. Churches in Africa continue to struggle with their response to the complex issue of polygamy. Some African Church leaders see Western serial marriage as but another version of polygamy.

This issue of ERT is but an introduction to the Church's call for sexual integrity. Space forbids the inclusion of many other valuable articles worthy of being published in this issue.

Editor p.4

Two Case Studies

Eliot

Reprinted with permission from *Craving for Love* by Briar Whitehead
(*Tunbridge Wells, Monarch, 1993*) pp. 180–182.

Noel and Jan

Reprinted with permission from Submission to the Justice and Law
Reform Select Committee on The Human Rights Commission
Amendment Bill 1992 (*Lower Hutt, Lion of Judah Ministries 1993*) pp.
150–153.

These stories need no introduction. They confront us with the pain and rejection of those who struggle with the reality of their human sexuality, and with defeat and victory. Let those who have no sin cost the first stone.

Editor

ELIOT

Eliot, a son of missionaries, but no longer a church-goer, says he first became aware of wanting to be ‘really close to boys’ when he was four. As a high-profile Christian teenager, and worship leader, fighting attraction to men, he spent hours on his knees, praying till he broke out in sweats, plagued with guilt. ‘I can’t tell you the number of times I was on my knees in prayer about wanting to be different and wanting to change. I can’t describe—it was agony at some stages—emotional agony.’ He begged God for help. It made no difference. After ‘a hell of a year’ at age seventeen in which he finally concluded he was gay he came home to tell his mother, and his father, who was an elder. ‘My mother cried for it seemed like six years and said, ‘How could you? How could you?’ My father just pulled back, became his usual distant, clinical self as if he wasn’t really there—and analyzed everything.’ His pastor visited and he was given an ultimatum: Go and get prayer and deliverance and stop what you’re doing, or you’ll have to resign your membership. ‘I got a lot of judgement, I was told to pray about this and pray about that, go for runs and have cold showers and get deliverance.’ His former friends in the church avoided him:

I couldn’t believe how these people who had been my close friends all of a sudden wouldn’t speak to me on the street; people walking straight past me, or ducking into shops so they wouldn’t have to talk to me. There wasn’t a shred of warmth or support. It would have been really nice if someone had just said, ‘It’s OK, you’re going through this and it’s OK.’ But no, they had a public meeting about my membership and decided that I wasn’t to be involved in the church anymore. I was only p. 5 eighteen. Even if people had said to me, ‘Look maybe we don’t understand ...’ that’s actually a lot better than people saying, ‘We understand.’ In fact for people to have said to me that they understood would have been totally patronising and too late, because I’d heard all the negative messages right from when I was a child about homosexuality. They didn’t understand at all. All I got was judgement and fear and ignorance, and I don’t know how people who supposedly have been loving and warm and open just ... click ... just like that. When I said I lost all my friends, I lost all my friends, because when my parents came back from the mission field I didn’t know a soul and I made my friends in the church because they were open and warm and friendly.

When he left home, Eliot said, ‘I got letters from my parents laying it on, “We pray for you constantly that God will deliver you from this.”’

Not surprisingly perhaps, Eliot went into the gay scene, and is still there—after seven years. Eliot is now a convert to gay theology, and says he finds no conflict between the Bible and his lifestyle. But it’s clear as he talks that the Christianity he knew as a teenager was getting nowhere near the deep needs that underlay his homosexuality.

The joyous Christian life was very rarely joyous for me, and I can’t say how much energy I put into trying to get this thing—this joyous Christian life. There were just all these rules and you had to do them or die and go to hell. The Holy Spirit came to give you the power to do the rules—so that your whole life was going to be a struggle of trying to get the Holy Spirit so you could do the rules. And God sat up there and if you tried hard enough to be close to him, then he would sometimes reach down and give a little stroke and that would be a spiritual buzz that would happen about once every couple of years to keep you going.

Eliot had been craving male love for a long time, love from his father, love from God. His concept of God mirrored that of his father—distant, aloof, unaffirming. He remembers doing many things to try to get his father’s approval but never succeeding, just as he tried to win God’s approval but felt he never succeeded there either. When he finally concluded he was gay, and his support system crashed around him, his relationship with God—built as it was upon rules and earning God’s love—was too fragile to hold him. Thousands of other genuine Christian men and women struggling with homosexuality will talk just as Eliot has—of striving as hard as any Christian could reasonably be expected to, against something they didn’t understand and didn’t want, trying to follow Christ and live a holy life, and knowing that the church was their foe rather than their friend. Eliot’s church is just like so many churches—full of good and genuine people—who don’t know how else to respond.

NOEL

If you were to ask me, ‘What made you happy in the gay lifestyle?’ I would answer, ‘Total involvement in the gay world.’ All my waking hours were spent thinking about gays, sex and how to win changes in the law. I lived for it. **P. 6**

On March 22 this year (1993) I will have been out of the homosexual lifestyle for 10 years.

People say you’re born gay, but no-one is born gay. In my brokenness and rejection and search for a father figure I was introduced to homosexuality and opened myself up to it. It’s very threatening to gays to tell them they can become heterosexual because they have spent so long trying to accept a homosexual identity. Because I am now fully heterosexual gays try to tell me I was never homosexual, but how long do you have to serve an apprenticeship before you can call yourself homosexual?

I was raped by a Minister of Religion when I was seven-and-a-half. By the age of 12 I was a practising homosexual, and from the late sixties active in the gay community in Auckland. For ten years in the sixties and seventies I was active in the Gay Rights Coalition. I used to fabricate cases of discrimination against gays to help build the case for homosexual law reform. In the early seventies I was a founding member of New Zealand’s first gay church, the Metropolitan Community Church that used to meet in St. Matthew’s Crypt in Auckland. In the late seventies I was deeply involved in the gay scene in London and Amsterdam.

For me, as long as I was affirmed as a good gay I was relatively happy. It never dawned on me that there was more to life than what I was experiencing. There were some exciting and happy times in the scene, but more often than not I was sad and depressed. I was always looking for someone to affirm me as a man—for love and acceptance—but I never found it.

As you get older, heavier and less attractive in the gay scene you’re cast aside and the hate and rejection is hard to take. I realized that I was wanted for only one thing: sex; my body; not me as a person. I didn’t actually find the gay lifestyle to be accepting and loving. I found it very catty, very violent, very abusive and very destructive of one’s trust and self-worth.

In early March, 1983, I guess I’d come to the end of my tether, and wanted to take my life. Nothing seemed to be real anymore. Even though life had been exciting in my early teens and twenties, I knew that homosexuality was inherently wrong. It was then that I met some people in Tunis, North Africa, who were Christians and who really understood my loneliness and sense of worthlessness as a person.

The Anglican Minister was gentle and compassionate. He, his wife and a few friends reached out to me and accepted me in a way I had never experienced in over 30 years. The life and love and acceptance of this man got through to me. He told me about Jesus and how he died. I was attracted to Christianity and on March 22, 1983 I became a Christian. Now, ten years later I am a healed person, as heterosexual as the next man.

A lot had to change. My thought processes were all homosexual. My jokes were homosexual, my friends were homosexual, everything I read was homosexual. I fed myself with a diet of porn magazines and pore videos. I spent a lot of time thinking about my next sexual conquest and [p. 7](#) going to new bars, parks, toilets. A lot of my thinking and excitement revolved around my next sexual conquest. You might think, how distorted. But the truth is that the desire for sex is so strong in the homosexual community that gay men can be motivated entirely by the need for sex, and give everything to that end. That is not a distortion of the truth. There is a lot of lying and cheating in the gay lifestyle. The gays always paint a rosy, spectacular picture of the lifestyle, one designed to impress.

For the next five years I basically worked on my own to become a heterosexual. Having met my needs through sex for so long, the thought of being celibate for the rest of my life freaked me out. So I realized I have to become completely heterosexual—on the inside. I had spent many years in the lifestyle learning to be gay. My acts reinforced how good I was at being homosexual. Now I had to work through the issues. What issues?

Well, for example, let me talk about my fantasies. Whenever I wanted to masturbate my head automatically turned on the videotape or fantasy or something I had seen in a magazine, or in a toilet, or in a bed or on a video.

I've often heard people say that masturbation is OK, it doesn't hurt anybody, but let's re-examine this. Whenever I masturbated I reinforced my image of myself as a homosexual. My whole fantasy life was that of a homosexual not a heterosexual. Pornography had a dreadful grip on my life. If I passed a pore shop I couldn't resist going in and picking up the latest magazine. So I got rid of all my pornography. But you can always go and get more, and I knew that. So I made myself accountable to my pastor who would ask me straight out each day: Have you been reading porn? Have you bought any pore? Have you been masturbating. And because I had promised not to lie to him I had to be able to say 'No'.

But you can still fantasize in your head. So I got into a habit that whenever I wanted to start fantasizing I would telephone my pastor instead and we'd have a prayer meeting. It's hard to have homosexual fantasies while your're praying.

So, in this way, bit by bit, homosexual fantasies lost their grip on me. And as I worked through this issue other things began to change at the same time. Now I no longer have homosexual fantasies. I have heterosexual fantasies.

On March 26, 1988 I married a beautiful person: my wife, and I know that I am fully heterosexual, though I am not saying an ex-gay has to be married to be healed.

I was an extremely aggressive individual, but through genuine love and acceptance I found it was possible to let my defences down and learn to trust. I have healthy male friendships; I am no longer emotionally dependent on other males.

I changed by facing up to the real reasons why I was gay. I found that in being honest with myself and another person and learning to accept correction, I could change.

Nor am I the only one with this kind of story; there are thousands of others.

There have been many difficult [p. 8](#) issues to face in the last ten years, and it would take a book to describe all the changes that have taken place in me, but with sheer determination and trust in God, these last ten years have been the happiest of my life.

It has not been easy to be married to an ex-gay. Although Noel and I have a sound and fulfilling marriage we have encountered intense opposition from those who do not believe gays can ever change: seven months of vile and abusive phone calls from the gay community, twenty-four hours a day; bomb threats, death threats and attacks from gays in public, either trying to sexually entice my husband or convince me he was still having sex with them. They have told me they are going to cut me up into little pieces. Nor has the heterosexual community—sceptical of and unfamiliar with the concept that gays can change—been very understanding or supportive.

Noel has changed remarkably. He has grown up emotionally. He now relates to women as a man with women, instead—as many gays do—as a man who identifies with women rather than his male gender. He was once touchy and aggressive with gay traits of sarcasm, defensiveness and anger. He has become compassionate, more patient, caring and understanding.

Noel is an honest and courageous man. He is a healed homosexual, a whole heterosexual man. I believe he is probably a better example of what a heterosexual man should be than most heterosexual men. [p. 9](#)

The St Louis Statement on Human Sexuality

*Reprinted with permission from Resource, a publication of
Presbyterians for Renewal (March 1994)*

The St Louis Statement developed by a group of Presbyterians meeting at St Louis in April 1991 was specified by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) later in that year as a resource for the Church's continuing study on human sexuality. The subsequent General Assembly overwhelmingly voted to preclude ordination to self-affirming, practising, unrepentant homosexual persons. This extended Statement deserves careful study by other churches facing the same issues. It reaffirms the authority of Scripture in sexual matters and responds to a wide range of questions raised in the Bible and by churches today—for example, sexual abuse and family violence, teenage sex, issues confronting older single persons and the place of homosexuals in the Church.

Editor

I. A THEOLOGY RELATING TO THE HUMAN BODY

'All things are lawful for me', but not all things are beneficial. 'All things are lawful for me', but I will not be dominated by anything. 'Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food', and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, 'The two shall be one flesh.' But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but

fornication sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your **P. 10** body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body. ([1 Cor. 6:12-20](#) NRSV)

The passage above was addressed to Christians who lived in a city that had more than a thousand cult-prostitutes in the service of the goddess Aphrodite, and who lived in a society that extolled the practice of homosexuality and pederasty. Licentious practices were such a scandal that the city bequeathed a verb to the Greek language, 'to act like a Corinthian'.

Contrary to such cultural influences. Paul proclaimed a divinely-ordained morality. Throughout Corinthians Paul celebrates the human body as the vessel of God's indwelling in believers, as well as the vessel of the believers' obedience to God.

This leads to a new orientation of life. Formerly, since we belonged to ourselves we were free to please ourselves. But now, redemption in Jesus Christ has established believers under a new and liberating authority that supersedes the old authority of sin and death. We have been purchased with the price of his life, and consequently we no longer belong to ourselves but to Christ. So total is our possession by Christ that even our bodies are included. The totality of God's claim over believers is revealed by linking our bodies to the Trinitarian nature of God. Thus, Paul explains that our bodies are gifts from God, they are members of *Christ*, and they are the temple of the *Holy Spirit*.

The Christian's body is thus transformed into the dwelling of God and made to participate in the mystery of redemption, namely, that God wills to be enfleshed in creation. God's dwelling in creation was first initiated in the tabernacle in the wilderness, which symbolized God's presence with Israel. In Jesus all the fulness of God dwelt bodily ([Col. 2:9](#)). And now through faith the bodies of believers become the temple of God, in which the Spirit dwells and furthers the redemptive work of Christ in the world.

This results in a total reorientation of life. If the old priority was to please self, the new one must be to please God. If our bodies will one day be raised by God's power, then God has even now laid claim to them as vessels for his glory in the world. If the body belongs to the Lord and the Lord to the body, then refraining from illicit sexual practices is both a demonstrable act of obedience and a witness to the world of our fellowship with Christ and the church. The one-flesh of the marriage union represents the mystery of our union with Christ by faith. We shun fornication in order to entrust ourselves fully to God in our bodily existence, as God has surrendered himself fully to us in the body of his Son on the cross. 'You were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.'

II. THE HOLY SCRIPTURE IS AUTHORITATIVE IN SEXUAL MATTERS OF THE CHURCH

It was the abiding contribution of the Reformation that Scripture—and Scripture alone—is the means by which God speaks to the church. In the history of creedalism, including **P. 11** the Reformed tradition, nearly all creeds contain an article on the authority of Scripture for faith and life. *Sola Scriptura* was not an invention of the Reformation but a rediscovery of a central truth which was embedded in Scripture itself, as attested, for instance, in [Romans 15:4](#):

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

and again,

And we also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God, that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers. ([1 Thess. 2:13](#)).

A further axiom of Reformed teaching going back to Calvin is that the Holy Spirit 'illuminates Scripture' by transforming human words into the God-given energy of salvation. This is a theological way of saying that *Scripture is self-authenticating*, and that the church cannot 'prove' Scripture either historically or rationally. The critical sciences, of course, bear witness at a penultimate level to certain truths of Scripture. Historical criticism, for example, can demonstrate to the unbiased mind that Christ died, and it can be argued from various ethical canons that the moral law of the Old Testament is just. But the saving purpose of Scripture is not that Christ died, but that Christ died *for us* ([Rom. 5:8](#)); not that the moral life is good, but that it is *pleasing to God* ([Rom. 12:1](#)). These are the ultimate, saving truths of Scripture, and they are revealed only by the Holy Spirit to the unbelieving heart.

If the Holy Spirit illuminates Scripture, it follows that a generation which is unlettered in Scripture will perceive the Spirit's testimony *to Scripture* in a much less distinct and compelling way, just as a candle, for instance, is less distinct in a basement than in a hall of mirrors. The decline in biblical literacy is, thus, one reason why the current generation of Presbyterians has lost its bearings in the maze of changes in ethics, including sexual perception and behaviour.

Moreover, if the Spirit forever bears witness to the Word of God, both the incarnate Word and the written word, then it would be a theological offence against the Trinity to assume that the 'Spirit' is bearing witness to the church through changing social conditions in such a way as to cause it to act at variance to the expressed word of God in Scripture on such matters. A theological conclusion that separates the church from the source of its revelation is an internal contradiction. By definition, a Christian truth unites the church to Christ and to Christ's people.

The apostle Paul called the people of God 'to announce the *whole* counsel of God' ([Acts 20:27](#)) and the resurrected Lord included in the apostolic commission the command 'to obey *everything* that I have commanded' ([Matt. 28:20](#)), including sexual, social, and economic righteousness. The Reformed tradition has been a vital tradition, moreover, not because of a professed dogma of the authority of Scripture, but because of its practice of obedience to Scripture. It is [p. 12](#) 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. It is precisely the 'higher righteousness' of Jesus that makes the gospel distinctive and redemptive, and that makes the church faithful and purposeful. It must, therefore, be our purpose as a faithful church to call women and men to obedience to Scripture's teaching and to name as sin all conduct that is contrary to Scripture.

In all eras the church has been tempted to accommodate its teaching to the culture. The wish for accommodation to culture, however, has always become a death-wish for the people of God. 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.

Within this decade, our church has forcefully reaffirmed its position on the precedence of Holy Scripture: 'In matters of faith, life, and salvation, Scripture takes precedence over all other authorities. However, the precedence of Scripture does not call for the disregard of other authorities. There are other sources from which we can learn something of the matters with which Scripture deals uniquely. Examples of such sources which deserve our respect include church councils, laws and decrees; ancient and modern theologians and thinkers in general; and various forms of knowledge and experience.... The witness of Scripture on matters within its purpose is authoritative over all other knowledge, opinions, and theories. This priority has implications for the way Scripture is used in relation to other forms of knowledge when dealing with issues of doctrine and obedience. 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.

'Since God is creator of all things, respect for the priority of Scripture does not exclude but requires respect for the subordinate, relative authority of such secular disciplines as the natural sciences, psychology, sociology, philosophy, economic and political research. Yet the priority of Scripture is compromised when Scripture is forced to conform or made subordinate to personal likes or dislikes; to any psychology, political, economic, or philosophical ideology, programme or method; to the authority of human reason and logical consistence in general; or to personal or collective "experience".¹ p. 13

The Declaration of Barmen in our *Book of Confessions* is clear and uncompromising in its insistence on the precedence of Scripture over all other claims about God's will. Vigorously opposing the imposition of an idealistic norm in the church of a previous generation, Barmen states: We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides, this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures or truths, as God's revelation.... We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions.... We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans.²

In our day this means:

- That any testimony of the 'oppressed', as in a liberationist perspective, must be measured against the teaching of Scripture;
- That inclusiveness, as desirable as it is, cannot be enthroned as an absolute value, but is subject also to biblical authority;
- That biblical concepts and words, such as 'fidelity', cannot be redefined in ways contrary to their biblical definitions.

G. K. Chesterton once said that when people stop believing in God they do not believe in nothing; they believe in anything. More recently, Karl Popper said that 'the conspiracy theory of society ... comes from abandoning God and then asking, "Who is in his place?" ' Shall the church put changing social conditions in that place? If the church will not live by the authority of God's word in sexual matters—as in all matters—then by what authority will it live? Will it surrender its sole foundation for faith and life to the arbitrariness of

¹ *Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture* Position Statement of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church U.S.A., published by The Office of the General Assembly, Louisville, KY.

² *Book of Confessions*, Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8-12; 8:18:27.

individual conscience, or to the latest sociological finding or psychological study? As Jaroslav Pelikan, a scholar who has devoted a lifetime of study to the development of doctrine, reminds us, 'It was heresy that constantly changed, that was guilty of innovation, that did not stick to the "faith which God entrusted to his people once and for all" ([Jude 3](#))'.³

We reject any notion that assumes that the light and knowledge which we currently possess on sexuality is superior to biblical mandates on such matters, and that such knowledge would be the norm for a fresh word on the subject. Is not the historic word of the church an essential corrective for a generation which is so sure of itself in such matters? At least since the beginning of the fifth century orthodoxy has been characterized as *ublique, semper, et ab omnibus*—as that which possesses the authority of universality, antiquity, p. 14 and consensus. Along with the doctrines of the Incarnation and Trinity, the authority of Scripture is one of the indispensable links by which the church maintains historical continuity with the source of its revelation, and universal fellowship with the communion of saints, both now and in the world to come.

The church is not inclusive when inclusiveness becomes its main objective, in the same way that happiness is seldom, if ever, found by seeking it. Inclusiveness, like happiness, is a by-product of seeking something other, and greater, than itself. The great longing of the church today is away from secondary and peripheral issues and toward a genuine encounter with God and a renewed understanding of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and in Scripture. In the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar:

Today the Christian people (or what is left of it) is searching with a lamp for persons who radiate something of the light, something of nearness to the source. It has long since had enough of modernities, lacking all religious instinct, which trumpet it from the press, the radio, and often enough from the pulpit. It is said because ... the 'one thing necessary' could be totally blocked off and made inaccessible by the 'experts', or the many dilettantes and apostates who pose as such ... The people has a sharp ear for spiritual sour notes.⁴

In the maelstrom of change surrounding it today, the church is desperately in search of the 'one thing necessary'. A story of Henry Van Dyke's entitled, 'The Keeper of the Light', is a parable for the church today:

A young daughter of a lighthouse keeper had inherited her father's work at his death. Once the supply boat bringing food to the remote hamlet was delayed. The people decided that they would have to use for food the oil intended for the light. The girl locked herself in the lighthouse and defended the oil with an old firearm of her father's. At the risk of her life, she kept the light burning until the supply boat arrived. Had the light gone out, the boat would have been wrecked, and they would all have perished.⁵

III. QUESTIONS RELATING TO A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN AEXUALITY

A. Why Did God Make Two Sexes

³ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Melody of Theology: A Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 52–53.

⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Convergences: To the Source of Christian Mystery* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 14–15.

⁵ Cited by Donald G. Miller in 'What Is the Future of Theological Education?', *Presbyterian Life*, August 15, 1969, 32.

We do not presume to know the last and deepest secrets of our sexuality. Our knowledge is partial, and here we stand in the presence of mystery. In the long history of the human race people have often associated sex with religion, as though sex were somehow the gateway to ultimate mystery, to God. Christian ethicist Lewis Smedes writes: 'What distorted vision of reality led those ancient Canaanites to their shrines of prostitution? What was it, on the other hand, that led Paul to see marriage as an illustration of how Christ relates to the church and to see sexual intercourse as a mysterious life-uniting act that so radically altered p. 15 the partner's individual existence that they become one flesh? Christianity knows that we do not get to God through ecstasy of the flesh. But the ecstasy of sexual fulfillment is not absolutely unlike the ecstasy of religious experience, otherwise it would not have been so often identified with it.'⁶

In speaking of our sexuality, we do acknowledge mystery. And we do acknowledge revelation, that which God has chosen to tell us of the good and gracious purpose in the creation-design of two sexes. Two passages in Genesis deal with the sexes: the story in chapter 1 (verses 26-31) and the story in chapter 2 (verses 15-25). The word of blessing in the first chapter (verse 28), in which God says to the female and the male: 'Be fruitful and multiply', is surely part of God's good purpose in the making of two sexes.

But there is more, a great deal more. Very careful attention needs to be given to the story in [Genesis 2](#), and a more poetic and lyrical approach, such as that of Smedes, may be the best vehicle for understanding it: 'God made a male body-person, and his name was *Ish*. But he was not alone. Had *he* been asked what it was like to be a male, he would have winced in ignorance: "What is a male?" How could he know what a male was as long as there was no female to make him aware? Yet, there was a kind of semiconscious awareness, it came in the form of restlessness. His heart and body were restless until they found their rest in femaleness. God took care of this. God caused a deep sleep, and while he slept took one of his ribs ... and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman. This done, God led the female to *Ish* as fathers (once led) brides to their husbands. Adam saw her and intuitively recognized her as the answer for the deep need surging through his body. "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman" (*Ishsha*). *Ish* and *Ishsha* together—as body-persons. Now the male knew what it was like to be a male, for he now saw himself in relation to one who was the same as he, but with the crucial difference.'⁷

Smedes goes on: 'The male and female know themselves only in relation to each other because they are made for each other. This is the deep origin of the powerful drive of the sexes to come together. It arises from the body-life humans share, with a difference. Male and female are driven toward each other until they again become "one flesh" in intimate body-union.

'God did not wince when Adam, seeing Eve, was moved to get close to her. Male and female were created sexual to be sexual together. When Adam and Eve, *Ish* and *Ishshah*, clung together in the soft grass of Eden, until wild with erotic passion, and finally fulfilled in their love, we may suppose that God looked on and smiled. We may suppose, too, that it never entered God's mind that, when those two created beings were sexually aroused they were submitting to a demonic lust percolating p. 16 up from some subhuman abyss to ensnare their virgin souls. Body-persons have a side to them that is wildly irrational, splendidly spontaneous, and beautifully sensuous. This is not a regrettable remnant of the best in human beings, a fiendish enemy in humanity's personal, inner cold war. It is a gift

⁶ Lewis B. Smedes, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 21.

⁷ Smedes, 29.

that comes along with being body-persons. God did not stick with making angels; God was delighted to have body-persons.’⁸

Both divine and human delight come through together in the wonderful line with which the story ends: ‘And ... (they) were both naked and were not ashamed’ ([Gen. 2:25](#)).

B. If Sex is God’s Good Gift, Why Are There Rules About It?

Playing in the grass is not all that God has in mind for the two body-persons of the Genesis story ([Gen. 1:26–31](#)): ‘As *persons* they were summoned to make free decisions of obedience to the God who made them. They were given work to do in the garden so that it would not turn into a jungle. They would exercise responsibility for the whole of the created world. They were then, not to be merely sexual creatures; they were to be *sexual persons*, responsive to God’s will in their development of God’s garden; and they were to be in personal communion with each other and their personal creator.’⁹

This is not to say that the spontaneity of their body lives was incompatible with the need for order: ‘Spontaneity is not chaos. Impulse does not need to mean loss of direction, and human sexuality is not an invitation to wild caprice. But the limits of a river bed do not restrict the freedom of a river; the limits of purpose and order do not have to dampen the spontaneity of sexuality. We have more to do as body-persons than look for chances to explode sexually. There is the business of providing food for one another, for arranging life in society, for seeking justice and creating art, for digging out the secrets of nature, and for a million other opportunities to create a culture fitting for body-persons who belong to God. The sexuality of our bodies must mesh with the total task of creating culture together. Sexuality is developed *within* the playground and workspace of human creativity; this is why it has limits as well as liberty.’¹⁰

And this, too, is the reason for the rules: to protect vulnerable people. ‘Fenced back yard. Wonderful place to raise a family’—so the real estate ad claims. Highways, creeks, neighbourhood swimming pools, roaming dogs, cliffs and sink holes do make a fenced back yard sound very good if you are raising a family. The commandments of God have often been called fences. And given the dangers out here—of disease and loneliness and hurt, of guilt and death—it would not be wrong to say that the Seventh Commandment, for example, is God’s fence, behind which God chooses to raise his family. [p. 17](#)

But fences can have another function, too. Suppose you have decided to get the finest play set for your children you can find. A friend shows you a catalogue, in which you see exactly what you want: swing, slide, sand box, rope to climb, playhouse with a canvas roof, a firehouse pole that the children can slide on, and all made of beautiful, solid wood. The blurb next to the picture tells all about the muscularskeletal development that this gorgeous piece of equipment will foster. But mostly it looks like fun, and is just what you would love to have had when you were a child. So you order it. And then you spend a Saturday—and maybe a couple more Saturdays—putting it together. And then you put a fence around it so the children will stay there, enjoying it, getting the benefit of it. This, too, is reason to erect a fence.

So Elizabeth Achtemeier has written ‘God’s guidance in the new life is pure grace, given out of his love for us. Heaven knows our society is unable to instruct us about how to live the Christian life; society is still lost in the wilfulness of its own sinful ways and knows nothing of God’s way. Apart from God’s continuing guidance we do not know how

⁸ Ibid., 20, 30.

⁹ Lewis Smedes, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 30.

¹⁰ Ibid., 30, 31.

to live. But God, in his incredible mercy, wants it to “go well with us”, as Deuteronomy puts it. God wants us to have joy. And so he gives us direction to point the way to wholeness, life and joy.

‘Sometimes, of course, we do not like the directions. For example, God says, “You shall not commit adultery,” while most every program on TV assures us that it is the only way to go. But seeing the consequences in our society—two out of every three marriages now end in divorce—I am overwhelmed daily by the love of God manifested in his commandment. Truly, he is a God who wants us to have the unsurpassed joy that comes from a lifelong, faithful marital commitment. Experiencing that joy and the blessing that results from obedience to other commandments as well, I have come to a new appreciation of the wisdom and mercy embodied in the divine instructions given us in the Scriptures.’¹¹

C. With All the Changes in Our Society, How Can the Church Even Think of Limiting Sexual Relations to Marriage?

What the church says must never be determined by the ‘market’ toward which its teachings are aimed, or by public opinion polls. As disciples of Jesus Christ we are first called to listen to what Scripture has to say to us. And because Scripture brings to us a voice from beyond the merely here and now, the Word by which the church is called to live may be problematical, unacceptable, even repugnant to the culture in which we live.

We believe, in keeping with the ‘Constitutional Questions’ in the *Form of Government*, that the statement on Man and Woman in the Confession of 1967 is an ‘authentic and reliable exposition of what Scripture leads us to believe and do’.¹² p. 18

That statement is clear in its call to the church:

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.¹³

Among the many words that the Bible uses to describe the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, none is more important than ‘faithful’. ‘God is faithful.’¹⁴ God is the covenant-keeper. When therefore, ‘in a service of Christian marriage a lifelong commitment is made by a woman and a man to each other’,¹⁵ and when throughout a life of plenty and want, joy and sorrow, sickness and health, they keep their promises, they are there most like the God whose name is Faithful.

¹¹ Elizabeth Achtemeier, ‘Renewed Appreciation for an Unchanging Story,’ *The Christian Century*, June 13–20, 1990, 597.

¹² *Form of Government*: G-14–0405.

¹³ *The Book of Confessions*, 9.047.

¹⁴ [Deut. 7:9](#); [1 Pet. 4:19](#) among many texts.

¹⁵ *Directory for Worship*, W-f.9001.

This faithfulness is, no doubt, a powerful witness against some of the most destructive forces in our society. For twenty years, we have watched the unfolding scenario from *Future Shock*: 'What is involved in increasing the through-put of people in one's life are the abilities to not only make ties, but to break them, not only to affiliate, but to disaffiliate. Those who seem most capable of this adaptive skill are among the most richly rewarded in society.'¹⁶ Christians are called to be different, and faithfulness in marriage is a difference to be noticed.

The marital fidelity of a woman and a man who are disciples of Jesus Christ becomes a witness to, and instance of, the central truth of Cross and Resurrection. Christian marriage has traditionally made this connection of Cross and Resurrection. William Willimon has said:

The Christian marriage ceremony illustrates the belief that a deep sexual and emotional encounter requires a revolution in which both turn away from self-centeredness. To be united to another person means to risk oneself in a rite of initiation and passage (as anthropologists call it) that entails a death of the old self and a resurrection of the new.... To remain your same old self after you are married is not enough.¹⁷

Other developments in this society give the church's stand of 'one woman, one man, lifelong fidelity in marriage' a distinctly positive value. We refer to the rampant spread of sexually transmitted diseases, and the chaos and confusion that so [p.19](#) many children in this society endure in their deep need for stability.

We believe that the church's historic stance regarding lifelong marital commitment is indeed 'a guide to freedom and a treasure to be shared'. The life of freedom, sexual freedom, is gloriously described in that phrase from the Genesis story: '(They) were both naked and were not ashamed' ([Gen. 2:25](#)). We believe that in the context of lifelong commitment persons become free to be their true selves. The need for games and masks, for big and little falsehoods, is gone. Something similar happens in our relationship with God. We cannot truly repent or be honest about our shortcomings and sins before God until we are completely convinced of the constancy of God's love. Any repentance and confession prior to this is pretence. So, also, the covenanting of two persons in marriage brings a sense of security and openness. It is here—in the long-term relationship—where honesty, forgiveness, acceptance, and healing take place. The church's historic teaching on marriage is, further, a treasure to be shared, and may well be recognized as such by those who have experienced uncommitted or casual sex. In a seminary course this case study was presented: A woman asked her pastor, 'What does the ... church believe about premarital sex?' The pastor asked (in turn) 'What do you think about premarital sex?' The parishioner persisted, 'I know that pastors don't approve.' 'Some pastors', he said. 'Older pastors.' 'Isn't the Bible against people just living together?' she asked. 'The Bible is a culturally conditioned book that must be read with interpretative sophistication', he said. 'The main thing is to be sure that you're open, trusting, loving and caring.' (The teacher) asked the students what they thought of the episode. One young man, sans shoes, wearing a tank top and blue jeans was first to speak: 'This is a bunch of garbage.... It's lousy counselling and even worse pastoring. The woman asked a straightforward, direct question. But the pastor refuses to answer. Instead, he says, in effect, "You dummy, that isn't your question. You don't really want to know what the church or the Bible says, you want to know what you think." Why won't the pastor do what he's ordained to do?'

¹⁶ Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970), 105, quoted in Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 258 (n.).

¹⁷ William Willimon, 'Marriage as a Subversive Activity', *Christianity Today*, February 18, 1977, 15.

Rather flippantly, (the teacher) observed, 'Well now, aren't we very conservative!' This young man looked at (the teacher) earnestly, and said, 'I've lived through three or four of these so-called relationships. I'm here to tell you there's no way for them to be open, trusting, caring, no way in hell without a promise. I hurt some good people in order to find that out. I wish the church had told me. I might have still learned the hard way, but I wish the church had told me.'¹⁸

D. If Sex is God's Good Gift, Why Are So Many People Troubled About It?

A pastor in his first church listened as a young woman told of how she had been used and discarded. The pastor was compassionate, sharing the **p. 20** woman's hurt and even her anger toward the one who had mistreated her. When the woman left the church office, it suddenly struck the pastor: 'I've done that.' The interview had stirred up memories and feelings of guilt that had remained unresolved.

Someone writes: 'Our sexual lives are of a mixed and disorderly composition. They rarely start with a simple easy sweetness. They are often visited by deeply troubling guilts, brought to us by others, or when those are not in ready supply, by ourselves.'¹⁹

Not only are we troubled by our own sexual histories, the ways we try to deal with hurt often further lacerate our wounds and break community, too. Those who believe that heterosexual marriage is God's intent for the human race may go the further step of claiming or assuming that being in the married state somehow confers guilt-free righteousness on them. But when that happens, we have forgotten that all human sexuality has suffered in the fall described in [Genesis 3](#).

Often, too, it happens that those of us who claim to take the Scriptures most seriously become harsh and punitive toward those who deviate from biblical standards. Hester Prynne in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is the classic example of a person made the object of condemnation and punishment. With sadness we must confess that there are still Hester Prynnes among us, male and female, damaged by others' self-righteous attitudes.

There is deep irony in the critical and punitive stance taken by those who claim to be biblical. To take this stance is to have forgotten a Bible story that we do well to remember and to keep telling to ourselves: the narrative concerning the crowd that gathered around the woman taken in adultery is a story all Christians are supposed to know about themselves ([Jn. 8:1-2](#)). Before God none of us is fully chaste, and there is no one whose love meets God's high standard. None of us can cast the first stone because none of us is guilt-free ([Jn. 8:1-12](#)). The truth driven home by this story has the power to make us deal with our troubled and troubling natures. It is to the sick, said Jesus, that the physician comes with healing ([Mk. 2:17](#)). And it is those who face their guilt who come to know the healing of the Great Physician.

It is just this knowledge that we are forgiven which becomes the bond that holds us together in Christian community. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in *Life Together*:

I am a brother to another person through what Jesus Christ did for me and to me; the other person has become a brother to me through what Jesus Christ did for him.... My brother ... is that other person who has been redeemed by Christ, delivered from his sin, and called to faith and eternal life. Not what a man is in himself as a Christian, his spirituality and piety, constitutes the basis of our community ... Our community with one another consists

¹⁸ William H. Willimon, 'Risky Business', *Christianity Today*, February 19, 1988, 29, 50.

¹⁹ Barry Ulanov, 'The Limits of Permissiveness', in *Men and Women*, ed. Philip Turner (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1989), 190.

solely in what Christ has done to both of us. This is true not merely at the beginning, as though in the course of time [p. 21](#) something else were to be added to our community; it remains so for all the future and to all eternity.²⁰

Our attitude toward those still outside the Christian community will be determined by our awareness of grace; having been received by God, we will receive them. Having confidence in God's forgiving grace, we will trust in 'the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit' ([2 Cor. 13:13](#)) to bring about the transformation in people's sexual lives that God intends. Remembering that it was 'while we still were sinners that Christ died for us' ([Rom. 5:8](#)), we will not ask as a pre-condition for coming among us, that others 'clean up their lives'. The pace of this transformation will likewise be in God's hands. Our part, with respect to our sisters and brothers in the Christian family, is to show the grace of patience, the willingness to wait, remembering God's patience with us. This patience of which we speak is also God's gift to us, a fruit of the Spirit ([Gal. 5:22](#)).

'Amazing Grace' is often sung when Presbyterians come together. This grace of which we sing is amazing not least in its power to transform sexual guilt. Some of us can bear witness that the Christian experience of forgiveness came to us precisely at the point of our being deeply troubled about some sexual wrong, confessing it and being assured of divine grace. Some of us know, too, that it was in the sexual area that we first decisively owned up to our powerlessness to manage our own lives, and turned them over to the control of the Lord Jesus, and began to know the reality of his presence and power within.

E. Does the Church Have a Word for Single People Beyond 'Just Say No'?

It is always more appealing to say 'yes' than 'no', and one of the reasons 'the traditional teaching of the church about sex' seems so unappealing is that it apparently has nothing to say to single people beyond 'Don't do it.' This impression is understandable, because so many Christians have missed the fact that the first word given to them is 'yes' rather than 'no'. What God wants for the world is not scolding and repression but the guidance of freedom—guidance that shows men and women the way to fulness of life as sexual beings.

The positive character of the church's teaching is readily apparent in the surprising yet simple example that follows. Strange as it may seem, there is no need for someone who holds traditional beliefs to deny that there may be much good in the inter-sexual relations single people enter. Many of them produce a genuine, though limited, community of life, and in them people often learn far more than they knew before about the nature of love. A person would have to be blind to miss these and other goods that are often present in relationships which for other reasons are not right.

Indeed, if the teaching of the church is properly understood, it becomes apparent that the good [p. 22](#) found in these relations derives in fact from what Christians have to say about the goods of the sexual division of the human race, the goods of sex, and the goods of marriage itself. The church teaches that God created men and women for mutual society, and that, as men and women, they are neither to avoid nor despise their life together. The *social* relation between men and women is intended in creation for every man and every woman, and it is given to them so that they will not be alone. The first word beyond 'no' to be spoken is that a sexual relation is not necessary to escape loneliness, but social relations between men and women are necessary.

It is God's intention that *social* relations be entered by all, but that *sexual* relations be contained within the more specific bond of marriage. Within that bond, protected as they

²⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, ed. John W. Doberstein (London: S.C.M Press Ltd., 1954), 15.

are by promises of fidelity and permanence, sexual relations nourish the unity of the couple, lead to the procreation of children, and provide a most immediate way for a man and a woman to learn what it is to love another as one loves oneself. It is the belief of the church that this providential ordering provides the framework within which our sexual lives can best serve not only our well-being, but also the more general purposes of God. These are the goods in one way or another sought in all sexual relations.

Observations like these make it obvious that Christians have far more to say to single people than ‘Don’t do it’, and that they have far more to say to married people than ‘Go right ahead.’ The teaching of the church about God’s providential will for sexual relations is rich and complex. Its truth helps define the fulness of our lives, and apart from a full, vigorous, and positive statement, both single and married people will find it difficult to glimpse the full extent of the promise that God has etched in their sexual natures.

If Christians are asked to say ‘no’ to sexual relations outside the bond of marriage, it is because they are called upon to honour God by saying ‘yes’ to a providential ordering of life intended both for our individual and common good. What we know however, is that we more often say ‘no’ to God’s providence than ‘yes’, and for this reason we know also that if God is not our reconciler and redeemer as well as our creator, we are lost. God in Christ, however, is our reconciler, redeemer and creator, and when our sexual lives are viewed from this perspective they take on greater significance than first we imagined. They become a part of the way in which we learn to be disciples of Christ.

The struggle necessary if we are to direct our sexual energies to their appointed and life-giving ends becomes, in Christ, a battle with an old self that refuses to honour God and insists upon its own way. In the power of the Spirit, this old nature must be put off and a new one put on. That old nature is driven by desires, some of them sexual, that are connected to self-serving ends. It is the teaching of the church that both married and single people are called to say ‘yes’ to the struggle and recognize it as part of the ‘upward call of God’. [p. 23](#)

For most, a struggle with unfulfilled sexual longing is anything but part of an ‘upward call’. It seems, instead, a destructive, repressive, and self-deceptive form of denial. It is the belief of Christians, however, that entry into this struggle leads men and women away from precisely these life-destroying habits and strategems and toward a life that is open both to God and to their fellow men and women. To say ‘yes’ to life in the Spirit is in fact the only way to end self-deceptive denial and harmful repression. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth and life rather than of repression and denial. It calls for us to present ourselves at each moment to God as we are, with as much knowledge of ourselves as we can muster, with all our desires and intentions exposed, and in so doing to ask for guidance, help and the transfiguration of our lives. God will not answer ‘yes’ to many of the desires presented, but in saying ‘no’ he will say ‘yes’ to deeper desires and deeper loves—both for God and for the men and women with whom God has surrounded us.

God will also speak a word of forgiveness over our inadequacies and failures, and in so doing provide us strength to be even more truthful. Sexual desire is very powerful and at the moment it is being given full license by our society. Everything that confronts single people says ‘just do it.’ It is increasingly rare for a single person, at one point or another, not to be involved in a sexual relation. In Christ, however, these relations need neither to be trumpeted, distorted, nor hidden. They can be brought before God, and as they are presented they will be judged honestly. Another thing the churches ought to say beyond ‘no’ is ‘come among us and present your life to God as it is.’ The upward call of God always begins from the place one starts, and it takes place in a fellowship of friends.

This observation calls to mind another thing the church has to say to single people about sex. Most people who enter even the most casual sexual relation are not

promiscuous. They are, however, lonely. Beneath our disordained desires lies a loneliness brought about by a failure in the common life that God intends for all men and women. In many ways the churches in America simply contribute to this loneliness. Their common life too frequently is not formed as a society of friends who share one Lord, one faith, one baptism. It is rather formed around the needs and expectations of the bourgeois family. Single people at best are tolerated.

Nevertheless, the view that sexual relations are intended for marital rather than general social relations is linked to the idea that close bonds between men and women, both single and married, will exist in all of life's dimensions. For this reason, sexual relations themselves are not necessary as a cure for loneliness. What is necessary is the fellowship of men and women in Christ. This is the word beyond 'no' that the church has to speak to single people. If it dares to speak, it will find not only that its common life is transformed, but also that its teaching begins to appear to single and married people alike as a treasure to be shared rather than as a burden to be inflicted. p. 24

IV. ISSUES OF HUMAN SEXUALITY IN NEED OF CONSIDERATION TODAY

A. The Bible and Patriarchalism

Surely it is time for the church to put to rest, once and for all, the charge that the Bible sanctions the inequality of the sexes and the rule of males over females. The Scriptures were largely written and handed down by males, it is true, and they portray ancient patriarchal societies. Furthermore, there are a few texts in the Bible, such as those in [1 Tim. 2:11-13](#), [Tit. 2:3-5](#), and [1 Cor. 14:33-36](#) (which contradicts what Paul wrote earlier in [1 Cor. 11:5](#)), where early house churches, in an effort to combat Gnostic heresies, forbade specific women in their congregations to speak or have authority in the church. But if we follow the Reformation principle of letting Scripture interpret Scripture, it is overwhelmingly clear that the biblical canon as a whole does not sanction patriarchal subordination of females. Indeed, it is only in the Bible that we learn:

- Both male and female are created in the image of God ([Gen. 1:27](#));
- The domination of male over female is the result of sin and of attempts to be our own gods and goddesses ([Gen. 3:16](#));
- Such sinful domination of male over female has been overcome by the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in whom there is now neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female ([Gal. 3:28](#));
- Equal relationships between males and females are mirrored in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, who broke all of the discriminatory rules against women ([Lk. 10:38-42](#); [Jn. 4](#)); who made faithful women to be models of discipleship ([Mk. 12:41-44](#); [Lk. 7:38-50](#); [Jn. 12:1-8](#)); who made a woman the first witness of his resurrection ([Jn. 20:11-18](#)); and who called women as leaders in his church ([Acts 9:36-43](#); [18:2](#); [Rom. 16:1-16](#); [1 Cor. 16:19](#), [2 Tim. 4:19](#));
- Through the death and resurrection of our Lord we are now freed from our slavery to our sinful selves and society; and
- For freedom Christ has set us free to serve and to walk by his Spirit in newness of life ([Gal. 5:1](#), [16-24](#)).

In all such discussions of patriarchalism it is important and instructive to highlight Jesus' relationship with women. Although generalizations about sexual stereotypes must be approached with caution, there is evidence that for whatever reason, women are prone to the sins of self-negation and lack of self-esteem whereas men are prone to the sins of

pride and self-aggrandizement. Jesus was particularly sensitive to feminine needs in this respect. In fact, in his one-to-one encounters with women, he never calls them to be more self-sacrificing than he does men. Jesus does not tell the Samaritan woman ([In. 4:7-30](#)) to stop thinking of herself and to concentrate on her chores. Instead, he discusses with her the correct worship of God and raises the issue of personal morality, encouraging her to shift her focus from physical water to salvation and Christ. At the end of the conversation the woman completely forgets her water jar and becomes the [p. 25](#) first evangelist to Samaria, and an effective one at that: 'Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony' ([In. 4:39](#)).

Jesus gives the same sort of message to Martha. Mary need not leave Jesus' teaching to help in the kitchen. Rather she should be encouraged to seek after truth and salvation. And when a woman calls out in a crowd, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!', Jesus rebukes her. 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!' ([Lk. 11:27-28](#)). Jesus' mother is not to be exalted in her role simply as baby bearer and child nurturer. There is a higher calling for women, namely living and thriving in relationship to God.

In each of these encounters Jesus calls women to involvement in the kingdom of God. He does not tell them, as he tells the rich young ruler, to sacrifice all that they have. He does not heap scorn upon them, as he does upon the Pharisees, for their pride and self-righteousness. He does not pull them up short, as he does James and John, for their attempt to seize the privilege of sitting one on his left, one on his right.

None of this means that women need not be self-sacrificing servants. What it does mean is that Jesus calls women beyond self-negation to his abundant life. Jesus is surely the saviour for women! Thus, far from being instruments of patriarchal domination, the Scriptures are a clear proclamation of our freedom and equality in Jesus Christ and our sure guide to abundant and joyful life.

B. Sexual Abuse and Family Violence

Recent statistics indicate that sexual abuse and family violence may be the most common crimes in America. Police departments across the country report that incidents of domestic violence (in which women are the primary victims) are rising at an alarming rate. One national study estimates that one in four children experiences some form of sexual abuse in childhood²¹ The church must recognize that sexual abuse and family violence constitute a major social problem—a social problem that appears to be as great inside the church as outside it. For centuries these crimes have often been dismissed as unimportant.

While this paper primarily addresses issues of human sexuality, we believe that issues of sexual abuse and family violence must be treated together, both for practical and for theological reasons. By definition, sexual abuse includes physically violent acts such as rape, incest, and molestation. Sexual abuse also includes verbal forms of violence such as shaming and humiliating persons, intimidation, and harassment at work. Because much of the sexual abuse reported to police and public welfare agencies occurs between family members, it is often a form of family violence.

The root causes of sexual abuse and family violence are not easily identified. These crimes occur among people in every socioeconomic and [p. 26](#) ethnic group. There is however clear evidence that this violent behaviour is learned, and is reinforced by conditions of family isolation and deprivation, and by conditions of social disintegration

²¹ Constance Doran. 'Family Violence', *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Rodney d. Hunter, ed. (Nashville, TN,: Abingdon Press, 1990), 426-429.

and oppression. The climate in which sexual abuse occurs is almost always a relationship of unequal power, where the victim has trusted and depended upon the abuser. When abuse happens repeatedly in families, there is usually a 'cycle of violence' in which the abuser feels remorse, then blames the victim, escalates tension in the relationship, and explodes again.

What does the Bible have to say to us about sexual abuse and family violence? Clearly Jesus condemned those who would abuse children: 'Whosoever causes one of these little ones who believes in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a great millstone tied around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea' ([Matt. 18:6](#)). While the Bible does not speak to all the particular aspects of this problem, it does reveal central themes about the nature of human sin and redemption which can guide the church in its action. A theological method which deals with the Bible thematically is important, because isolated verses of Scripture have sometimes been misused to excuse or even justify sexual abuse and family violence (e.g., 'Spare the rod and spoil the child.'). Modern family therapists have observed that dysfunctional families often draw selectively from Scripture to reinforce pathology, while healing families sometimes discover the deeper significance of Scripture as the power of its truth is experienced personally.²² Finally, a thematic approach to Scripture helps us recognize that there is a tension between the social setting in which many of the Bible stories occur (where for example, wives and children were sometimes regarded as the 'property' of men) and the enduring truths about God and human beings which the stories reveal.

Biblically, sexual abuse and family violence are a fundamental violation and perversion of the covenant which expresses and preserves our essential humanness. 'The Bible', says Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, 'is essentially covenantal in its perception of all reality ... it affirms that one is never a person alone, but always in the context of community.'²³ The Bible uses the image of covenant to affirm that the essential goodness of creation derives from its foundation in a network of trustworthy relationships—between God and the world, and between persons who live as God's family. The church expresses this reality covenantally in marriage and in infant baptism. In baptism, the whole community of faith acknowledges that it is entrusted with children and that it shares responsibility for them. The 'family' of the child is not just his or her kin through blood and genealogy, but all those called by God and regarded as the 'household of faith' ([Eph. 2:19](#)). p. 27

When speaking of marriage, 'the Bible participates in the sociology of its time in subordinating wife to husband', says Brueggemann. But at the same time, in both the Old and New Testaments, 'there is a more important counter theme which suggests that the marriage relationship is understood as a covenantal relation which reflects mutual respect, concern, and love.'²⁴ Marriage and baptism are thus two specific events where we are called to acknowledge that what makes life essentially good is a network of trustworthy relationships, which require our fidelity. This covenantal view now helps us understand that sexual abuse and family violence are a misuse and perversion of this trust in order to control or destroy another person, and therefore must be named as evil and resisted.

²² Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985).

²³ Walter Brueggemann, 'The Covenanted Family: A Zone for Humanness', *Journal of Current Social Issues* 14 (1) Wintger 1977, 18–23.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

The biblical understanding of covenant is also important here because it critiques aspects of both conservative and liberationist views in our culture which may perpetuate or hide sexual abuse and family violence. On one side, this covenantal view stands against the tendency among conservative Christians to idealize the nuclear family and to make it a private affair. To quote Brueggemann again:

In the Bible, the family is never presented in terms of privatism.... The family includes not only blood kin, it includes the entire household ([Ex. 20:10](#), [Deut. 14:20](#)). The family is not a self-contained entity, but it inherently has links to broader political and economic issues in which zones of freedom and security must also be maintained.... Family is thus not an invitation to withdrawal, but an agent of initiative for reshaping of all historical existence as God's intended zone of freedom and security.²⁵

Carried to the extreme, the elevation and privatizing of the nuclear family sometimes leads to the heresy that spouse abuse and violent 'discipline' of children are private matters in which outsiders have no right to interfere.

Alternatively, the Bible's covenantal perspective stands against a tendency of contemporary liberationist views to promote sensuality and sexual expression as a means to wholeness and self-realization, without attention to the need for restraint. Covenantally, sexual behaviour finds its meaning within bonds of fidelity to persons and to God. Thus, limits on sexual expression are necessary for the maintenance of trust and to protect the welfare of those who are dependent and vulnerable. Since we know that sexual abuse and family violence are to some extent *learned* behaviours, we have a special obligation to practise restraint of sexual expressions which may encourage or reinforce such destructiveness.

The biblical idea that God's covenant underlies all our relationships has radical implications for ministry in situations of sexual abuse and family violence:

- Through it we affirm the right of the church to intervene in the problems of families when children and women are subjected to sexual abuse and violence.
p. 28
- We affirm the right of children to innocence regarding genital sexuality, and to protection from violence, so that they may develop basic trust in the essential goodness of self and world.
- We affirm the right of each individual person to control his or her own body. The covenantal value of mutual respect places restraint on a parent's right to physically discipline children or on a husband's right to force his wife to have sexual relations.
- We reject the idea that wives are the property of husbands or that children are the property of parents. While marital partners may choose acts of submission to one another as gifts of love and faithfulness, these may not be demanded as a privilege of ownership. Children's submission to the discipline of parents must always be balanced by the parents' attitude of love and respect for the child.

Practical Implications for Ministry

These affirmations, arising from the Bible, call for personal involvement and even risk on the part of church leaders in caring for those who suffer sexual abuse and family violence. Our first order of responsibility is to help protect those who are victimized and

²⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

vulnerable. We have a pastoral responsibility to learn to recognize the signs of abuse, and we reserve the right to intervene on behalf of the faith community in order to break the cycle of violence. Our interventions may include reporting abuse to police and social service agencies, helping persons who seek the protection of a restraining order; and even supporting prosecution.

This responsibility requires us to recognize our own limited skills in helping situations of abuse and violence. We are obligated to discover and use the professional resources for intervention and care that are in our community—including the police, emergency shelters (or in areas without shelters, a network of host homes), and professional counsellors specifically trained in treating domestic violence.

Churches should provide education to help persons identify and resist abusive patterns of relationship, and to learn nonviolent ways of resolving family conflict. Clergy can also help by sponsoring support groups such as Parents Anonymous, and by modelling relationships of mutual respect with their colleagues and families.

The church is called to care for perpetrators as well as survivors of violence and abuse. Often these are persons who have themselves been abused as children. Our first task is to assist in challenging their denial and blaming of others for their behaviour, and to support their taking responsibility for self-control. Both criminal prosecution and professional counselling can serve this purpose.

We recognize that restoring the capacity for trust in those who have been abused often includes protecting their confidentiality. However, we also acknowledge that when the church keeps silent to protect the perpetrator or to minimize the seriousness of the hurt, it participates in the violation and perversion of God's covenant. Therefore, we recognize the importance of hearing those who have been victims and [p. 29](#) who wish to speak of their pain. We stand ready to affirm that such abuse is never deserved, and that it is not wrong to feel hurt, angry, and afraid. Neither is it wrong that some survivors of abuse still love the parent or spouse who did the abusing.

As ministers we are called to be guided by and to interpret the biblical story. We are also called to hear the pain of those who are victimized and to risk involvement with them. It is in this intimate involvement with both the particular stories of hurting persons and *the* story revealed in Scripture that we may deepen our understanding of God's work among us, much as one recovering family did when in the presence of a pastoral counsellor the abused adult daughter said to her father: 'Now I know more about what the word "redemption" means. It means that God can take something ugly and cruel and use even *that* to bring about new life among us.'²⁶

C. Teenagers

An ethical stance can be judged on the basis of how it affects the weakest members of society. Sexual relativism fails this test. It may seem beneficial to those who have enough money, education and maturity to avoid the negative consequences of multiple sexual relationships. But for the poor, the uneducated, the young and the weak, the breakup of covenantal marriage has terrible effects. They suffer economically, physically and socially. Christians would add that such persons also suffer spiritually.

Teenagers are among the weak who suffer from sexual relativism. They are extremely vulnerable, for they can easily become involved in sexual patterns that, apart from the grace of God, will affect them adversely for the rest of their lives.

The Situation Among Teenagers Premarital intercourse is common.

²⁶ F. Allen Bettis, unpublished paper.

By the time they are 17, more than half of all teenagers in American today have had at least one sexual experience, according to the Louis Harris poll done for Planned Parenthood in 1986.

Birth control is rare. The same poll found that only a third of those teenagers who are sexually active use birth control methods 'all the time', another 19% use it 'most of the time'. Another recent poll (1989) found that of sexually active college women only 41% reported having sex with men who used condoms. At least half of all teenage sexual encounters are without birth control.

Teenagers who are sexually active have brief, multiple sexual relationships. Once teenagers begin to have sex, they usually continue. Almost none of their relationships is long lasting. (Robert Coles and Geoffrey Stokes found that only 14% of teenage sexual relationships lasted more than a year.) The truth is that most sexually active teenagers have a series of partners. The earlier they begin premarital sex, the more partners they are likely to have before marriage.

Consequences

The consequences of these experiences are so well known that we easily become hardened to them. *p. 30* But for the teenagers who experience them, these consequences are often terrifying.

Unmarried pregnancy, abortion, childbirth. Coles and Stokes found that nearly a third (31%) of 17-year-old girls had been pregnant. The overwhelming majority of these pregnancies ended in abortion (86%). Those who choose not to abort must raise the child themselves, give the child up for adoption, or marry prematurely.

Sexually transmitted diseases. The high rates of promiscuity among teenagers make their society a prime breeding ground for disease. Some sexually transmitted diseases are incurable; others are difficult to detect. While AIDS has not yet made a major impact among teenagers, some contagious disease specialists believe that it may soon do so. Chlamydia, herpes, venereal warts, gonorrhea, syphilis and other diseases are currently spreading rapidly among teenagers, and threaten their long-term health and ability to bear children.

Marital stability. For economic and health reasons, if for no other, a stable marriage is highly valuable. Indeed, most teenagers do value the ideal of lifelong monogamy undergirded by love—even more so, it seems, if their own family has been shattered by divorce.

The reality, however, is that patterns of sexuality, once established, tend to remain. There is a strong correlation between the increase in premarital sex and the increase in broken marriages and in adultery. Additionally, surveys show that children of broken marriages are more likely to engage in premarital sex than those whose parents' marriage is intact. The loss of sexual fidelity tends to amplify itself; there is no 'pendulum' which will automatically lead to correction. Teenagers who become sexually involved will tend to have unstable marriages, for 'serial monogamy' with its making and breaking of sexual relationships can and often does become a pattern beginning in the teenage years.

Date rape and abusive relationships. Fourteen per cent of teenage girls report having been raped. (Coles and Stokes). If 'date rape' were included, this percentage would be much higher. In addition, 10% of all 13-year-olds and 20% of all 14-year-olds have had sex (Harris poll). Seldom could these decisions be described as 'informed consent'.

Many teenagers report feeling considerable pressure to be sexually involved. The result is often relationships that show the immaturity of those involved, whether in physical or emotional abuse. When sexual abuse is involved, the emotional traumas of teenage love become much deeper and more likely to scar.

In sum, the consequences of sexual relativism are devastating for teenagers. Few teenagers are able to think subtly and maturely about their sexual decisions. Their sexual urges are powerful. Unless they are given clear and convincing direction, these sexual urges will (and do) control their lives.

The results of these decisions can (and do) affect their entire lives. They affect our entire society in its economics, health, family integrity, and psychological well being—to say nothing about spiritual purity. p.31 No one who is well informed can consider teenage sexual activity a ‘good’.

But is it realistic to teach teenagers ‘just say no’? In one sense the answer must be ‘yes’. We know, however, that teenagers, like singles of all ages, belong to a society teaching that sexual experience is the highest good. Our society underscores this in television commercials, music and film, and in adult members who are often sexually promiscuous. Teenagers in such a society will often be sexually active. The church of Jesus Christ must be present with a healing ministry to teenagers who have been prematurely sexually active.

Therefore we joyously affirm the biblical view of sex when we minister to teenagers. Indeed, it is this message of uncompromising fidelity that is most liberating in a sexually sick society. Out of compassion for teenagers, we must not offer any cut-rate ideals such as ‘safe sex’.

Is this realistic? One might also ask: is it realistic to ask teenagers in Beirut not to become involved in killing squads? Is it realistic to ask teenagers growing up in a racist society to deplore racism? Teenagers in a sick society will sometimes be sick. It is the church’s role to minister to them in that sickness, but even more to call them out of the sickness.

The church is not calling teenagers to be merely civil, well-educated American citizens, but to be Christians. We are calling them to Christian ideals, and to a Christian community. We are calling them to Christ. If sexual faithfulness marks the church, then it is quite realistic to ask teenagers to join that faithful community.

It should be pointed out that, while exposed to a barrage of sexual propaganda, a great many teenagers—a solid minority—still do not engage in sexual activity outside of marriage. Many of these teenagers resist for Christian reasons. We owe them the honour of saying that their choice is not only right but realistic, open to anyone who seeks to build a life of sexual integrity with the help of God. To brand ‘just say no’ as unrealistic is to undercut those who do ‘just say no’.

D. Sexuality and Older Adults

Myths and Realities

There are some basic myths surrounding the sexuality of older persons. Four of the most prevalent false impressions are:

1. When sexual dysfunctioning occurs, it is irreversible.
2. When a man or woman reaches 65, rapid decline takes place in the remaining sexual capabilities.
3. Sexual thought and interest in older persons is atypical and abnormal.
4. In old age sexual activity is damaging and hazardous.²⁷

While all four of these are myths, there are definite realities concerning sexuality for the nearly 30,000,000 Americans over 65. Since the average age of members of the

²⁷ Richard C. Crandall, *Gerontology* (McGraw-Hill: 1991), 215.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is 54, and almost 30% of our denomination is over 65, these are important realities for us to understand. p. 32

Most older adults experience significant changes in sexual activity and in sexual functioning with increased age. Such changes do not necessarily mean that the quality of the sexual experience is diminished. Yet there are specific factors which contribute to the reduction or discontinuance of sexual activity. Some of the major factors are

1. Death of a spouse.
2. Illness of spouse or self.
3. Loss of interest in sex by spouse or self.
4. Inability of spouse or self to perform sexually.²⁸

Long range studies have noted that 'although generally sexual activity declines with increasing age, there are many exceptions, with some individuals' levels of sexual activity actually increasing'.²⁹ The best indicator of sexual activity in old age is the pattern of sexual behaviour earlier in life. 'Sexually active individuals tend to remain sexually active, while those who have been less sexually active continue that pattern into old age.'³⁰

The Role of the Church

Because of the tremendous emphasis on sexuality in modern America, gerontologists and social psychologists are exploring the sexuality of older persons in a scientific manner.³¹ Much of this research is helpful to the church in enabling older adults to understand their changing sexuality. But the church cannot abdicate the understanding of the moral implications of sexual behaviour to gerontologists and social scientists. Though they are teaching many things we need to understand about sexual behaviour in older adults, the church must continue to teach biblical morality as the standard for sexual expression in younger and older persons. We go too far when modern books on aging and gerontology replace the Bible as the authoritative voice concerning sexual behaviour and expression.

Instead of speaking God's word to our society, the church is all too often echoing what society says. With regard to sexuality and older persons, society says, 'What will it hurt if two older persons live together without being married? After all, living together will take away their loneliness.' Or society may justify couples living together by saying, 'It is all right for two older persons to live together because they will lose some Social Security benefits if they get married. Surely we don't want to burden older persons financially. Why should they be penalized just because they want to be together?'

Rather than echoing what society says, the church needs to state and affirm clearly the biblical standard for sexual morality. Here we repeat what has been stated earlier in this paper.

This affirmation speaks to young and old alike. 'It is God's intention that social relations be entered by all, but that sexual relations be contained within the more specific bond of marriage. Within that bond, protected as they are by promises of fidelity and permanence, sexual relations nourish p. 33 the unity of the couple ... and provide a most immediate way for a man and a woman to learn what it is to love another as one loves oneself. It is the belief of the church that this providential ordering provides the framework within

²⁸ Ibid., 227.

²⁹ Ibid., 241.

³⁰ Diana Woodruff-Pak, *Psychology and Aging* (Prentice Hall, 1988), 186.

³¹ Crandall, 212.

which our sexual lives can best serve not only our well-being, but also the more general purposes of God.'

Beyond reaffirming the biblical standard of morality, the church needs to affirm the good gift of sex in the bonds of marriage for persons of all ages. The church should be ready and willing to dispel the myths about sexuality and older persons. Sexual thought and interest in older persons is normal and right within the sight of God. When sexual dysfunction occurs, couples should be encouraged to seek medical help to correct the situation. The church needs to affirm that whether couples are young or old, sex within the bonds of marriage is a significant and fulfilling aspect of the relationship.

Sexuality and Older Single Adults

Sexuality is more than just sexual intercourse. It also includes touching and talking. While sexual intercourse is to be experienced within the bonds of marriage, genital sexual expression is not a prerequisite for human wholeness, whereas intimacy and sociality are. The church has the responsibility of providing opportunities for older single adults to experience loving contacts and meaningful conversations as a way of expressing their sexuality. Too often the church has neglected older single adults and left them to find their own ways of expressing sexuality. The church needs to invest time and creativity and financial resources to develop appropriate opportunities for sexual expression among older single adults. This is best done within the ongoing life of the local congregation. There are a variety of ways the local church (or Presbytery and ecumenical endeavours) can provide such opportunities. Here are some suggestions:

1. Inviting younger families with children to develop ongoing relationships with older single adults. This provides an environment for a sense of belonging and caring and affection.
2. Sunday School Class for older single adults. Such a class underscores the importance of older single adults. It also enables them to fellowship and socialize with peers. Bible teaching can focus on issues relating to older single adults. Within the context of such a class, meaningful relationships can be developed and the sense of loneliness and isolation can be significantly lessened.
3. All church social events such as dances, picnics, and outings into the community can be designed to invite and include older single adults. The message in such events is that older single adults are an integral part of the local congregation.
4. Special support groups for older single adults. The purpose of such a group is to encourage and support older single adults in their specific areas of need. This type of group provides an ongoing opportunity to share personal concerns with others who are empathetic and caring. The support [p. 34](#) group provides a safe environment to discuss creative ways to express biblically one's sexuality as a single person.
5. The church needs to promote an environment where healthy and appropriate affection is demonstrated. In such an environment, older single adults give and receive touch, which is an important part of sexual expression. It is also a vital aspect of personal well-being and wholeness
6. The church needs to provide premarital counselling for older single adults who are planning to marry. There are special issues which face older adults as they enter marriage, either for the first time or for remarriage. The church has the privilege and opportunity to provide counselling which addresses these special areas.

Affirming appropriate sexual expression for older adults is the responsibility of the church, not our society. It is time for the church to reclaim its God-given purpose. The church has a wonderful opportunity in our day and age to empower older adults to live out a sexuality which will be personally fulfilling and honouring to the Lord Jesus Christ.

E. Sexual Misconduct Among Clergy

‘In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural and acquired, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world ...’—*Book of Order*, G-6.0106.

Sexual misconduct on the part of the clergy is most assuredly an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ and a betrayal of the pastor’s calling. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that such cases are greatly increasing. It is true—and salutary for the church—that the issue of clergy misconduct is being openly addressed across the church.

The magnitude of this problem and the grave harm that such conduct does to the church make it imperative that careful consideration be given by the church as to what is included in, and excluded from, clergy sexual misconduct. We suggest:

- that appropriate uniform disciplinary procedures be put in place all across the church. Such disciplinary procedures should safeguard the rights of victims/accusers, of victimizers/accused, and the spiritual well-being of congregations affected as well as being a demonstration of the love and justice of Jesus Christ.
- that adequate screening of candidates for the ministry be built into the preparation process.
- that seminary courses be expanded or instituted to equip women and men for ministry in a ‘manner of life which would be a demonstration of the Christian gospel’ specifically with respect to sexual conduct.

F. The Bible and Homosexuality

The English word ‘homosexual’ is of relatively modern origin, having been first used, it seems, about [p.35](#) 1890. It is made up of two words, namely *homo*, a Greek word meaning ‘same’, and *sexualis*, a late Latin word referring to sex or the sexes. ‘Homosexual’, therefore, is literally ‘same-sex’, and refers to sexual activity of male with male, or female with female.

Naturally the original documents of the Bible do not use this modern term, 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 Old Testament and New Testament writers are forthright in condemning such practices. The following is a brief summary of biblical passages that refer to homosexual practices. In order, however, to appreciate fully the import of the scriptural condemnation of homosexual practices, it will be helpful to glance at the total picture of human sexuality as set forth in the Old and New Testaments.

Beginning with the simple yet profound stories in chapters [1](#) and [2](#) of Genesis, the Bible discloses that the creation of humankind in the image of God involved male and female persons. In conjugal relationship a man and a woman ‘become one flesh’ ([Gen. 2:24](#)), a statement repeated in the New Testament ([Mark 10:8](#)).

The life-long commitment of husband and wife to each other is emphasized again and again in both Testaments. Not only the Old Testament commandment against committing adultery, a commandment repeated in the New Testament, but also such narratives as those that tell of Joseph's resisting the impure advances of Potiphar's wife ([Gen. 39](#)), the sin of David with Bathsheba ([2 Sam. 11](#)), Hosea's distress occasioned by the continuing unfaithfulness of his wife Gomer, the words of Jesus concerning the lustful gaze of a man upon a woman ([Matt. 5:28](#)), the admonition in the Letter to the Hebrews that the marriage bed be kept undefiled, 'for God will judge fornicators and adulterers' ([Heb. 13:4](#))—all these passages unite in describing the kind of relationship that God intends to be normative for a man and a woman.

Within this pattern of consistent emphasis on the purity of marriage relationship between husband and wife, it is not surprising that the Bible condemns homosexual practices as unacceptable deviations from God's intention for humankind. In the Old Testament the Holiness Code of Leviticus specifically declares, 'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination' ([Lev. 18:22](#)). In fact, the punishment prescribed for such practice is death; 'If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them' ([Lev. 20:13](#)).

Along with these specific statements condemning homosexual practices, other Old Testament passages describe instances of attempted homosexual acts between males. The account in [Genesis 19](#) reports the demand of certain men of Sodom to indulge in homosexual acts with the male guests who were lodging in Lot's house in Sodom (the verb 'to know' in [Gen. 19:5](#) p. 36 means to have carnal knowledge). A still more lurid account in [Judges 19](#) relates the extraordinarily shocking treatment shown to a Levite and his concubine who had been given hospitality for the night at the home of an old man in Gibeah. Thereupon, 'men of the city, a perverse lot, surrounded the house, and started pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, so that we may have intercourse with him,"' i.e., oral or anal sex ([Judges 19:22](#) NRSV). The rest of the story reveals the depths of perversity exhibited by these sex-crazed men. It is perhaps no surprise that the preference for same-sex practices practised by the men of Sodom ultimately gave rise to the term 'sodomite'.

In the New Testament several writers refer to same-sex practices as reprehensible and contrary to God's intention for humankind. In his correspondence with the church at Corinth the apostle Paul declares: 'Fornicators, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God' ([1 Cor. 6:9-10](#)). Here the two Greek words that the New Revised Standard Version renders 'male prostitutes' and 'sodomites' (*malakoi*; *arsenokoitai*) refer to the passive and active partners respectively in male homosexual relations. (James Moffatt's translation uses the more technical phraseology, 'catamites and sodomites'.)

In his letter to the Romans ([Rom. 1:26-27](#)) Paul broadens his condemnation of homosexual practices by including also sexual activities of women and women (often called 'lesbianism'). The same condemnation against sodomites is repeated again in the First Letter to Timothy ([1 Tim. 1:10](#)), a letter often considered today to have been written by a follower of Paul after Paul's death. If this is so, it broadens still further the basis of the witness of the New Testament against same-sex practices. Two of the shorter letters in the New Testament refer to the men of Sodom as examples of unbridled licentiousness ([2 Pet. 2:6-7](#)) and unnatural lust ([Jude 7](#)).

Attempts have been made to avoid the plain meaning of these biblical passages. It is sometimes said that the men of Sodom and Gibeah were condemned merely because of their inhospitality. While it is certainly true that ancient codes of showing hospitality to

strangers were violated in these instances, the narratives in both Genesis and Judges also focus on the sexual improprieties of the residents, a focus echoed in subsequent references ([3 Maccabees 2:5](#) ‘the people of Sodom who acted arrogantly, who were notorious for the vices,’ and Jubilees 16:6 ‘the uncleanness of the Sodomites’).

Again, it is sometimes argued that the Holiness Code in Leviticus is no longer binding on the Christian. While it is true that some elements of the Holiness Code are abrogated in the New Testament—for example, the distinction between clean and unclean foods ([Mark 7:19](#))—the same-sex practices are still viewed with abhorrence by Paul in Romans and 1 Corinthians, and by the authors of 1 Timothy, 2 Peter, and Jude. [p.37](#)

In conclusion, it is appropriate to make some reference to the views of three widely-read authors who seek to neutralize the teaching of the Scriptures on same-sex practices. Robin Scroggs in *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (1983) certainly over-presses the evidence when he concludes that the only model of male homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world was pederasty, the love and use of boys or youths by adult males.

Again, while one can acknowledge with George R. Edwards (*Gay/Lesbian Liberation*, 1984) that Paul has borrowed some of his phraseology used in Romans I from the intertestamental book *The Wisdom of Solomon* and builds up a rhetorically powerful argument on Gentile depravity, this cannot neutralize the apostle’s vigorous condemnation of same-sex practices; see Richard B. Hays in *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 14 (1986), pp. 184–215.

Finally, the lexical arguments that John Boswell (*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 1980) employs to avoid finding homosexuality mentioned in [1 Cor. 6:9](#) and [1 Tim. 1:10](#) are without substance. Boswell is an assiduous historian, but he leaves something to be desired in accuracy when it comes to linguistic matters; see David F. Wright’s extensive critique in *Vigiliae Christianae*, 38 (1984), pp. 125–153, and 41 (1987), 396–398.

Furthermore, as an exegete Boswell is heavy-handed in dealing with specifically religious and theological implications in his sources, and tends to draw conclusions that are wholly unwarranted by the sources. While it is undoubtedly true that sexual conduct was not the major focus of Israelite faith or of the teaching of Jesus, at the same time it is irresponsible for Boswell to conclude that ‘sexuality appears to have been a matter of indifference to Jesus’ and that ‘the New Testament takes no demonstrable position on homosexuality’. On the contrary, the careful and unbiased analysis of [Romans 1:15–27](#) made by Hays (in the article referred to above) clearly shows that ‘Paul portrays homosexual activity as a vivid and shameful sign of humanity’s confusion and rebellion against God.’

G. The Church and Homosexuality

Within the last two decades homosexuality has become the subject of increasing attention. While this has raised awareness of homosexuality, it has not succeeded in clarifying the underlying issues of the debate. Foremost among these issues is whether homosexuality is primarily the result of genetic constitution or of human choice. It is often asserted that if it can be shown that homosexual persons are ‘born that way’, then, like left-handedness, for example, it ceases to be a moral choice, and any proscriptions of it, including church proscriptions, are in error.

The following discussion of homosexuality is broken into two parts. The bulk of the study documents scientific research on the matter as it currently stands. This material is reproduced in Appendix A. Although research to-date is inconclusive on the exact causes of homosexuality, it is the contention of this report that whether homosexuality is a

matter of [p. 38](#) genetics or whether it is a matter of choice, such considerations are not decisive for the church.

The fundamental issue is one of redemption and not of creation. The Christian church has always confessed that humanity is not born into the world in a perfect state, or even in a neutral state. Human beings are 'not able not to sin'. The church's moral concern is not with homosexual orientation but with what one does with it.

How do the causes of homosexual orientation relate to choice of how to act here and now? It is erroneous to argue that the existence of a predisposition or orientation justifies acting upon it. When predispositions are contrary to the claims of the gospel the church must call its members to oppose such predispositions. Because sin is natural to all fallen human beings, the church has always called Christians to act in opposition to those tendencies which run counter to faith and morality. So the core issue is neither the existence nor the causes of a predisposition, but it is how the gospel would have us live.

The behavioural sciences have increasingly shown that causation cannot be understood in simplistic terms of 'cause' versus 'free choice'. Rather, human behaviour is seen to be the result of a network of factors that work together, and choice cannot be eliminated as one of these factors. Proving that particular factors contribute to a behavioural pattern, or predispose us to make certain choices, does not render human choice obsolete. If that were the case, it would be necessary to conclude that those adults who engage in acts such as assault, rape, and theft are not morally accountable because research shows that certain factors predispose their behaviour. Such a conclusion is obviously false. When psychological scientists today talk about causes, they typically do not mean one event that makes another event inevitable (e.g., the hammer striking the thumb *causes* pain), but rather that one set of events makes certain other events more likely (e.g., poverty causes crime).

Information about the factors that influence the development of the pattern can help us understand homosexual persons, deepen our compassion and sensitivity, and enhance our capacity to respond pastorally to them. This information does not, however, alleviate the responsibility of any person to make moral choices.

Conclusion

There is a general consensus today that no one theory of homosexuality can explain such a diverse phenomenon (See Appendix A). There is certainly no single genetic, hormonal or psychological cause of homosexual orientation. The complex of factors which results in the orientation toward homosexuality probably differs from person to person. While we do not know what causes the orientation, we undoubtedly know that the forces that go into the creation of a homosexual person are more complex and mysterious than most people had earlier appreciated. There appears to be a variety of factors, therefore, which can provide a push [p. 39](#) in the direction of homosexuality for some persons, but there is no evidence that this 'push' renders human choice irrelevant.

H. Church Membership and the Ordination of Homosexuals

According to the General Assembly's decision in 1978, it is clear that homosexual persons are to be welcomed into church membership. That decision reads:

Persons who manifest homosexual behavior must be treated with the profound respect and pastoral tenderness due all people of God ...

Homosexual persons are encompassed by the searching love of Christ ...

As persons repent and believe they become members of Christ's body. The church is not a citadel of the morally perfect; it is a hospital for sinners. It is the fellowship where contrite, needy people rest their hope for salvation on Christ and his righteousness. Here

in community they seek and receive forgiveness and new life. The church must become the nurturing community so that all those whose lives come short of the glory of God are converted, reoriented and built up into Christian maturity. It may be only in the context of loving community, appreciation, pastoral care, forgiveness and nurture that homosexual persons can come to a clear understanding of God's pattern for their sexual expression.

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.³²

In 1978 the General Assembly affirmed: 'That unrepentant homosexual practice does not accord with the requirements for ordination set forth in the Book of Order ...'³³ We reaffirm the position that ordination of practising homosexuals is against the Book of Order and the authority of the Scripture. While membership in the church is open to homosexual persons, ordination is not.

Isn't it inconsistent to welcome homosexual persons into the church and deny them ordination? On the surface it may appear so, but there is a difference between church membership and ordination. Church membership affirms a person's desire to be part of the community of faith; a community in which sinful human beings are transformed more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ. While ordination also affirms this desire, it affirms much more. The Form of Government states (G-6.0106): 'In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural and acquired, those who undertake particular ministries shall be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world.'

To ordain practising homosexuals is to affirm their lifestyle as a demonstration of the Christian gospel. In p. 40 the act of ordaining, the church would then be approving homosexual practice. This would be contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

We believe, therefore, that the church's present stance of welcoming homosexual persons into the church and not ordaining 'self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons' is consistent with our understanding of membership and with our understanding of the scriptural teaching with regard to homosexual practice.

I. The Church and AIDS

(See Appendix C for statistics about the AIDS epidemic.)

Although many in the church have shown compassion and understanding toward individuals with AIDS, a certain amount of ambivalence remains. There are two sources of this ambivalence:

1. AIDS is a fatal disease with no cure in sight;
2. The majority of the victims of AIDS contracted the HIV virus by engaging in behaviours inconsistent with biblical teaching, namely, homosexual behavior and illicit IV drug usage.

The church is reminded that there is no evidence that AIDS is transmitted by casual contact; bodily fluids must be exchanged. When the possibility for such a transmission

³² Policy Statement and Recommendations adopted by the 190th General Assembly on May 22, 1978. *Minutes*, UPC USA, 1978, 48, 213.

³³ *Ibid.*

exists, as in healthcare settings, due caution is urged. But in normal social relations, AIDS victims should not be treated as pariahs and outcasts.

We are all sinners. We all fall woefully short of the glory of God. All of us need compassion and care when the consequences of a fallen world result in disease and death. Whether or not AIDS sufferers share responsibility for their disease, the church is called to help such persons.

The church has two responsibilities in response to the AIDS epidemic:

First, it must educate its members, particularly adolescents, about sexually transmitted diseases. These discussions need to be frank and clear, but they also need to be placed in the context of biblical teaching on sexuality. Prevailing opinion would have us believe that AIDS is an insoluble problem. It is precisely at this point, however, that the gospel offers a solution. Sexual abstinence outside of marriage and fidelity in marriage are the best protections against sexually transmitted disease, including AIDS. Once again, God's word has proved faithful in pointing the way to abundant life.

Second, the church must be a compassionate family to afflicted men, women and children. Since AIDS sufferers are often rejected, as were lepers in biblical times, Jesus' response to such outcasts sets a clear example for us today. AIDS sufferers must not be abandoned. Even in communities where adequate medical and end-stage care are available, the church must provide supportive relationships for AIDS sufferers.

Where such care is not available, the church should take the initiative in establishing AIDS clinics and hospices. One of the tragedies of the AIDS epidemic is that sufferers despair and become suicidal. The church is called to offer an alternative, hope for the desperate, companionship for the abandoned, and [p. 41](#) respect for the dignity of those who face death.

V. CALL TO FREEDOM, HOLINESS, AND JOYFULNESS

The words of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians are the words of the Holy Spirit to the church today. 'The body is meant for the Lord, and the Lord for the body... You were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body' ([1 Cor. 6:12, 20](#)). In bodily existence believers are to render demonstrable obedience in matters pertaining to sexuality, as well as in all other ethical matters, and to teach the same to others. According to the Scriptures, sexual morality is the God-ordained response of men and women to their creation as male and female in the image of God.

The union of sexual intercourse is the means by which male and female participate in the creative plan of God by bringing offspring into the world. It is furthermore a gift by which male and female celebrate and nurture their mutual delight and submission to one another in the life-long covenant of marriage. Where that covenant, for whatever reason, is not established, the gift of sexual intercourse has no use and is thus forbidden by the Creator.

This is not to say that unmarried persons who do not participate in sexual intercourse are somehow incomplete individuals. They are fully complete individuals because, whether male or female, they are created in the image of God. It does mean, however, that sexual intercourse is unnecessary, and indeed harmful and contrary to God's will, in relationships with other singles, or with members of the same sex, or among unwed teenagers, or with children, or with a partner married to someone else, or above all and under any circumstances, in a coercive and abusive manner in any sexual relationship.

There can be no illusion that this word may seem foreign, indeed impossibly difficult, to a generation in which, in nearly every facet of life, permissiveness rather than discipline has been the norm of behaviour. Perhaps it seemed so to the Corinthians of Paul's day.

Nor can there be any illusions that many in the church today fall short of God's expressed will in this area, just as they did in first-century Corinth. When this happens the church of Jesus Christ will not cast the first stone but will extend a forgiving hand of hope and renewal.

Nevertheless, this is still God's word to the church today, as it was to the church at Corinth. The church of Jesus Christ must be bold to proclaim the whole truth regardless of prevailing sexual customs. Its practice and proclamation are God's own word for the prevention of moral error as well as help for lives disoriented, distraught, and destroyed by sexual immorality and anarchy.

As Christians, we cannot separate faith and obedience, love and law, grace and works. The attempt to do so has always led to failure. It is not just that the Bible will not separate faith and obedience, as though obedience were some kind of inheritance tax which God levies on the free gift of salvation. God's love is too deep not to demand commitments p. 42 from his human partners. A God of love without law who makes no demands is an abstraction, indeed no God. The commandments of God are all designed to make us more happy than we can possibly be without them. They are not penalties but blessings.

Human obedience or disobedience, however, is never the final word. The ultimate word of the Christian is grace, through which we are loved, accepted, and forgiven by the cross, and through which we are enabled by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to become new persons in conformity to Jesus Christ, our Lord. p. 43

Gender and Homosexuality

Harold Turner

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In this important chapter written in non-technical language, the author argues that the issue in the current homosexual debate is about gender relationships not sexuality; and that morals and rhetoric cannot be separated from theological truth. He shows that the uniqueness of complementary gender relationships must be grounded in the Christian doctrine of the trinitarian understanding of God.

Editor

CURRENT SHAPE OF THE QUESTION

Recently there has been intense discussion among Christians in the areas of gender and homosexuality, conducted in terms of 'sexuality', and focused especially on the two forms of hereto- and homo-sexuality. In relation to the latter there are at least three distinct issues and considerable progress has been made since the 1970s in dealing with two of these.

The first, decriminalization of consenting homosexual behaviour, was long overdue. The Christian opposition to decriminalization was based on the belief that such a

procedure implies acceptance of homosexuality in general. In fact, decriminalization was a first step in removing harsh, punitive attitudes in both Church and State.

The second step was the new pastoral attitude that sees homosexuals not so much judgementally but rather as people to understand and relate to lovingly and responsibly. Official church statements and most people in pastoral ministry now express this attitude, even if many church members have not yet caught up.

The discussion now concentrates on a third issue: the acceptance of [p. 44](#) those living in a full homosexual partnership not only into church membership but also into the ordained ministry. Many of those who have campaigned for the above-mentioned first two changes see this as the logical conclusion to the process of change. They, perhaps rather wishfully, assume that the new pastoral attitudes imply the normalization of homosexuality. Others, a majority, have seen these new attitudes as no more than a fully Christian approach to this as to any other aspect of human behaviour, and as having nothing to do with reclassifying homosexuality as 'right'. This unidentified difference of interpretation has bedevilled current discussion.

Language and limits for our discussion

Beyond the current divisions of opinion on these issues the one inescapable feature we all share is the fact of our sexuality, which is given to us in the form of our gender. We must all have parents of the two genders and we are all born either male or female. Some would play down the effect of 'nature', i.e. genetic origins and physical differences. They would emphasize the subsequent influence of 'nurture' in a particular culture in establishing our gender and our sexual orientation. Others argue for the reverse emphasis. There is probably no way of settling the balance of these two groups of factors, either for any individual or as a general rule. Since for the purposes of our exploration here this question does not first have to be settled, we need spend no more time on it.

Likewise we can avoid being embroiled in attempts to stereotype the two genders in terms of different masculine and feminine 'qualities', or to do the reverse, to eliminate differences and see humankind in unisex terms. The biological distinctions between men and women are permanent and pervasive. They can neither be eliminated nor sloughed off after they have served a reproductive purpose for some of us. We live our whole lives as men or women, apart from a tiny proportion of transsexual and transvestites. The holistic emphasis in modern thought points to the interaction of body and mind.

Gender must not be identified with sexuality. The latter may find expression between the genders ('hetero-'), or within either gender ('homo-', and then as either 'gay' or 'lesbian'). The forms of gender expression vary from the implicit and unconscious factor in all relationships between men and women to the more overtly sexual forms. Sexuality as a drive, an activity or an experience is endlessly variable, comes and goes, waxes and wanes. But through all these variations the invariable fact of gender remains, and it is the wider term.

Again gender is presupposed by marriage but does not require marriage, much less parenthood, for its significance. Some men and women may by choice become related as husband and wife, but all men and women *are* related as male and female and here there is no choice between gender or no gender. Transsexual and sex-change operations only illustrate the point. The fact that Jesus was neither married nor a parent, but nevertheless possessed gender enabled him to be thoroughly [p. 45](#) human, and let us say at once no more human than if the incarnation had been in the form of a female.

Some ethical theory and basic theology

The arguments for the radical reclassification of homosexuality have been conducted in terms of sexuality rather than gender. Gender from which sexuality can be distinguished but not separated, has tended to be ignored. Those who oppose any aspect of this comprehensive reclassification have often found themselves discussing the issue in the terms chosen by those who support the new attitudes, even while they feel uneasy in so doing. At the same time they have not found it easy to formulate their own understanding in a way that is convincing to themselves or to others. Although able to explain decriminalization and support a more positive pastoral approach, they have been left with little more than an inarticulate 'gut reaction' against the public acceptance of homosexuals into the Christian ministry.

The fact that this reaction is inarticulate does not mean that it is erroneous. Michael Polanyi, an influential scientist-philosopher dealing with the ways in which we know truth, has taught us that most of our knowledge of truth is in fact implicit or 'tacit knowledge'. We always 'know more than we can tell', much less actually 'prove'. Our knowledge about right and wrong, truth and error, always exceeds our capacity to articulate this knowledge. 'Gut knowledge' is therefore to be taken seriously, even though we should always work at making it more explicit and then critiquing it.

To articulate and examine our implicit knowledge in this area is to engage in moral philosophy or ethical theory, and in Christian theology. This essay aims to help us undertake some fairly simple but basic thinking, to 'do' some ethics and some theology. In acquiring these tools we will also be able to examine the presentation of the homosexual position by its convinced supporters.

MORAL ARGUMENTS USED IN THE DISCUSSION

The presentation of the homosexual position is couched in moral rather than theological language, and upon analysis it reveals at least four features that are subject to criticism.

1. Reliance on moral rhetoric to support one position and denounce the other

In the past, such rhetoric was conspicuous in church criticism of homosexuality, which was described as inevitably associated with all kinds of evil habits and lusts, from which, by implication, heterosexuality was protected. This indiscriminate condemnation contributed to the marginalization and persecution of homosexuals. Decriminalization and pastoral acceptance have not yet entirely eliminated this rhetoric from the language of church members. On the other hand many church reports now lean in the reverse direction and one detects efforts to compensate for the past sins of the churches.

The main examples now occur not among the critics but among the supporters of homosexuality. Here the case presented often consists [p. 46](#) largely of a range of 'good words', mostly moral qualities, associated with the one position and a range of 'bad words' with the other.

A recent example is that of a Presbyterian minister's preaching in his church on the subject of human sexuality. On the one hand he associated homosexuality with liberation, justice, openness, acceptance, freedom, love (indeed 'new heights of loving'), gentleness and truth. Those who disagreed were described as 'hounds of heaven', contravening human rights, obsessed with sex, ignorant and prejudiced, persecutors, with 'chains of oppression'. The sermon concluded with Lowell's moving hymn, 'Once to every man and nation' with its dramatic contrasts between 'strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side'. The good side was then described in terms of 'bloom', 'light', and the 'brave'; the evil side was associated with 'blight', 'darkness', 'cowardice' and 'wrong'. The sermon left

no doubt as to where all these terms applied. This may be regarded as powerful rhetoric, but it is certainly not argument.¹

Often statements of this kind are, as in this case, followed by an appeal for people to sit down together and listen to one another. It is not surprising if this does not happen when one side monopolizes the language of the moral high ground rather than presenting arguments with substantial moral or theological content. The well-known name for this procedure is 'argumentum ad hominem'—attack the opponent, not the argument.

It is important to abstain from any form of moral intimidation. Neither party in the debate has any moral monopoly, neither today nor in their histories, and this procedure must be exposed for what it is and replaced by real discussion with solid content.

2. There is no close correlation between morality and religion

The above rhetorical method assumes that there is always an inbuilt relation between moral rectitude and religious or theological truth. In this sphere, if moral qualities we all recognize (such as love, loyalty, unselfishness, etc.) are exhibited in the lives of homosexual partnerships, then it is argued that this lifestyle must be acceptable to God, and is indeed as much his gift and blessing as heterosexual marriage. Right morality and true religion, it is claimed, or more often just implied, always go together.

Everyone's experience, in fact, contradicts this assumption. We all know of admirable, morally upright citizens of unblemished character who are atheists or even strongly anti-religious. And we know of the reverse—the sincere and humble Christian who fights an often losing battle against known moral weaknesses or habits, be it alcoholism, kleptomania, a sexual fault, or bad temper, and yet who knows the ever-renewed grace and forgiveness of God in the way that is outside the atheist's ken.

Thus we may recognize that some homosexual partnerships exhibit more qualities of kindness, mutual support, p.47 etc., than some heterosexual marriages, and of course vice versa. Thus we can also recognize that a homosexual partnership may have helped someone to find acceptance, stability, responsibility, even deliverance from drugs, without this fact 'proving' that such a partnership is theologically acceptable as part of the divine pattern for creation.

I first teamed this clearly when I had to accept the real rescue of a young man from hard drugs by the Unification Church or 'Moonies', in spite of the Christian theological criticism of its Asian syncretist beliefs. I accepted the moral achievement but rejected the associated theology. It would be so much simpler if moral quality always coincided with theological truth, but it doesn't, and any argument involving this assumption is simply invalid. The loving, permanent homosexual relationships of which we are told are irrelevant to the central theological issue.

3. We all have moral 'blind spots'

The presence of the above positive qualities among homosexuals is equally irrelevant to our moral judgement on this type of relationship itself. It is notorious that we are capable of great moral inconsistencies. The more dramatic examples occur when a devoted husband and father, pillar of the church and respected citizen noted for good works, is discovered to have embezzled clients' funds, secretly gambled or maintained a mistress, or otherwise acted 'out of character'. Defence lawyers often play on this very contrast, and the media make much of it. And in varying degrees there is some touch of Jekyll and Hyde

¹ From the copy of a sermon given in Auckland, New Zealand, in November 1991 by the Rev. David Clark, a prominent supporter of the comprehensive acceptance of homosexuality as a normal Christian position.

in all of us. Which of us good ‘law and order’ people has never deliberately and knowingly broken the speed limit when the law is not looking?

A variation on this fact of inconsistency occurs when a person who is full of the virtues is felt to have a serious blind spot on certain moral issues. The animal rights supporter may approve of capital punishment; the ecological enthusiast may be an example of conspicuous consumer spending; the peace campaigner may adopt openly militant and violent methods. Each issue then has to be discussed on its own merits and it is no argument to point to one’s virtues in other areas. So also with homosexual partnerships—they may be admirable in many other ways, but this has nothing to do with the inherent rightness or wrongness of such relationships.

4. Reliance on moral arguments in a pluralist culture

A weakness in the contemporary use of moral considerations to justify the homosexual case is that there is no agreed public moral reference point in modern Western culture. Objective moral standards of right and wrong have been eroded, and any theological or Christian base abandoned. Morality is said to derive from changing ‘cultural values’ and in a pluralist society where all moral standards are relative it reduces to a matter of personal, subjective opinion—my life-style and ethic alongside yours. Indeed this argument is invoked in support of a variety of sexual lifestyles and behaviour, including homosexual relationships, as equally ‘right’ for different people. **p. 48**

The churches themselves are caught up in our own culture more than they know; their pronouncements in the field of sexuality often reflect the values of contemporary society rather than the gospel. This makes it all the more necessary—and difficult—to seek a base beyond the flux of contemporary culture in the classic theology of the Christian faith, and especially in what we believe about God and the pattern for human life that he has created. To this issue we now turn.

A THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER

There are two possible views of God, each of which has a corresponding view of humanity and of gender. The Godhead is either

1. a unitary being and so non-relational within itself (i.e. monotheism); or
2. a more complex single being with differentiated (i.e. ‘hetero’) internal relations (as in trinitarianism).

The use of the terms ‘homo’ and ‘hetero’ is perhaps unusual in the theology of God and may seem contrived, but they do apply and serve to show the inter-relation between the theology of God, the theology of creation, especially of gender, and the ethics of our subject, especially of love. Let us now look at each position more closely, and try to spell this out.

1. Non-relational monotheism and a God of love

God has often been seen as a unitary being, with no internal structure to sustain inherent relationships. This view is called *monotheism*. There is nothing distinctively Christian in such a unitary view of God, for Judaism, Islam and some other faiths would assent to it.

If such a God is to be eternally and inherently loving then this God has no eternal object to relate to in loving apart from himself. Such self-love we call narcissism and regard as unhealthy. To have an object to relate to in love, a unitarian God has to create human beings. This makes God dependent on us in order to be himself, instead of our depending

on him in order to be fully ourselves. God is then less than an absolute, ultimate being who is love in himself; we humans enable him to love and to 'be' love. There is not much security for us in such a God, whose nature we determine.

Humanity, if made in the image of such a God, would also be essentially undifferentiated, unitary and all alike. (The technical terms for this are androgynous and hermaphrodite; nowadays we would say unisex.) Gender difference in this case would be reduced to the level of the biology needed for reproduction; it would have nothing to do with reflecting the nature of God. Therefore, if God is love, gender has no essential connection with the nature of love. Hence there is no real difference in hetero-relationships of love and homo-relationships of love.

Not surprisingly, therefore, supporters of the homosexual position are often monotheistic in their theology, i.e. unitarians rather trinitarians. This first came home to me when I read a paper on Christology (who and what Jesus is), written by a leading homosexual minister. He p. 49 presented Jesus not as essentially divine but only as an outstanding prophet and teacher, whose death had no unique significance.² Jesus must then have worshipped a unitary 'God of love'; and there is no room in this view for the trinitarian view of God's nature. This unitarian view would not be accepted by churches associated with the World Council of Churches, by Christians of the Lausanne movement, or by the Catholic or Eastern Orthodox churches, but it comports well with the homosexual position.

It is this unitarian or monotheistic God who is usually invoked in statements that support homosexuality by declaring that God loves us all just as we are, no matter what our sexual orientation. We must expose this apparently unchallengeable declaration as most misleading. In the context of the sexuality discussion it always implies that God accepts, even loves, homosexuality itself, which is then declared to be another blessing from God.

I sincerely hope God does not love, and so approve, any of us as we are in this indiscriminating fashion. There are things about myself that I regret, even hate. The Christian gospel is that God loves me *in spite of what I still am* in so many ways, that he is ready to forgive all this, and knows what he will yet make me through Christ with whom my future is hidden. That is the 'amazing grace' of God, the forgiveness that is misrepresented or entirely omitted in the common claim for the way God loves homosexuals and their homosexual activity. This sort of claim would support not only homosexual behaviour but every kind of human wrong-doing. It must be exposed for the distorting and dangerous half-truth that it is.

2. Hetero-relationship trinitarian God: eternal love in its fullness

In turning to the heterosexual view we shall find that we are operating not in the moral categories of the homosexual supporters but in basic structural and relational categories both for God and for mankind i.e. in terms of how we are actually made.

The classic Christian position sets forth an internal self-differentiation within the Godhead, with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This distinctive Christian doctrine of the Trinity is no mere speculative or archaic option to be discarded if we are to relate to modern culture. The present century has seen a massive re-discovery of the centrality of this understanding of God and today many of our major theologians have been producing substantial studies of the Trinity, the crown of Christian reflection about the faith. We

² A paper on 'Who Jesus is for us today', submitted in New Zealand in 1991 by Dr David Bromell to a Methodist Church committee on doctrine. Through the media Dr Bromell has become nationally known as a homosexual minister. He is a former Baptist pastor seeking admission to the Methodist ministry.

have discovered that in the Christian view of persons we are *constituted by* our relations with others, our belongingness. We are not self-contained atomistic ‘marbles’ as modern individualism would have it; our critique of this false view derives from recognizing that we are made in the image of our maker, a trinitarian God who is essentially relational. p. 50

Likewise, and for the same reasons, we reject the current political and economic views that society arises from a voluntary social contract between free individuals acting in their own interests. We can critique what has gone so manifestly wrong in Western societies only on the basis of an organic understanding of society as *constituted by* a network of relationships. Leonardo Boff, a leading Catholic exponent in South America of what is known as liberation theology, has a whole volume on *Trinity and society*. In it an impressive exposition of the classic doctrine of God is the basis for his radical critique of the oppression and poverty around him, and of both capitalism and socialism.

It is also of great significance that due to twentieth century developments in the science of physics, physicists no longer see the material world as made up of basic building blocks called atoms but rather in terms of interacting complexes. This is another sign that the hetero-relational or trinitarian view of God can provide the most comprehensive reference point and model for all thinking about the creation—the physical world, human society, and the human person.

In the trinitarian view God is not a three-in-one partnership of equal divine individuals, but one single divinity with internal self-differentiation into three ‘persons’—differences for which we lack adequate human language but which we describe as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These differences provide opportunity for a new form of love. This is not only reciprocal love between parties who are like each other; it goes further by reaching across the real and basic differences between the parties. This love is richer and deeper because it has the added dimension of complementarity. The parties now depend upon each other for their own completeness; each is actually *constituted by* relation in love with the two other different yet equal partners in the Godhead. They do not first exist and then have the option of loving; and they do not love their own mirror-images. What we have called ‘hetero-relationship’ goes beyond ‘homo-relationship’ into a mutual interweaving in love of the very being of each different ‘party’ with the basic reality of the two other ‘parties’.

Co-humanity in the image of the Trinity

There are immediate and profound implications for our understanding of how this trinitarian God has created the human race. We now have the model for an internal differentiation basic to created humanity, seen in gender as male and female, and maintained in heterosexual but not in homosexual relations.

This is set forth in the first creation story in [Genesis 1:26–27](#) where we read, ‘God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” ... So, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.’ This is repeated in [Genesis 5:1–2](#). Here our likeness to God is not spelled out in terms of sharing in his spirituality, rationality, creativity, moral nature or righteousness, self-consciousness, power, free-will, knowledge or any other distinctive features that separate us from the animals. It is the fact p. 51 of complementarity through gender that affirms the likeness.

This likeness, moreover, is not a point-to-point correspondence so that we start looking for a male and a female member within the Trinity and then proceed to impose gender or sexuality on God. It is, rather, an analogy where the complementary relationship between the genders is likened to the complementary relationships within the Trinity. Both God and human beings are essentially differentiated and relational in

nature. This is the first and most important thing the story says about humans as the image of God; note that it is not simply identified with sexuality and reproduction, which are mentioned further on in the narrative. These are aspects of gender but not its essence, which is complementary relationship in wider dimensions than the sexual.

It is also important to note that whereas the animal world is created 'each according to their kind' or species, mankind is not divided into various species of race, cultures or societies, but simply into the two genders. These are not equivalent to two different species, since in their complementarity they need each other to form the one human species. It might be said that the homosexual position breaks this co-humanity up into two different species, 'hereto' and 'homo', each with its own 'sexual' orientation and practices, although only the former is able to fulfill the associated Genesis duty to be fruitful and multiply.

The complementarity between man and woman is at the heart of the second more detailed creation story in [Genesis 2:15–25](#), where again there is creation of community between man and woman, as equals but different. The key concept is in [Genesis 2:18](#) where it is declared that it is unsatisfactory for man to be alone. His incompleteness is remedied not by the creation of another man like himself, but by the creation of a woman as a complementary being. Here again marriage and sexuality come later in the account, and are not to be confused with the gender that they presuppose.

In the light of the profound insights in these two creation accounts it might be said that the main task of the current feminist movement is to affirm the place of woman as the original, equal, distinctive, complementary and indispensable 'other' of man. The ultimate model for this is the Trinity.

Strangely, this relation of gender to exposition of the image of God eluded the great theological minds of the past. Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin all tend to subsume gender under reproduction and marriage and to see the divine image in terms of our differences from the animals, as in the moral and intellectual categories we listed above. Only since the great German theologian Karl Barth took a major step forward in the middle of our century and related gender to the image of the Trinity have we been equipped to articulate a theology of gender, sexuality and marriage.

The complementarity of gender

It is of course true that there are many other kinds of complementarity between people especially where there is close friendship or [p. 52](#) love between man and man, or woman and woman. There are many forms of complementary relationship—between manager and staff, oarsmen and cox, surgeon and anaesthetist, architect and builder, home-keeper and wage-earner, extrovert and introvert personalities, the practical and the thinker, the Marys and the Marthas. Any of these and many more may exist between the partners in a homosexual relationship, and may serve to support and enrich the quality of relationship. What then is so special about the complementarity of gender?

There are at least six dimensions in which gender stands apart from all other forms of complementarity, and we have already alluded to a number of these:

1. It is a given fact, unchangeable, and in no sense voluntary.
2. It is biologically necessary and every human being originates in gender, with a father and a mother. Here it serves that basic concern for survival at the heart of all societies; the sterile state of homosexuality ignores this concern and is in fact parasitical on a life-affirming society.
3. It is anatomically appropriate both for initial attraction through different kinds of beauty and for the fullest expressions of lovemaking. In comparison the options

open to homosexuals are inadequate, often contrived, and in some of the commonest forms actually dangerous (will any medical school support anal intercourse?).

4. It touches every aspect of the psyche. In the words of the nineteenth century philosopher Feuerbach, it is 'a distinction which pervades the entire organism, which is everywhere present, which is infinite, and whose beginning and end are beyond discovery'. Somewhere here lies the mystique, the wonder, of what exists between a man and a woman in all relationships, in all degrees, whether married or celibate, from the brief polite encounter at a ticket office to the ecstasies of love-making.
5. It is presented at the heart of both biblical creation accounts as we have examined them, and it runs through the Bible as a norm in counterpoint with the story of the destruction of complementarity through the effects of sin, and of its restoration through Christ.
6. It is theologically at the heart of the Christian doctrine of humanity as made in the image of the distinctively trinitarian God. Any theology of homosexuality will have to come to terms with this position. It would, however, seem impossible to present a homosexual partnership as an 'equally valid' alternative image of the Christian God without basic distortion of the rich trinitarian view into the inadequate monotheism of a 'God of love'.

Any one of these six features would be sufficient to establish the uniqueness of gender complementarity; taken together they present an overwhelming case for the special status of gender and of heterosexuality. Here there is an interlocking or bonding abundantly provided for in male and female as [p. 53](#) created that is absent from relations between two men or two women. No emphasis upon moral features or quality of relationship can replace this essential feature of complementary difference, lacking in the homosexual position.

The homosexual position, on the contrary, either ignores all that we have said about gender or regards it as of no importance and therefore separates it from sexuality and from both heterosexual marriage and homosexual partnership. But in practice gender often reasserts itself; in a gay or lesbian relationship it sometimes happens that one partner begins to assume the role or the appearance and behaviour conventionally associated with the opposite gender. And of course the unconscious ramifications of gender in the life of the homosexual person since birth cannot be escaped.

We now ask those who support the normalization of homosexuality to avoid dependence on rhetoric or irrelevant moral considerations and to engage with the trinitarian understanding of God that defines the distinctively Christian position. Only in this way can there be a meeting of Christian minds in the current discussions.

RECOMMENDED READING

D. S. Bailey, *The man-woman relationship in Christian thought* (Longmans, 1959). An older but comprehensive study.

The House of Bishops of the Church of England, *Issues in human sexuality: a statement by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England*. (London: Church House, 1991). The most recent, and perhaps the best, of the church reports.

P. K. Jewett, *Man as male and female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975). A solid theological study.

Janet Martin Soskice (ed.), *After Eve* (Marshall/Pickering, 1990). See especially the essay by Paul Fiddes on Barth's position.

Samuel Terrien, *Till the heart sings: a biblical theology of manhood and womanhood* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985). A leading Old Testament scholar's charming account of gender and sexuality.

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The Source and Meaning of the translation 'Homosexuals' in Biblical Studies

James B. De Young

Reprinted with permission from The Masters Seminary Journal, Fall 1992, pp. 191–215. (Abridged)

This detailed and scholarly linguistic article is rewarding for those who persevere with it! The author seeks to show how the pro-homosexual lobby in our mainline church councils have been influenced by the arguments of John Boswell, R. Scroggs, William Petersen and others that Paul's use of malakai and arsenokoitai refers to male prostitutes, sodomites and men who make use of call boys; therefore scriptural injunctions have no relevance to homosexuality as now practised by Christians, lay and ordained. This study argues that Paul coined the term arsenokoitai, deriving it from the LXX of [Leviticus 20:13](#), and used it to refer to both homosexual orientation and practice.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

Coincident with the rise of the gay rights movement in recent years has been an increasing focus on the biblical statements regarding homosexuality or sodomy.¹ As part of this focus, the meaning of the term ἀρσενοκοῖται (*arsenokoitai*, 'homosexuals'), used twice by the apostle Paul ([1 Cor. 6:9](#), [1 Tim. 1:10](#)), has received vigorous scrutiny.² This [p. 55](#) issue is particularly crucial to contemporary society since so much of modern ethics is shaped by

¹ For convenience sake, the term 'homosexual' is used to encompass both same-sex orientation and same-sex behaviour. The meaning of this term is one of the main considerations of this study.

² These times are different from just over a century ago. Then P. Fairbairn (*Pastoral Epistles* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1874] 891) could write of ἀρσενοκοῖται that it is a 'term for which fortunately our language has no proper equivalent'. Unknowingly he thereby touched upon the basis for the contemporary debate and study. The present writer endorses the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles on the basis of internal and external evidence (see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, [4th ed.; Downer's Grove: Intervarsity, 1990] 621–649, for an extensive discussion and citation of supporters of the Pauline authorship).

biblical statements. More particularly, the concern over gay rights and the place of gays or homosexuals in the church and in society requires the resolution of biblical interpretation.

This study of historical, linguistic, and literary matters will survey and evaluate recent proposals for the meaning of *arsenokoitai* and present evidence to point to a resolution. Several writers and their positions represent the modern debate on this word. Three authors, Bailey, Boswell, and Scroggs, have provoked considerable discussion and significantly encouraged the wider acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle in society, in the church, and in the ministry.³

I. A NEW INTERPRETATION OF 'HOMOSEXUALS' J. BOSWELL

The most influential study of *arsenokoitai* among contemporary authors is that of John Boswell.⁴ Whereas the usual translation⁵ of this term gives it either explicitly or implicitly an active sense, Boswell gives it a passive sense.

In an extended discussion of the term (341–53), he cites 'linguistic evidence and common sense' to support his conclusion that the word means 'male sexual agents, i.e. active male prostitutes'. His argument is that the *arseno-* part of the word is adjectival, not the object of the *koitai* which refers to base sexual activity. Hence the term, according to Boswell, designates a male sexual person or male prostitute. He acknowledges, however, that most interpret the composite term as active, meaning 'those who sleep with, make their bed with, men'. Boswell argues that in some compounds, such as παιδομαθής (*paidomathēs*, 'child learner'), the *paido-* is the subject of *manthanō*, and in others, such as παιδοπόρος (*paidoporos*, 'through which a child passes'), the *paido-* is neither subject nor object but simply a modifier without verbal significance. His point is that each compound must p. 56 be individually analysed for its meaning. More directly, he maintains that compounds with the Attic form *arreno-* employ it objectively while those with the Hellenistic *arseno-* use it as an adjective (343). Yet he admits exceptions to this distinction regarding *arreno-*.

Boswell next appeals to the Latin of the time, namely *drauci* or *exoleti*. These were male prostitutes having men or women as their objects. The Greek *arsenokoitai* is the equivalent of the Latin *drauci*; the corresponding passive would be παρακοῖται (*parakoitai*, 'one who lies beside'), Boswell affirms. He claims that *arsenokoitai* was the 'most explicit word available to Paul for a male prostitute', since by Paul's time the Attic words πόρνος (*pornos*, 'fornicator') and πορνεύων (*porneuōn*, 'one committing

³ For example, see Scroggs' (see n. 14 below) influence on M. Olson, 'Untangling the Web', *The Other Side* (April 1984): 24–29. For a study suggesting a further prohibition of homosexuality in the OT, see A. Phillips, 'Uncovering the Father's Skirt', *VT* 30/1 (January 1980) 38–43. For a bibliography of other sources dealing with ἀρσενοκοῖται see the *Wilson Disc Religion Indexes* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1987).

⁴ J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University Press, 1980).

⁵ Several translations of [1 Tim 1:10](#) are: KJV, 'them that defile themselves with mankind'; ASV, 'abusers of themselves with men'; NASB, 'homosexuals'; RSV, NKJV, NRSV, 'sodomites'; NEB, NIV, 'perverts'; GNB, 'sexual perverts'. In [1 Cor. 6:9](#) these occur: KJV, 'abusers of themselves with mankind'; ASV, 'abusers of themselves with men'; NASB, RSV, 'homosexuals'; NKJV, 'sodomites'; NEB, 'homosexual perversion'. The RSV and NEB derive their translation from two Greek words, μαλακοί and ἀρσενοκοῖται which GNB has as 'homosexual perverts'. NRSV has the two words as 'male prostitutes' in the text, and 'sodomites' in the footnote. The active idea predominates among the commentators as well; it is the primary assumption.

fornication'), found also in the LXX, had been adopted 'to refer to men who resorted to female prostitutes or simply committed fornication'.⁶

In the absence of the term from pagan writers such as Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch, and from the Jewish writers Philo and Josephus, Boswell finds even more convincing evidence for his affirmation that *arsenokoitai* 'did not connote "homosexual" or even "sodomite" in the time of Paul' (346).⁷ He also demonstrates its absence in Pseudo-Lucian, Sextus Empiricus, and Libanius. He subsequently finds it lacking in 'all discussions of homosexual relations' (346)⁸ among Christian sources in Greek, including the *Didache*, Tatian, Justin Martyr, Eusebius,⁹ Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom. Chrysostom is singled out for his omission as 'final proof' that the word could not mean homosexuality.¹⁰

Boswell next appeals to the omission of the texts of 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy from discussions of homosexuality among Latin p. 57 church fathers (348).¹¹ Cited are Tertullian, Arnobius, Lactantius, and Augustine. The last named uses 'circumlocutions'. Other Latin writers include Ausonius, Cyprian, and Minucius Felix. The term is also lacking in state and in church legislation. By the sixth century the term became confused and was applied to a variety of sexual activities from child molesting to anal intercourse between a husband and wife (353).

Having surveyed the sources, Boswell concludes,

There is no reason to believe that either ἀρσενοκοῖται (*arsenokoitai*) or μαλακοί connoted homosexuality in the time of Paul or for centuries thereafter, and every reason to suppose that, whatever they came to mean, they were not determinative of Christian opinion on the morality of homosexual acts (353, transliteration added).

It is clear throughout that Boswell defines *arsenokoitai* to refer to male prostitutes. He even goes so far as to conclude that Paul would probably not disapprove of 'gay

⁶ Boswell, *Christianity* 344. Yet this was not a word 'available to Paul for a male prostitute', for it does not occur at all in any literature prior to Paul (as a search in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* using IBYCUS confirms). If Paul coined the term, it would have no prior history, and all such discussion about its lack of usage in contemporary non-Christian and Christian literature is meaningless.

⁷ Again this would be expected if Paul coined the word.

⁸ The key phrase here apparently is 'discussions', for Boswell admits later (350 n. 42) that it occurs in quotes of Paul but there is no discussion in the context. Hence the implication is that we cannot tell what these writers (Polycarp *To the Philippians* 5:3; Theophilus *Ad Autolycom* 1.2, 2.14; Nilus *Epistularum libri quattuor* 2.282; Cyril of Alexandria *Homiliae diversae* 14; *Sybilline Oracle* 2.13) meant. Yet Polycarp, who was a disciple of John the Apostle and died about A.D. 155, argues in the context that young men should be pure. He uses only the three terms πόρνοι, μαλακοί, and ἀρσενοκοῖται from Paul's list. This at least makes Boswell's use of 'all' subjective. Apparently Clement of Alexandria *Paedagogus* 3.11; *Stromata* 3.18 also belong here.

⁹ Yet Eusebius uses it in *Demonstratiois evangelicae* 1.

¹⁰ Either Boswell is misrepresenting the facts about Chrysostom's use of ἀρσενοκοῖται and its forms (about twenty) in the vice lists of [1 Corinthians 6](#) or [1 Timothy 1](#), or he is begging the question by denying that the word can mean homosexual when Chrysostom uses it. Yet the meaning of ἀρσενοκοῖται is the goal of his and our study, whether in the lists or other discussions. Boswell later admits (351) that Chrysostom uses the almost identical form ἀρσενοκοῖτος in his commentary on 1 Corinthians. Although Boswell suggests that the passage is strange, it may be that Paul is seeking to make a refinement in ἀρσενοκοῖται.

¹¹ Apparently Jerome is a significant omission here, since he renders ἀρσενοκοῖται as *masculorum concubitores*, corresponding 'almost exactly to the Greek' (348, n. 36).

inclination', 'gay relationships', 'enduring love between persons of the same gender', or 'same-sex eroticism' (112, 116–17).

II. REACTIONS TO THE NEW INTERPRETATIONS D. WRIGHT

In more recent years the positions of Bailey, Boswell, and Scroggs have come under closer scrutiny.¹² Perhaps the most critical evaluation of Boswell's view is that by David Wright. In his thorough article, Wright points out several shortcomings of Boswell's treatment of *arsenokoitai*.¹³ He faults Boswell for failing to cite, or citing inaccurately, all the references to [Lev. 18:22](#) and [20:13](#) in the church fathers, such as Eusebius, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen (127–28). Boswell has not considered seriously enough the possibility that the term derives either its form or its meaning from the Leviticus passages (129). This is significant, for if the term is so derived, it clearly refutes Boswell's claim that the first half of the word (*arseno-*) denotes not the object but the gender of the second half (*-koitai*). The LXX must mean 'a male who sleeps with a male', making *arseno-* the object.

Wright also faults Boswell's claims regarding linguistic features of the term, including suggested parallels (129). Though Boswell claims that compounds with *arseno-* employ it objectively and those with *arreno-* employ it as an adjective, Wright believes that the difference between the two is merely one of dialectical diversity: 'No semantic import attaches to the difference between the two forms' (131). Wright believes [p. 58](#) that in most compounds in which the second half is a verb or has a verbal force, the first half denotes its object and where 'the second part is substantival, the first half denotes its gender' (132).¹⁴

It is with Boswell's treatment of the early church fathers that Wright takes special issue, because the former has failed to cite all the sources. For example, Aristides' Apology (c. A.D. 138) probably uses ἀρρενομανεῖς (*arrenomaneis*), ἀνδροβάτην (*androbatē*, and ἀρσενοκοιτίας (*arsenokoitias*) all with the same basic meaning of male homosexuality (133, contrary to Boswell's discussion. Boswell fails to cite Hippolytus (*Refut. Oran. Haer.* 5:26:22–23) and improperly cites Eusebius and the Syriac writer Bardesanes. The latter uses Syriac terms that are identical to the Syriac of [1 Cor. 6:9](#) and [1 Tim. 1:10](#) (133–34).¹⁵

Next Wright shows how the early church fathers use *arsenokoitai* in parallel with παιδοφθορία (*paidophthoria*) referring to male homosexuality with teenagers, the dominant form of male homosexuality among the Greeks (134). Sometimes this parallelism occurs in the threefold listings of μοιχεία (*moicheia*, 'adultery'), πορνεία (*porneia*, 'fornication'), and *paidophthoria*, with *arsenokoitai* replacing *paidophthoria* (136). Clement of Alexandria in *Protr.* 10:108:5 cites the second table of the Ten Commandments as 'You shall not kill', οὐ μοιχεύσεις (*ou moicheuseis*, 'you shall not commit adultery'), οὐ παιδοφθορήσεις (*ou paidophthorēseis*, 'you shall not practise homosexuality with boys'), 'you shall not steal ... (150 n. 43, transliteration and translation added).

¹² On Boswell's treatment of [Rom. 1:26–27](#), the article by R. B. Hays, 'Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1', *JRE* 14/1 (Spring 1986): 184–215, is an excellent critique.

¹³ D. F. Wright, 'Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of ΑΡΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ ([1 Cor. 6:9](#), [1 Tim. 1:10](#))', *VC* 38 (1984): 125–53.

¹⁴ In an unpublished paper, Henry Mendell, 'ΑΙΙΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ: Boswell on Paul', effectively refutes Boswell's claims regarding the philology of ἀρσενοκοῖται. He finds the meaning to be general, 'a male who has sex with a male' (4–11). The paper is available from the writer of this essay.

¹⁵ Wright's end notes (148–49) list additional sources in the church fathers.

Another occurrence of ἀρσενοκοιτεῖν (*arsenokoitein*, 'commit homosexuality') exists in the *Sibylline Oracles* (2:71–73). It may be, Wright observes, that the word was coined by a Jewish pre-Christian writer in a Hellenistic setting represented by *Or. Sib.*, book 2 (137–38).

Wright also discusses uses of *arsenokoitai* in Rhetorius (6th century) who drew upon the first century A.D. writer Teueer, in Macarius (4th–5th cent.), and in John the Faster (d. 595) (139–40). The last in particular bears the idea of homosexual intercourse, contrary to Boswell.

Wright next replies to Boswell's contention that the term would not be absent 'from so much literature about homosexuality if that is what it denoted' (140–41). Wright points out that it should not be expected in writers prior to the first century A.D. since it did not exist before then, that the Greeks used dozens of words and phrases to refer to homosexuality, that some sources (e.g., *Didache*) show no acquaintance with Paul's letters or deliberately avoid citing Scripture, and that Boswell neglects citing several church fathers (140–41).¹⁶ p. 59

Boswell's treatment of Chrysostom in particular draws Wright's attention (140–44). Boswell conspicuously misrepresents the witness of Chrysostom, omitting references and asserting what is patently untrue. Chrysostom gives a long uncompromising and clear indictment of homosexuality in his homily on [Rom. 1:26](#). Boswell has exaggerated Chrysostom's infrequent use of the term. Wright observes that Boswell has 'signally failed to demonstrate any use of ἀρσενοκοίτης (*arsenokoités*) etc. in which it patently does not denote male homosexual activity' (144, transliteration added). It is infrequent because of its relatively technical nature and the availability of such a term as *paidophthoria* that more clearly specified the prevailing form of male homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world.¹⁷

Wright also surveys the Latin, Syriac, and Coptic translations of [1 Tim. 1:10](#) and [1 Cor. 6:9](#). All three render *arsenokoitai* with words that reflect the meaning 'homosexual', i.e., they understand *arseno-* as the object of the second half of the word (144–45). None of these primary versions supports Boswell's limited conclusion based on them.

Wright concludes his discussion with a few observations about the catalogues of vices as a literary form. He believes that such lists developed in late Judaism as Hellenistic Jews wrote in clear condemnation of homosexuality in the Greek world. This paralleled the increased concern on the part of moral philosophers over homosexual indulgence. The term came into being under the influence of the LXX (145) so that writers spoke 'generally of male activity with males rather than specifically categorized male sexual engagement with παῖδες (*paides*)' (146, transliteration added). If *arsenokoitia* and *paidophthoria* were interchangeable, it is because the former encompassed the latter (146).

In summary, Wright seeks to show that *arsenokoitai* is a broad term meaning homosexuality and arises within Judaism. The views of Boswell, Scroggs and others who limit the term to 'active male prostitutes' or pederasty are without significant support from linguistic and historical studies.

¹⁶ We also have noticed the same tendency by Boswell to fail to cite all the references to Sodom and sodomy in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. See J. B. De Young, 'A Critique of Prohomosexual Interpretations of the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha', *BSac* 147/588 (1990): 437–53.

¹⁷ In light of the claim made by Boswell that the infrequency of ἀρσενοκοῖται points to a meaning lacking homosexual significance, Wright asks pertinently 'why neither Plato nor Josephus use παιδοφθορία nor Josephus παιδεραστία, and why ... Clement did not use the latter and Chrysostom the former' (152 n. 71). In a more recent article, 'Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible', *EvQ* 61 (1989): 291–300, Wright reiterates these same points. He believes the term is general and was 'adopted or fashioned' from Leviticus (298). Paul shows a 'remarkable originality' in extending the OT ethic to the church (300).

SUPPORT FOR THE PAULINE ORIGIN OF ΑΡΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ

Some final questions remain to be answered regarding the source of Paul's term. As Mendell points out, anyone wishing to explain Paul's meaning must answer three questions.¹⁸ Where does he get the word? Why does he use such an arcane word in speaking to his P. 60 audience? If the word is ambiguous, as Boswell affirms, how can he expect to be understood?

It is a reasonable position that Paul coined the term based on the juxtaposition of the two words *arsenos* and *koitén* in the LXX of [Lev. 20:13](#) (cf. [18:22](#)), though absolute proof of this is impossible. It may be suggested that the criteria of style, practice, familiarity with the LXX, and context, make this a highly plausible conclusion, however.

Paul has the practice of coining terms, it appears. For example, in [1 Tim. 1:3](#) and [6:3](#), Paul used a term he had probably originated. The word *ἑτεροδιδασκαλέω* (*heterodidaskaleō*, 'to teach a different doctrine') does not occur before Paul and only afterward in *Ignatius to Polycarp* [3:1](#).¹⁹ Hence in the scope of eight verses Paul has possibly coined two terms, though one of them he had used earlier in [1 Cor. 6:9](#).

In general, statistics show that Paul probably coined many terms. There are 179 words found in Paul and nowhere else in pre-Christian Greek literature. Of these, 89 occur only one time. Other statistics support the theory that Paul had a creativity in choosing vocabulary.²⁰

In addition, Paul displayed considerable dependence upon the LXX. He usually quoted from the LXX rather than the Hebrew of the OT when he quoted the OT. Out of 93 quotations of the OT classified by Ellis, Paul used the LXX 14 times, but only 4 times did he quote the Hebrew.²¹ Obviously Paul was familiar with and used the LXX.

More particularly, the NT frequently uses the portion of [Leviticus 18–20](#). The structure and content of these chapters mark them as special. Often identified as the 'code of holiness', these chapters (unlike the remainder of Leviticus) are universal in their scope, much the same as the Ten Commandments of [Exodus 20](#) and [Deuteronomy 5](#). The Jews held [Leviticus 19](#) to be a kind of summary of the Torah, a central chapter in the Pentateuch. This respect carried over to the writers of the NT where chapters [18–20](#) are

¹⁸ Mendell, 'ΑΡΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ' 20.

¹⁹ Paul also uses rare terms found elsewhere outside the NT only. One such term is *ἀνδραποδισταῖς* which occurs in [1 Tim. 1:10](#) and is important to the meaning of *ἀρσενοκοῖται*. Scroggs defines the former term as 'those who steal boys for sexual purposes' and uses it to define the preceding *ἀρσενοκοῖται* as 'pederasts'. The word occurs in many pagan writers (e.g., Aristophanes, Plato, Xenophon, Demosthenes, Polybius, Dio Chrysostom). In Philo (*Special Laws* 4.13) it is used generally of a kidnapper who steals people to reduce them to slavery. It appears that Scroggs is again too narrow in his definition and fails to appreciate the structure and OT background of the list of vices of [1 Tim. 1:9–10](#).

²⁰ For example, there are 433 words used only in both secular Greek and Paul. Of these 203 occur but once in Paul. More interestingly, 175 words occur only in both the LXX and Paul. Of these 31 occur but once in Paul. Of this last group 5 of the 31 are combinations of two words similar in pattern to that of *ἀρσενοκοῖται*. See R. Morgenthaler, *Statistik Des Neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* (1973 rpt.; Zurich: Gotthelf-Verlag, n.d.) 175–80. The numbers are our calculations.

²¹ E. E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the OT* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957) 150–52. Some of the remainder of Paul's quotations are in agreement with both the LXX and Hebrew (19 times), and in others he agrees with neither.

widely used. They are cited by Christ, Paul, Peter, p. 61 and James.²² ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’ is from [Lev. 19:18](#). When Paul alludes to [19:19](#) in [2 Cor. 6:14](#) to illustrate the ban on unequal yoking, he coins a word ἑτεροζυγοῦντες (heterozygountes, ‘being unequally yoked’) that is found nowhere before him. Yet the adjective form ἑτεροζύγω (*heterozygō*, ‘unequally yoked’) occurs in [19:19](#). The LXX probably suggested the coinage to Paul.

Most importantly, both of the contexts where *arsenokoitai* appears suggest that Paul was thinking of the Levitical ‘code of holiness’.²³ [First Corinthians 5](#) has many allusions to [Leviticus 18–20](#). The theme is moral separation, as it is in Leviticus. Topics include distinction from the Gentiles ([5:1](#); cf. [6:1–6](#); [Lev. 18:3](#), [24–30](#); [20–23](#)) and future inheritance (κληρονομέω [*klēronomeō*, ‘I inherit’], [6:9](#), [10](#); [Lev. 20:23–24](#)). The law of loving your neighbour ([Lev. 19:18](#)) is reflected in [6:8](#). Of the ten vices in [1 Cor. 6:9–10](#), only one (drunkards) is not found in [Leviticus 18–20](#). It is feasible, then, that both *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* come from [Leviticus 20:13](#) and point to the passive and the active same-sex roles. [Leviticus 20:13](#) said that both persons were to be put to death (the penalty is not found in [18:22](#)). The Corinthian list of vices may be a summation of [Lev. 20:23–24](#)) (cf. [18:29–30](#)).

The same observations apply to [1 Tim. 1:10](#). In the context Paul begins with perversions of teaching regarding the Mosaic Law (vv. [3–8](#)), moves to legislation in general (vv. [9–10](#)), and ends with the gospel (v. [11](#)). With the Law of Moses so dominant, it is not surprising that the list of specific vices corresponds in order to the fifth through the ninth of the Ten Commandments. Since the list uses both single terms and doublets to refer to the Ten Commandments, it is more probable that ἀνδραποδισταῖς (*andrapodistais*, ‘slave-dealers’) goes with the following ‘thieves’ rather than with the preceding *arsenokoitai*. This militates against Scrogg’s narrow sexual definition (‘slavedealers who procure boys as prostitutes’, 120) of the term. Hence *pornois* and *arsenokoitai* represent the sixth commandment.

The preceding discussion justifies the claim that Paul coined the word in question. No one else in Hellenistic Judaism used the term before Paul.

Two questions still remain. Why did Paul coin such a term? It may be suggested that he sought to demonstrate the relation of believers to the Law of Moses, in particular to show that the universal standards of the Law (derived from [Exodus 20](#) and [Leviticus 18–20](#)) were still valid. Paul assumed his readers’ acquaintance with Judaism: note references to ‘Satan’ ([1 Cor. 5:5](#)), the ‘day of the Lord’ ([1 Cor. 5:5](#)), ‘leaven’ and ‘unleaven’ ([5:6–8](#)), ‘Passover’ ([5:7](#)), and judging angels ([6:3](#)). He quoted [Deut. 17:7](#) in [5:13](#). Since [Leviticus 18–20](#) became central to the Day of Atonement, it was natural for Paul to refer to this section of Leviticus (cf. p. 62 chaps. [16](#) and [23](#)). The topic of the believer’s relationship to the Law or law is the main point in [1 Timothy 1](#).

Finally, how could Paul expect his Greek readers to understand the term? Compounds involving *arseno-* and *arreno-* and *koiṭē* abounded. The Greeks were adept at forming compounded Greek words.²⁴ Therefore Paul coined a word that brought quick recognition.

²² Specific citations are available in J. B. De Young, ‘The Old Testament Witness to Homosexuality: A Critical Assessment of the Prohomosexual Interpretation of the OT’ (an unpublished paper read at the NW section, Evangelical Theological Society, Portland, Oregon, May 4, 1985) 22–23.

²³ Mendell, ‘ΑΡΣΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ’ 21–24.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 21, 25–28.

The word is general, reflecting the passage in [Lev. 20:13](#). Paul did not use ἀνδροκοίτης (*androkoitēs*, ‘male having sex with a male’), which would not have suggested a reference to pederasty. His term expressed gender but not gender and maturity; he condemned ‘males who lie with males of any age’.²⁵ It agrees with the threefold use of ἄρσην (*arsen*, ‘male’) in [Rom. 25:1:27](#) where Paul condemns same-sex activity.

This theory also explains why the word did not catch on with the secular world after Paul. The Gentiles did not appreciate the biblical context of OT moral legislation. Paul was ahead of and contrary to his time. Perhaps for the same reason ‘sodomists’ and ‘sodomy’ are fading from general secular usage today.

CONCLUSION

It seems quite likely that Paul himself coined a new term which he virtually derived from the LXX of [Lev. 20:13](#). No other current explanation is as practical as this. If this be true, there are significant consequences, assuming that Paul wrote prescriptively. Obviously he viewed the moral law (derived from [Leviticus 18–20](#); [Exodus 20](#)) as authoritative for his Christian audience. Since he and his readers in Corinth and Ephesus knew also about same-sex orientation or condition, sufficient reason exists to apply his term to those today who are inverts or homosexuals in orientation.²⁶ English translations are justified in their use of words such as ‘homosexuals’ or ‘sodomists’. Besides, these terms should not be limited to acts or behaviour. Just as an adulterous orientation or condition is wrong, so is a homosexual one.²⁷

In addition, it appears that lexicons and dictionaries (e.g., BAGD, *TWNT*, *NIDNTT*, *EDNT*) are too narrow in limiting, explicitly or implicitly, the term to male sexual activity with men or boys.

However, since he referred to behaviour in his lists in [1 Corinthians 6](#) and [1 Timothy 1](#), he excluded from the kingdom of God all those who engage in same-sex behaviour, including forms of pederasty, prostitution, or ‘permanent mutuality’. The term *malakoi* used with *arsenokoitai* probably refers to the passive agent in same-sex activity and comes under similar condemnation. p. 63

Other applications follow from the contexts involved. First, homosexual behaviour is cause for church discipline in light of the context of [1 Corinthians 5–6](#). Certain religious bodies that approve a homosexual lifestyle have rejected scriptural authority. In addition, homosexual orientation should be a concern for church counsel and exhortation with a view toward moulding a heterosexual orientation.

Second, homosexual behaviour is a proper focus and concern for legislation in society and of the sanction of law, according to the context of [1 Tim. 1:8–11](#). This suggests that ‘gay rights’ is a misnomer. The movement has no legitimate claim to protection by the law.

²⁵ Ibid., 6 n. 14. Ἀνδροκοίτης and its cognate verb are much less frequent (c. 13 occurrences in secular papyri ranging from 30 B.C. to A.D. 140 [most before Paul] and apparently a few others [3?] in the church fathers). There are c. 50 occurrences of ἀρσενοκοῖται, apparently all post-Pauline.

²⁶ One may cite additional reasons for including ‘adult-adult mutuality’ as well as orientation or condition in Paul’s term, as the context and wording of [Rom. 1:26–27](#) make clear. See De Young, ‘Nature’, 439–40.

²⁷ It may be that one should distinguish between sexual feelings (amoral) and sexual lust or desire (immoral).

In the Case of John Boswell

Richard John Neuhaus

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This readable and lucid critique of John Boswell's book, Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality (1989) shows that despite wide scholarly refutation of Boswell's arguments, his thesis that the early church countenanced homosexual activity continues to have an extraordinary influence on the councils and statements of many churches today. Neuhaus's exposure will help church leaders confronted with the arguments that Paul's reference to homosexual practice has no relevance to present-day practice, to recognize the source of such false assumptions.

Editor

Until a few years ago there was little need to defend the assertion that Christianity has, in a clear and sustained manner, always taught that homosexual acts are morally wrong. That has now changed, and the change can be dated from 1980, the publication of John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (University of Chicago Press). The influence of that book is truly remarkable; it has become a kind of sacred text for those who want to morally legitimize the homosexual movement. In certain circles, any allusion to what the Bible or Christian tradition say about homosexuality is likely to be met with, 'Yes, but Boswell says ...'

IMPACT OF BOSWELL'S THESIS

Boswell, a professor of history at Yale, says that in the early Church there were few sanctions against homosexuality. 'Intolerance' of gays became characteristic of Christianity during the high middle ages when the Church tried to assert greater control over the personal lives of the faithful. In time, theologians such as [P. 65](#) Thomas Aquinas would provide a theological rationale for the prohibition of homosexual acts, and canon lawyers would give the prohibition force in ecclesiastical discipline. That, Boswell says, is the unhappy legacy that is still with us in the attitudes and laws prevalent in Western societies.

The Boswell book was at first met with widespread acclaim. The reviewer in the *New York Times* said Boswell 'restores one's faith in scholarship as the union of erudition, analysis, and moral vision. I would not hesitate to call his book revolutionary, for it tells of things heretofore unimagined and sets a standard of excellence that one would have thought impossible in the treatment of an issue so large, uncharted, and vexed.' The next year Boswell won the American Book Award for History. Since then the book has become a staple in homosexual literature.

For instance, Bruce Bawer's much discussed *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society* (Poseidon Press) devotes page after page to a précis of Boswell, as though this is the only necessary text in Christian history dealing with homosexuality. And, of course, Boswell is routinely invoked in Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and other studies urging that the churches should at last overcome their 'homophobia' and be 'accepting' of homosexuals and homosexuality. 'Boswell says' featured prominently also in last fall's Colorado court case in which gay activists sought (successfully, for the moment) to overthrow Amendment Two, a measure approved by the voters in 1992 and aimed at preventing special legal status for homosexuals as a class.

In sum, Boswell and his book have had quite a run. Among his fellow historians, however, Boswell has not fared so well. The scholarly judgement of his argument has ranged from the sharply critical to the dismissive to the devastating. But reviews in scholarly journals typically appear two or three years after a book is published. By that time the Boswell book had already established itself in many quarters as the definitive word on Christianity and homosexuality. In the draft statement on sexuality issued late last year by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), for instance, Boswell's interpretation of New Testament texts on homosexuality is uncritically accepted.

NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS ON HOMOSEXUALITY

There are not many NT texts dealing explicitly with homosexuality. Extended treatment was not necessary as there is no evidence that St. Paul and other writers dissented from the clear condemnation of such acts in the Hebrew Scriptures. (Boswell and others make a limp effort to mitigate the sharp strictures of the Old Testament and rabbinic literature, but even some gay partisans recognize that that effort is not strikingly plausible.) The most cited NT passage on the subject is the [Romans 1](#) discussion of 'the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men P. 66 who by their wickedness suppress the truth'. Such people are 'without excuse', says Paul, because they have rebelled against the 'eternal power and deity [that] is clearly perceived in the things that have been made'. This rebellion finds also sexual expression: 'For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.'

Another frequently cited passage is [1 Corinthians 6](#): 'Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. 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.' Against those who treat homosexuality as uniquely heinous, it is rightly pointed out that the Corinthian text makes clear that it is one of many behaviours incompatible with Christian discipleship. More important, this passage underscores that for homosexuals, as for adulterers et al., there is the possibility of forgiveness and new life. But none of this changes the clear assertion that homosexual behaviour is wrong. And that has been the Christian teaching over the centuries.

REVISIONISTS' INTERPRETATIONS

The revisionists of the Boswell school make several interesting moves. They suggest, among other things, that the homosexual practices condemned by Paul were condemned

because they were associated with idolatrous cults and temple prostitution. And it is true that [Romans 1](#) is concerned with idolatry, but the plain meaning of the text is that homosexual acts are themselves an evidence of turning away from God and the natural order that he has ordained. Put differently, the point is not that some homosexual acts are wrong because they are associated with idolatrous cults; rather, homosexual acts are wrong because they are themselves a form of idolatry. New Testament scholar Richard Hays of Duke Divinity School is among those who are sharply critical of Boswell's mishandling of the New Testament material. Boswell's interpretation, says Hays, 'has no support in the text and is a textbook case of reading into the text what one wants to find there'. (*The Journal of Religious Ethics* [No. 14, 1986])

Boswell's reading of early Christian and medieval history also turns up what he wants to find. Christian history is a multifarious affair, and it does not take much sniffing around to discover frequent instances of what is best described as hanky-panky. The discovery process is facilitated if one goes through history with what is aptly described as narrow-eyed prurience, interpreting every expression of intense affection between men as proof that they were 'gay'. A favoured slogan p.67 of the contemporary gay movement is 'We Are Everywhere!' Boswell rummages through Christian history and triumphantly comes up with the conclusion, 'They were everywhere.' Probably at all times in Christian history one can find instances of homosexual behaviour. And it is probably true that at some times more than others such behaviour was viewed with 'tolerance', in that it was treated with a wink and a nudge. Certainly that has been true of at least some Christian communities in the last forty years or so. The Church has always been composed of sinners, and some periods are more morally lax than others.

Despite his assiduous efforts, what Boswell's historical scavenger hunt does not produce is any evidence whatever that authoritative Christian teaching ever departed from the recognition that homosexual acts are morally wrong. In the years before, say, the fourth century, when Christian orthodoxy more firmly cohered, there are significant gaps in our knowledge, and numerous sects and heresies flourished, some of them bizarre also in their moral practices. This is a rich field for speculation and fantasy, and Boswell makes the most of it. He has failed, however, to persuade those who are expert in that period. For example, David Wright of Edinburgh wrote the article on homosexuality in the highly respected *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*. After discussing the evidence, he summarily dismisses the Boswell book as 'influential but highly misleading'.

Also influential but highly misleading is another move made by the revisionists. What Paul meant by homosexuality is not what we mean by homosexuality today, they contend. Thus Boswell says that the people Paul had in mind are 'manifestly not homosexual; what he derogates are homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons. The whole point of [Romans 1](#), in fact, is to stigmatize persons who have rejected their calling, gotten off the true path they were once on.' Paul, Boswell says, failed to distinguish 'gay persons (in the sense of permanent sexual preference) and heterosexuals who simply engaged in periodic homosexual behavior'.

This line of thinking is picked up in the Lutheran and similar statements to make the argument that, living as he did in the first century, Paul did not consider the possibility of 'loving, committed, same-sex relationships'. Since the situation of the biblical writers is not ours, what the Bible has to say about homosexuality is not relevant for Christians today. The logic of the argument goes farther. If Paul had known about people who were not capable of heterosexual relations and if he had known about loving, committed, same-sex relationships, he would have approved. The whole point of [Romans 1](#), it is suggested, is that people should be true to who they really are—whether heterosexual or

homosexual. The problem that Paul had was with heterosexuals who were false to themselves by engaging in homosexual acts.

Like many influential but misleading arguments, this one contains an element of truth. David Greenberg's [p. 68](#) *The Construction of Homosexuality* (University of Chicago Press, 1988) is a standard reference on these matters. Greenberg, who is himself sympathetic to the homosexual movement, emphasizes that the category 'homosexual' is a late-nineteenth-century invention. Prior to that time, people did not speak about 'the homosexual' or about 'homosexuals' as a class of people. There were simply men who did curious things, including engaging in homogenital acts, that were viewed—in different cultures and to varying degrees—with puzzlement, tolerance, or (usually) strong disapproval. So the element of truth in the claim of the Boswell revisionists is that Paul, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Calvin, and a host of others who lived before the nineteenth century indeed did not know about a 'homosexual community' in which people are involved in 'loving, committed, same-sex relationships'.

Historical 'what ifs' are of very limited usefulness, but we might ask ourselves, What if Paul did know about homosexuality in the way that it is commonly presented today? What if he knew about a significant number of people, constituting a sizeable subculture, who engaged only in homogenital sex and found heterosexual relations personally repulsive? If he believed that homosexual acts are contrary to nature and nature's God (the plain meaning of [Romans 1](#)), it would seem not to make any difference that there are a large number of people who disagree, who engage in such acts, and whose behaviour is supported by a subculture and its sexual ideology. Nor would what today is called 'sexual orientation' seem to make any difference. Sexual orientation means that one's desires are strongly (in some instances exclusively) directed to people of the same sex. This would likely not surprise Paul, who was no stranger to unruly and disordered desires. It was Paul who wrote, 'I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!' ([Rom. 7](#)).

Revisionism takes other interesting twists. Episcopalian bishop John Spong, a prominent champion of the gay movement, is not alone in claiming that Paul was a repressed and frustrated homosexual. Leaving aside the anachronistic use of the term 'homosexual', one cannot conclusively demonstrate that Paul did not experience sexual desire for men. (Proving a negative is always a tricky business.) But, if he did, this would then have been one of the 'orientations' to evil against which he so heroically contended. Gay advocates who adopt the Spong line should take care. If Paul was a homosexual in the current meaning of the term, then it demonstrates precisely the opposite of what they want to demonstrate. It would demonstrate that Paul knew exactly the reality experienced by homosexuals and urged upon them the course he himself follows—resistance, repentance, conversion, and prayer for the grace 'to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called' ([Eph. 4:1](#)). [p. 69](#)

CASE FOR CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY

The revisionism being advanced today is influential, misleading, and deeply confused. Robert L. Wilken, the distinguished scholar of early Christianity at the University of Virginia, describes Boswell's book as 'advocacy scholarship'. By that he means 'historical learning yoked to a cause, scholarship in the service of a social and political agenda'. Wilken notes that Boswell's subtitle is *Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*. If, as Boswell insists, there were not 'gay people' (in the contemporary meaning of the term) in the ancient world, and therefore

Paul and other Christian authorities were only criticizing heterosexuals who engaged in homosexual acts, how can one write a history of gay people in that period of history? Wilken puts it gently: 'Boswell creates historical realities that are self-contradictory, and hence unhistorical.' Boswell writes that in antiquity there were no prejudices directed 'to homosexual relations as a class'. The reason is obvious, observes Wilken: as Boswell himself elsewhere recognizes, 'the ancients did not think there was a class of people with sexual "preferences" for the same sex.'

Wilken writes, 'The notion that there is a "class" of people defined by sexual preference is a very recent idea that has no basis in Western tradition. To use it as an interpretive category is confusing and promotes misunderstanding. Where there were laws or social attitudes against homosexuals, they had to do not with homosexuals as a class but with homosexual acts. Even where certain homosexual acts were tolerated by society (as in ancient Greece), there was no suggestion that sexual preference determined behaviour or that certain people were thought to belong to a distinct group within society. Even when tolerated (for example, between an adult male and a youth), there was no social approval given an adult male who played the "passive" role (the role of the boy).' And, as we have seen, Paul and the early Christians departed from the Greeks in judging homosexual acts per se to be unnatural and morally disordered.

'In some cases', Wilken notes, 'Boswell simply inverts the evidence to suit his argument.' For instance, Boswell writes that in antiquity some Roman citizens 'objected to Christianity precisely because of what they claimed was sexual looseness on the part of its adherents.' They charged, among other things, that Christians engaged in 'homosexual acts', and Boswell says that 'this brief seems to have been at least partly rooted in the fact'. As evidence Boswell cites Minucius Felix, a third-century writer who was answering charges brought against Christians by their Roman critics. Among the items mentioned by Minucius Felix, Boswell says, is the charge that Christians engage in 'ceremonial fellatio' (the text actually says 'worshiping the genitals of their pontiff and priest'). What Boswell fails to say is that this charge—along with others, such as the claim that Christians sacrificed children in the Eucharist—was manufactured out of whole cloth and historians have long dismissed such claims as having nothing to do with Christian behaviour. [p. 70](#)

G. W. Clarke, the most recent commentator on the passage from Minucius Felix writes, 'This bizarre story is not found elsewhere among the charges reported against the Christians.' It is, says Clarke, the kind of invention that the opponents of Christianity 'would have felt quite free to use for effective rhetorical polemic'. It is noteworthy, observes Wilken, that no such charges appear in any of the texts written by critics of Christianity. They appear only in Christian writings (such as that of Minucius Felix), perhaps because they were slanderously passed on the streets or because their obvious absurdity gave Christian apologetics greater force. The situation, in short, is entirely the opposite of what Boswell suggests. While the passage from Minucius Felix gives no information about Christian behaviour, it does undercut the burden of Boswell's argument. Boswell seems not to have noticed it, but the passage makes clear that, for both Romans and Christians, it was assumed that to charge someone with fellatio was to defame him. Both the Christians and their critics assumed that such behaviour is a sign of moral depravity. This is hardly evidence of early Christian 'tolerance' of homosexual acts.

It is the way of advocacy scholarship to seize upon snips and pieces of 'evidence' divorced from their historical context, and then offer an improbable or fanciful interpretation that serves the argument being advanced. That is the way egregiously exemplified by *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. David Wright, the author of the pertinent encyclopedia article on homosexuality, wrote in 1989: 'The conclusion

must be that for all its interest and stimulus Boswell's book provides in the end of the day *not one firm piece of evidence* that the teaching mind of the early Church countenanced homosexual activity.' Yet the ideologically determined are not easily deterred by the facts. As the churches continue to deliberate important questions of sexual morality, be prepared to encounter the invocation, as though with the voice of authority, 'But Boswell says ...' p.71

The Church and Polygamy A dialogue with Omodo

Walter A. Trobisch

*Reprinted with permission from Readings in Missionary Anthropology
II ed. William A. Smalley (South Pasadena; William Carey Library,
1978).*

In this complex and agonizing dialogue, the author raises the question as to who faces the greater predicament, the pastor or Omodo. Marriage alliances that are less than the biblical ideal, whether polygamous, serial or homosexual carry their own consequences.

Editor

On one of my trips I worshipped in an African Church where nobody knew me. After the service I talked to two boys who had also attended.

'How many brothers and sisters do you have?' I asked the first one.

'Three.'

'Are they all from the same stomach?'

'Yes, my father is a Christian.'

'How about you?' I addressed the other boy.

He hesitated. In his mind he was adding up. I knew immediately that he came from a polygamous family.

'We are nine', he finally said.

'Is your father a Christian?'

'No', was the typical answer, 'he is a polygamist.'

'Are you baptized?'

'Yes, and my brothers and sister too', he added proudly.

'And their mothers?'

'They are all three baptized, but only the first wife takes communion.'

'Take me to your father.'

The boy led me to a compound with many individual houses. It breathed an atmosphere of cleanliness, order and wealth. Each wife had her own house and her own kitchen. The father, a middle-aged, good-looking man, tall, fat and impressive, received me without embarrassment and with apparent joy. I found Omodo, as we shall call him, a well-educated person, wide p.72 awake and intelligent, with a sharp wit and a rare sense of humour. From the outset he made no apologies for being a polygamist, he was proud of

it. Let me try to put down here the essential content of our conversation that day which lasted for several hours.

'Welcome to the hut of a poor sinner!' The words were accompanied by good-hearted laughter.

'It looks like a rich sinner.' I retorted.

'The saints come very seldom to this place', he said, 'they don't want to be contaminated with sin.'

'But they are not afraid to receive your wives and children. I just met them in Church.'

'I know. I give everyone a coin for the collection plate. I guess I finance half of the Church's budget. They are glad to take my money, but they don't want me.'

'I sat in thoughtful silence. After a while he continued, 'I feel sorry for the Pastor. By refusing to accept all the polygamous men in town as Church members he has made his flock poor and they shall always be dependent upon subsidies from America. He has created a Church of women whom he tells every Sunday that polygamy is wrong.'

'Wasn't your first wife heartbroken when you took a second one?'

'Omodo looked at me with almost pity. 'It was her happiest day', he said finally.

'Tell me how it happened.'

'Well, one day after she had come home from the garden and had fetched wood and water, she was preparing the evening meal, while I sat in front of my house and watched her. Suddenly she turned to me and mocked me. She called me a "poor man", because I had only one wife. She pointed to our neighbour's wife who could care for her children while the other wife prepared the food.'

'Poor man', Omodo repeated 'I can take much, but not that. I had to admit that she was right. She needed help. She had already picked out a second wife for me and they get along fine.'

I glanced around the courtyard and saw a beautiful young woman, about 19 or 20, come out of one of the huts.

'It was a sacrifice for me', Omodo commented. 'Her father demanded a very high bride price.'

'Do you mean that the wife, who caused you to become a polygamist is the only one of your family who receives communion?'

'Yes, she told the missionary how hard it was for her to share her love for me with another woman. According to the Church my wives are considered sinless because each of them has only one husband. I, the father, am the only sinner in our family. Since the Lord's supper is not given to sinners, I am excluded from it. Do you understand that, Pastor?'

I was entirely confused.

'And you see', Omodo continued, 'they are all praying for me that I might be saved from sin, but they don't agree from which sin I must be saved.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, the Pastor prays that I may not continue to commit the sin of polygamy. My wives pray that I may not commit the sin of divorce. I [p. 73](#) wonder whose prayers are heard first.'

'So your wives are afraid that you might become a Christian?'

'They are afraid that I become a Church member. Let's put it that way. For me there is a difference. You see they can have intimate relations with me only as long as I do not belong to the Church. In the moment I would become a Church member their marriage relations would then become sinful.'

'Wouldn't you like to become a Church member?'

'Pastor, don't lead me into temptation! How can I become a Church member, if it means to disobey Christ? Christ forbade divorce, but not polygamy. The Church forbids polygamy but demands divorce. How can I become a Church member, if I want to be a Christian? For me there is only one way, to be a Christian without the Church.'

'Have you ever talked to the Pastor about that?'

'He does not dare to talk to me, because he knows as well as I do that some of his elders have a second wife secretly. The only difference between them and me is that I am honest and they are hypocrites.'

'Did a missionary ever talk to you?'

'Yes, once. I told him that with the high divorce rate in Europe, they have only a successive form of polygamy while we have a simultaneous polygamy. That did it. He never came back.'

I was speechless. Omodo accompanied me back to the village. He evidently enjoyed being seen with a Pastor.

'But tell me, why did you take a third wife?' I asked him.

'I did not take her. I inherited her from my late brother, including her children. Actually my older brother would have been next in line. But he is an elder. He is not allowed to sin by giving security to a widow.'

I looked in his eyes, 'Do you want to become a Christian?'

'I am a Christian.'

The late Walter Trobisch is well known for his popular books on marriage in the African cultural context. p. 74

A Socio-Theological Evaluation of Polygamy

Leopold A. Foullah

Reprinted with permission from Evangelical Ministries (Jan–April 1985).

The author of this interesting contextual article calls for a return to a God-centred view of marriage.

Editor

Among the subjects that need careful evangelical theological attention for guidance of Christ's church in Africa, polygamy stands high. History has revealed to us that polygamy has been debated from time immemorial by church prelates, anthropologists and also by renowned theologians of wider circles. Questions about polygamy with which the church is still wrestling are: Is polygamy condemned by the Bible? Is monogamy the only approved form of marriage? Should polygamists who become Christians afterwards be accepted into the fellowship of the church? Questions about polygamy are many.

Instances where the church has given pastoral guidance on the subject can be cited as follows:

1. In 1979, an attempt to revise the canon law on marriage was undertaken by the Church of the Province of Kenya. Regrettably, most of the discussions centred around the problem of divorce rather than on the question of polygamy specifically.
2. There was a time when the Anglican Church in Nigeria in cooperation with their Sierra Leonian counterparts gave some consideration to this same subject.
3. The Lambeth conference of Bishops has on many occasions discussed polygamy during the years of 1888, 1908, 1920, 1968 and 1978. It goes without saying that other church denominations were not the least interested in the issue.

However, a careful analysis of past decisions of such church bodies has revealed that the usual approach to polygamy has been judgementally humanistic and culturally sympathetic rather than biblical. In [p. 75](#) view of this situation of lack of a clear biblical interpretation the church is left in a more confused state than ever before.

Today, the leadership of the church has been challenged to rethink the whole matter and possibly to overhaul past resolutions which may have been inadequate and misleading. This challenge that is so often taken up by some thoughtful scholars takes the following tone: 'In such a situation, we may be sure, theologians and church leaders would quickly enough produce weighty reasons and biblical texts to justify a new concept of marriage among their own people. How weighty must the reasons be? How many Bible texts are needed? Indeed, it might even be asked just how much of our moral theologizing ever really goes beyond the rationalizing of the accepted behaviour in the historico-cultural environment of our theologians.'

The aim of the writer in the light of the foregoing challenge is to set forth once more the question of polygamy in its socio-theological dimensions, taking into account the sociological causes of polygamy, the sociological advantages of polygamy, the sociological disadvantages of polygamy and the fundamental biblical blueprint of marriage.

I. POLYGAMY—A DESCRIPTION

According to its strict or technical usage, the word polygamy connotes plurality or multiplicity of mates in the marriage relationship. Plurality or multiplicity of mates is not confined to Africa since it is practised in other parts of the world as well, taking a variety of forms:

Polygyny

This is the kind of polygamous marriage where a man has more than one wife at the same time. It may also be called *simultaneous polygyny* because a bevy or group of wives live with their husband in a supposedly permanent union as long as marital norms are not abolished. Among Africans, this is the kind of polygamous marriage that is most commonly practised.

Consecutive polygamy or serial monogamy

This mode of marriage is more frequently practised in the West, although its presence cannot be totally denied in Africa. It is the kind where a man marries 'one spouse after another in a sequence involving divorce and remarriage. One spouse engaged consecutively in *discreet* monogamous union.'

Polyandry

The practice of polyandry in Africa and the world at large is a rarity. It is the kind in which a woman is married to more than one husband. It is believed to be a practice common among the Eskimos and the Todas of South India where killing of female babies is widespread. It is reported that some people in Tibet do practise polyandry. Also, *consecutive polyandry* occurs when a woman engages in the habit of having one husband after another.

A common mistake often made is to think that Africans are polygamous by nature. This is a false notion that has been held over the p. 76 years by some anthropologists, sociologists and ill-informed Christian workers. Available research has confirmed the universal nature of polygamy.

Among the Themnes of Sierra Leone, to marry more than one wife is the *modus operandi* (mode of operation) of community life. Unchastity, bad behaviour and sexual perversion are among the list of things frowned upon by the village people. But, polygamy is a virtue that is welcomed with open arms almost all the time.

The Themne people believe a man with one wife has just started treading on the paths of life and will soon gather for himself wives who will enlarge and beautify his father's homestead, bear children, and by so doing establish the eternal link between the living members of the community and the dead (those who have gone ahead). After a few years of observation by the ageing members of the community especially, a man who insistently continues with the one wife pattern is ridiculed, and rebuked either openly or secretly by his parents, peer-group and the whole community. Such a man becomes the talk of the town. Today, things are changing due to the fact that no longer does a man with one wife receive the kind of disapproval that was so common in a typical Themne village hundreds of years ago.

II. SOCIOLOGICAL CAUSES AND ADVANTAGES OF POLYGAMY

Reasons for the practice of polygamy among the Themnes are many:

1. In the first place, it is the fashionable craze of the community. While it is prestigious to have more than one wife, the opposite sounds unattractive.

2. Secondly, since the percentage of women is higher than that of men, the acquisition of more wives eradicates prostitution. In view of this fact, the village is a commune of people who care, work together and aspire together. It is inhuman not to take part in contracting a marriage for the daughter of a friend or a relative.

3. In close connection with the aforementioned cause, *the spirit of comradeship* is also a contributing factor. In a case where two men are close friends like David and Jonathan in the Bible, the tendency is for their friendship to cover every area of their lives, including marriage. Stories have been told of men and women contracting marriage on their friends' behalf. Such gestures of friendship must be honoured at all cost whether a man has one or more wives already.

4. In some societies, the Themnes being no exception, it is an insult to return a woman to her parents on the pretext of *barrenness*. In such a case, an honest husband who does not want to sever the link that has already been established with another clan or family, may decide to augment his barren wife with another woman from a different clan or family without having to undergo the pain of divorce. In situations where the link is so strong, the parents of the barren wife may decide to give their son-in-law a substitute who would bear children on their daughter's behalf. Usually, p. 77 the substitute is the barren woman's younger sister. By this means the problem is not only solved, but a soronate (two sisters marrying the same husband) kind of marriage is introduced.

5. The need to expand one's *labour force* on the part of those whose vocation is farming, is another factor that leads to polygamy. Care must be taken not to blow this labour force aspect out of proportion because many polygamists do not see this factor as the major reason for marrying more wives. Nevertheless, it does appear the more wives a man has, the more children he will have; the bigger the farm and the labour force.

6. The common practice of inheriting wives from deceased relatives and friends is another way by which a man can be polygamous. For instance, among the Luo people in Kenya, a brother may inherit the wife or wives of his deceased brother.

III. THE SOCIOLOGICAL DISADVANTAGES OF POLYGAMY

With all these reasons or causes for polygamy, we must not be misled into believing that all is well in the home of a polygamist. It would be pretentious not to point out the evils which so often go side by side with this kind of marriage. By observing his own people among whom he grew up, the writer has seen for himself the dangers or disadvantages inherent in polygamy and can readily point out some of them:

1. *Dehumanization of women*: In a society where women contribute to the work force and are valued for what they can produce rather than for whom they are, such women cease to be what God designed them to be in the marriage relationship. They are more often subjected to treatment which makes them less than human beings, helpmates and companions. Women are maltreated in a variety of ways:

(1) Marriages are often ended on the pretext of barrenness.

(2) Crimes of rudeness and adultery are punished by beating.

(3) Among some societies, women are chosen on the basis of their social and economic skills instead of on the primary basis of love.

2. *Deification of children*: The concept of the essence of children in a polygamous setting is the opposite of what the Bible teaches. While the writer acknowledges the biblical command to be 'fruitful and multiply', he has not yet come across a verse in the Bible that says children are the end of marriage and where they are absent a marriage should be dissolved and the wife returned to her parents. In the home, instead of loving children and viewing them as additional gifts from God, they are worshipped, as it were, for the following reasons:

(1) They perpetuate the biological line of the family.

(2) They establish political links through intermarriage with other families or class.

(3) They fortify the family against external transgression.

(4) They provide a mystical link between the living members of the family and the dead. The act of making the children small gods for the reasons just outlined may sometimes [p. 78](#) lead to a facade of love for the wives.

3. *Petty quarrels and jealousy*: Quarrels and jealousy are not uncommon among polygamous families. In a family where the wives and children are not treated on an equal basis, there is nothing more to expect than a disorganized and turbulent atmosphere.

4. *Marital unfaithfulness*: A man with more wives may try to satisfy the sexual needs of his wives at all costs but one cannot truly say how well he is able to do this. The main cause for sexual perversion among women who are polygamously married may be lack of sexual satisfaction. In such a case, instead of eradicating the escalating rate of prostitution, the husband ends up turning out prostitutes or women who go out seeking sexual satisfaction from other men. Among the Themnes, it has become the obsession of some men to commercialize the plight of their wives by requiring them to confess the names of their boyfriends during a particular time of the year (confession season). A fine prescribed

by custom and law is levied upon each boyfriend found guilty of cohabiting with a man's wife.

5. *Inadequate care for children:* It is quite unlikely for a father of two or more wives and ten children to be able to fulfil adequately his fatherly role unless such a man is very rich and unique. So often, the early years of children born in families too big for one man are characterized by many problems. For instance, there is the problem of proper child discipline, hunger in times of drought and lack of money to send the children to school. Homes where these kinds of problems are inherent inevitably become feederstations for urban criminals and highway robbers.

IV. THE BIBLICAL BLUE-PRINT OF MARRIAGE

Biblically speaking, the pattern of marriage ordained by God for the whole of mankind is the one man one wife kind which is described by both sociologists and anthropologists as monogamy.

In [Genesis 1:27](#), we read, 'So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.' While [Gen. 1:27](#) gives a more general description of the creation of mankind as male and female, [Gen. 2:7, 18, 20-24](#) give us a complete story of the first man and the first woman ever created on earth and the first marriage ever instituted by God. In the passage just cited,

1. God created Adam and made him a steward of the created order.
2. Among God's creation there was no suitable partner or helper to Adam.
3. God created Eve out of Adam and gave her to him for a companion and helper.
4. The deep and unfulfilled longing in Adam for fellowship was at once fulfilled—'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh ...'

The climax of Genesis chapter two in regard to the marital relationship of Adam and Eve is emphatically suggesting three things concerning [p. 79](#) the marriage that took place in the Garden of Eden:

1. God solemnized the marriage between Adam and Eve—'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him' ([2:18](#)); 'And he brought her to the man' ([2:22c](#)).
2. It was a one man, one woman kind of union—'And the rib which the Lord God had taken from *man* he made into *woman* and he brought *her* to *the man*' ([2:22](#)).
3. It became the measuring rod for all marriages that were to be solemnized in future generations—'Therefore *a man* shall leave *his* father and mother and be joined to *his wife*, and *they shall become one flesh*' ([2:24](#)). The reader should guard against being beguiled by those who advocate a plurality of mates on the basis of explanations that are different from what God enunciates in the Scriptures. [Gen. 2:24](#) does not read, 'Therefore, a man shall leave *his* father and mother and be joined to *his wives* and *they should become one flesh*.'

Proponents of polygamous unions or marriages have often cited instances in the Bible of the practice of polygamy on the part of some of the fathers of the Hebrew nation or other Bible personalities, like Abraham, Jacob, Elkanah, Solomon, etc. The impression often given is that God approved the polygamous marriages of some of his most renowned patriarchs whom he called his friends, a fact which seems to suggest that polygamy is O.K. for everybody if it was O.K. for Abraham, Jacob and Solomon. The writer can only say that this way of interpreting Scripture is inadequate and mutilated. It is a method that leads people astray.

Actually, those Bible personalities who practised polygamy violated God's commands, despised God's primordial pattern of marriage, and therefore suffered certain consequences for their disobedience.

In view of what I have just said, let us investigate three cases of polygamy in the Bible and underscore some of the bitter experiences suffered by those involved. First, Abraham. He started out with one wife but was later beguiled by his wife, Sarah and diverted from God's plan due to the sin of impatience. Consequently, an unwanted son was born— Ishmael. Then there was jealousy between Sarah and Hagar resulting in the sending away of both Ismael and Hagar. Ishmael and his descendants (the Arabs), born after the flesh, have been the greatest persecutors of the church (see [Gal. 4](#)).

Another case of polygamy worthy of consideration is that of Jacob which is found in the 29th, 30th and 37th chapters of Genesis. A closer look at these three chapters will bring a lot of sad experiences to our notice: 1. There was partiality on the part of Jacob because he loved Rachel more than Leah ([Gen. 29:18, 31](#)), 2. Rachel envied Leah because Leah had children while she did not have any ([Gen. 30:1](#)). 3. Joseph's brothers hated him and sold him into slavery.

Lastly, we also see the evils of polygamy in full display in the family of Elkanah according to 1 Samuel [p. 80 1:7](#). Elkanah had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Here, Elkanah shows more love and favour to Hannah, the barren wife, and Peninnah provoked Hannah and made life very unbearable for her because of her inability to bear children.

It has often been said by biblical scholars that the Old Testament should be used as the basis for the interpretation of the New Testament and that the New Testament is a commentary of the Old Testament. In light of this maxim, a careful study of the whole Bible will clearly reveal that the whole concept of monogamy is a theme that runs through the entire body of scriptures.

For example, in [Matthew 19:1-12](#), Jesus quotes and interprets [Gen. 2:24](#) in an attempt to teach the Pharisees who came to test him concerning God's primordial concept of marriage. Jesus' point of reference is not what Abraham, Jacob or Elkanah did. In order to teach the right thing about marriage, Jesus went back to the first marriage that was solemnized between Adam and Eve before the appearance of the rest of mankind ([Mt. 19:4, 5-6](#)).

The whole question of polygamy that is being debated today from one conference to another is due to a shift from a God-centred view of marriage to a man-centred view. The Bible has the answer to the problem. It is the responsibility of the church to give her members the true teaching concerning God's concept of marriage as Jesus did ([Mt. 19:4-7](#)). [p. 81](#)

Book Reviews

CRAVING FOR LOVE: RELATIONSHIP ADDICTION, HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE GOD WHO HEALS

by Briar Whitehead
(Tunbridge Wells, Monarch 1993)

(Reviewed by Pete Broadbent.)

(Reprinted with permission from Third Way July 1993)

It is time for an honest debate among evangelical Christians about the question of homosexuality. It is not easy to discuss the subject rationally and openly in many churches, and almost impossible to admit to being homosexual without being ostracised. The climate is hostile, and the counsel given simplistic.

Whitehead's book, written from a conservative theological standpoint, does something to redress this. She provides an agenda for discussion and further action and, even if you disagree with her conclusions, she is asking all the right questions.

She argues that homosexuality is caused by unaffirmed masculinity and femininity, which lead to unmet need, poor self-esteem and, in compensation, what Elizabeth Moberley (on whose research she leans heavily) calls 'defensive detachment' from the same-sex parent. Whitehead dismisses biomedical explanations as not proven: any homosexual, she says, can be 'cured'.

It is perhaps worth asking why evangelical Christians are so determined to back this particular horse. One reason must be to make sense of pastoral ministry to the gay community. If gays cannot be cured, the argument runs, what are we to do with them in a 'straight' church?

But the deeper underlying reason is to protect our doctrine of scripture. The Bible appears to say that the homosexual condition is sinful. As such, it must be capable of forgiveness and cure. If it were natural, God would have had to create something contrary to his will—which would make nonsense of scripture. So evangelicals are driven to prove that homosexuality is learned behaviour which can be unlearned.

But, like all arguments about nature versus nurture, the case is far from proven either way. Both sides discount the opposing evidence. Empirical proof of healing and change can be countered by testimony of years of struggle, failure and acceptance of one's condition. [p. 82](#)

Whitehead proposes that homosexuality is an addiction like those to alcohol, drugs and relationships. She confesses her own addiction to platonic relationships with older men (which, I suspect, conditions the way she views homosexuality). There is some useful stuff here which helps to explain the 'gay scene' culture of the promiscuous one-night-stand; but she does not really do justice to the lifelong committed relationships of many gay people. This also underscores the American provenance of the book—gay culture in the US is very different from that of the UK. Many 'ex-gay' Christians draw parallels between their experience and that of the heterosexually promiscuous, the workaholic, and the perfectionist.

But to view all homosexuality as relationship addiction is simplistic. Many of my gay friends would say that they have discovered stability and fulfilment because they found someone who loved them unconditionally in a relationship for which they were *not* looking. We might want to tell them that they would find their ultimate fulfilment in the love of God through Jesus Christ; but some of them are not ready for that.

Whitehead says plainly: 'There is healing for the homosexual. No one has to stay homosexual.' There is a strong emphasis in the ex-gay movement on inner healing and the healing of memories, and the book is exciting in its documentation of many homosexuals who have found healing and transformation in Jesus. But enough has been written on the ministry of healing in the church for us to be wary of such bad claims. My own pastoral experience suggests that this ministry is useful only to people of certain personality types: not everyone responds to revisiting their childhood.

Healing is facilitated by the deliberate renunciation of addictive behaviour—Whitehead brings out well the parallels with drugs and pornography. But for every Christian homosexual who does experience change and healing, there are two or three

who do not find that God 'delivers' them, and for better or worse have to live with who they are.

One feature of the book which is particularly welcome is its honest account of innate evangelical homophobia. Whitehead searches scripture, to find that homosexuality is not a perversion: the biblical term 'abomination' is applied to a whole range of sins including lying, pride and the breaking of promises. Homosexuality is not the worst sin in the world.

She examines the denial, prejudice and instant healing techniques which typify the response of the conservative church; and she is equally scathing of the liberal attitude.

Our churches are full of gay people afraid to reveal themselves. Our hostility drives them underground, and repels the non-Christian gay. 'First they burned us, then they imprisoned us, then they said we were diseased, then they said we were demonised', announced a 'gay pride' placard in San Francisco. And yet many lesbians and gaymen are raised (and nurtured!) in Christian homes, in the dysfunctional families that lie at the root of so many of our pastoral problems. p. 83

Read the stories in this book if you are not convinced. It is a valuable resource, with advice for wives, for friends and for parents of gay people, and detailed accounts of how the emotionally absent or abusive parent contributes towards the homosexual's condition.

I remain unconvinced that all homosexuality can be healed. But Whitehead does enough to challenge us all to think through the questions and to face our own prejudices. 'No-one is an ex-homosexual until unmet same-sex needs have been fulfilled. The mistake of the conservatives has been to ignore the homosexual's unmet needs; the mistake of the liberals [has been] to believe that he should be allowed to eroticise them.'

We all have more serious thinking, talking, praying and ministry to do.

SEXUAL ETHICS: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON HUMAN SEXUALITY

by Stanley Grenz

(Dallas, Word Publishers, 1990, 268 pp., pb)

(Reviewed by Ronald Smith.)

(Reprinted with permission from Crux March 1993)

For those of us whose professions require us to chart a course through contemporary sexual mores, any serious treatment of sexual ethics is a welcome resource. We experience so much pain and dysfunction arising out of society's inability to deal with this important topic, in spite of all the attention sexuality receives from the entertainment industry, the media, and pop psychology.

Nowhere is there a greater need for understanding than in the church. Sexual issues claw at the fibre of the modern church. From the controversy over the ordination of homosexuals in the United Church of Canada, to the rejection (once again) by the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada of the right of its pastors to marry divorced persons, sexual issues are a pervasive cause of division and conflict in the body of Christ.

This topic demands and deserves our serious attention. In addition to prayer and openness to the teaching of Scripture through the instruction of the Holy Spirit, it also requires the application of sound philosophical, sociological, psychological and medical knowledge.

Stanley Grenz attempts to do all that. He wades boldly into most of the difficult issues, examining them carefully in the light of Scripture. Wisely, he engages secular insights as well. Yet Grenz's treatment of sexual ethics enjoys a certain muscular quality, one which is often lacking in contemporary social thought. The reason is that Grenz builds his argument upon the solid foundation of God's intention for human sexuality.

'Human sexuality', says Grenz, 'forms the basis of the drive towards human community. True community, community in accordance with the divine design, gives rise to the primal male-female relationship, the bond of marriage' (p. 37).

It is from this perspective that Grenz tackles the sexual issues we face in the home, in the church, and p. 84 in the world. Beginning with the nature of human sexuality, Grenz examines marriage, the sex act in marriage, fidelity, adultery and divorce. He moves us from God's intended vehicle for developing community, the family, to the destruction of that intention, divorce. But he is able to remind us of God's compassion even in the face of our failure:

Divorce is never to be taken lightly. Regardless of the circumstances, it is always a declaration of the failure of marriage. The community of male and female desired by God has been marred. While being a declaration of failure, divorce is not a declaration of the boundaries of divine grace. God's forgiveness and healing meet fallen human beings where they are. As a result, the people of God are called to do likewise ... (p. 125).

This willingness to wrestle seriously with divine designs, while celebrating God's forgiving grace, is the pattern Grenz follows throughout. On the issue of abortion, e.g., he clearly enunciates the Christian position affirming life and opposing abortion. He says, however, that

... Christian concern cannot cease with the unborn. Rather, it must encompass the pregnant women in unique situations ... the Christian community ought to minister God's acceptance and healing to mothers in distress ... standing beside them no matter what decisions they ultimately make (p. 139).

On the subject of homosexuality, Grenze is clear that homosexual relationships are not acceptable alternatives to monogamous heterosexual marriage. However, he believes that,

... the Good News of the Gospel is that persons of a same sex orientation, like heterosexuals, can live full lives. They can find fulfilment as singles who practice abstinence while finding their primary bonded community within the fellowship of Christ (p. 221).

Everyone whose profession leads him or her into the shark-infested waters of contemporary sexual issues will find this book required reading. From the attorney who practises law, to the teacher of family life education in the secular school system, to the pastor who does pastoral counselling, all can benefit greatly.

Some, no doubt, will be offended by its conclusions. Those who see issues in black and white, for whom moral choice is simple adherence to pat moral codes, may see Grenz as too liberal, soft on sin. And those who think Scripture is outdated, no longer applicable to contemporary society, will no doubt see Grenz as far too conservative. If he wins both the above accolades, it will be a tribute to the integrity he brings to this topic.

Those of us who want to hold fast to God's word, but whose hearts are torn by the experience of our fallen nature in this area of sexuality, will see Orenz as a pioneer on whose work others may build.

One criticism of this work which may be made is the layman's lament over its academic tone. In the world of academia big words and complex phrases are useful, because of the precision they bring to the thought the author wishes to convey. But in the world where this book is most needed, big words and complex p. 85 phrases can be stumbling blocks to understanding. This book can be tough slogging, even to the university-educated. Jesus was able to convey profound and eternal truth through stories; perhaps we should try harder to emulate his methods.

For all that, *Sexual Ethics* does its job, and does it well. It is a comprehensive chart for all of us who work in this difficult area.

RECOVERING BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD: A RESPONSE TO EVANGELICAL FEMINISM

by John Piper and Wayne Grudem
(Wheaton, Crossway Books, 1991, 566 pp.)

(Reviewed by David J. Palmer.)

(Reprinted with permission from The Reformed Theological Review May–August 1993)

This is the latest and most comprehensive offering from within the evangelical fold on the vexed issue of male-female relationships. It is quite magnificent and almost without exception is written with great sensitivity ('Hearing the pain' as Harvie Conn would put it) towards those who reject or feel hurt by the traditional Christian understanding and yet at all times its contributors, twenty-three in all, evince a strong desire to let the Bible speak on its own terms as the Word of God to the late twentieth century.

The various contributors go to some length to dialogue with those within broadly evangelical circles who have accepted the feminist charge that to support gender-based role differences is unjust discrimination and so have moved in the direction of opposing any unique leadership role for men in the home and church.

In place of the traditional view of male headship, yet in substantial agreement with its fundamental premises, this volume proposes a new vision, one of biblical 'complementarity', hopefully correcting previous mistakes as well as avoiding those that arise from the feminist blurring of God-given sexual distinctions. 'Complementarity' is said to suggest both equality *and* beneficial differences between men and women.

The Editors express their desire in a Preface that having read this book:

Christian women will come away feeling affirmed and encouraged to participate much more actively in many ministries, and to contribute their wisdom and insight to the family and the church. We hope they will feel *fully equal* to men in status before God, and in importance to the family and the church. We pray that, at the same time, this vision of equality and complementarity will enable Christian women to give wholehearted affirmation to biblically balanced male leadership in the home and in the church

and every Christian man

will come away feeling in his heart that women are indeed *fully equal* to men in personhood, in importance, and in status before God, and, moreover, that he can eagerly endorse countless women's ministries and can freely encourage the contribution of wisdom and insight from women in [p. 86](#) the home and church, without feeling that this will jeopardise his own unique leadership role as given by God.

The book is divided into five sections. The first section defines biblical complementarity and provides an overview of the central issues in dispute using a question and answer approach. The second section covers detailed exegetical and theological studies of all the key texts as well as a survey of the place of women in Old and New Testament life. The third section covers studies from related disciplines such as women in the history of the church and the biological and psychological differences between men and women. Preachers will find much useful material in these two sections. The fourth section discusses various applications and implications, largely related to women, whilst the final section interacts in a most gracious and loving manner with

recent output from evangelical feminists, and concludes on the hopeful but not entirely convincing note that the controversy will move towards resolution.

In conclusion, if only one book is to be read in the subject, then this is the book. It is written with calmness; it is incisive, detailed, always clear, broad in vision, comprehensive, multidisciplinary with one eye on what is happening on the ground and the other eye firmly fixed on God's authoritative and fully trustworthy Word. Let us hope Carson and Gruden provide us with a study guide for use in our parishes and universities. *Other reviewers are more critical of the use made by the contributors to this volume of the complementarity principle of male and female and the order of creation as a basis for the subordination of women. See Evangelical Quarterly July 1993, pp. 276–281.*

Editor

WOMEN CAUGHT IN THE CONFLICT: THE CULTURE WAR BETWEEN TRADITIONALISM AND FEMINISM

by Rebecca Merrill Groothuis
(Grand Rapids, Baker, 1994. Pb. 249 pp.)

(Reviewed by David Parker)

In *Women Caught in the Conflict*, Rebecca Groothuis effectively argues the case for a critical examination of feminism by evangelicals, taking account of historical and social factors as well as the more obvious biblical and theological issues. Her target is the traditionalist antifeminist wing of evangelicalism which she accuses of employing a variety of inadequate methods and resorting to erroneous reasoning in its strident rejection of evangelical feminism. Particularly helpful is the consideration in the final section of the book of emotional factors, culture clashes and illogical argument. Groothuis also points to the problem of 'guilt by association' when mild forms of feminism are falsely condemned by linking them with the highly questionable features of some of the more extreme examples, such as liberal theology, gnosticism and neo-paganism, when they share no such characteristics.

But the heart of the book is an [p. 87](#) attempt to distinguish evangelical feminism from other forms which are more radical and take no account of biblical authority. In the author's mind, evangelical feminism seems to focus mainly on freedom for women to pursue their own vocations based on their worth and qualities as individuals and their calling as Christians rather than on the basis of the stereotypes imposed upon them by a patriarchal society. The question of vocational choice includes ordination as a matter of course, but Groothuis does not rule out homemaking or other more conventional roles *ipso facto*.

The author also seeks to show that the traditionalist's conception of what is normative Christianity is often poorly grounded biblically and of comparatively recent formation. The opening chapters are particularly helpful in this respect, outlining the rise of feminism over the last two centuries and showing how evangelicals developed positive initiatives in many areas, including missions and socio-political activity, long before the emergence of the radical feminist movement in the modern period. She claims many traditionalists conveniently ignore this longer history and distort the issues by focusing exclusively on the recent more radical developments in the feminist movement.

Overall, Groothuis, a former editor for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, makes out a compelling case for the claims of evangelical feminism, cutting through the traditionalist rhetoric in a ruthless yet cogent and courteous manner. In the process, she sets out some of the complexities of the feminist movement, including its legitimate grievances, but she

also identifies clearly the features which make some of the more prominent forms of the movement unacceptable from an evangelical point of view. However, it is not altogether clear that she has not fallen victim to a certain cultural contextualization herself since the entire discussion reflects very strongly her own social, intellectual and religious milieu.

As an appeal for logical, critical and well-informed thinking on the issue of feminism, with some interesting details about the development of traditionalism and feminism, this is a useful book. But as the sub-title suggests, the theological and biblical aspects of feminism are not its main focus. In fact, such issues as the exegesis of crucial passages and consideration ordination and hermeneutics are passed over without much discussion. Thus *Women in Conflict* does not constitute a general coverage of evangelical feminism, but this lack is more than met by its copious references and the classified list of books in the section 'For further reading'.

HOLY SCRIPTURE: REVELATION, INSPIRATION AND INTEPRETATION

by Donald G. Bloesch

(Carlisle: Paternoster/Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1994. Hardback, 384 pp., index.)

(Reviewed by David Parker)

Holy Scripture is the second volume in a new systematic theology series, p. 88 Christian Foundations, being published by Donald Bloesch, emeritus professor of theology at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. (For the first, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, see [ERT 17:4 October 1993, 509-512](#).) In tackling critical elements of the doctrine of Scripture in this expanded form, Bloesch consolidates and refines his position as expressed in earlier writings, especially *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*. Expounding his distinctive 'progressive evangelicalism', his main concern is to steer between two equally unacceptable and increasingly polarized options. On the one hand, there is a rationalistic biblicism which treats Scripture as if it were a legalistic text or even an oracle; on the other, a 'latitudinarism that plays fast and loose with the biblical texts'. Bloesch's preference is for a view which sees Scripture as the written Word of God which is 'by virtue of its divine inspiration a reliable witness to the truth revealed by God in Jesus Christ'. However, 'it becomes the living word when it actually communicates to us the truth and power of the cross of Christ through the illumination of the Spirit'.

The first part of the book sets the topic in its contemporary scholarly and church context with emphasis on 'the crisis in biblical authority', and then proceeds to a detailed discussion of revelation and inspiration. Bloesch rightly sees the approach to Scripture as crucial for all other theological issues. Although he holds a high view of Scripture and its authority, he rejects the idea that the Word of God can be identified simply with the text of the Bible. Instead, he sees it as a 'mediate source of divine revelation'; the 'ultimate source is the living Christ, who speaks to us by his Spirit'. Following on the theme of his earlier volume, Bloesch affirms 'the paradoxical unity of Word and Spirit so that the reception of the Word is both a rational apprehension and a redeeming experience'.

Bloesch's comprehensive approach is seen in a chapter on tradition in which he discusses the complex relationship between Scripture and the church, including tradition, canon and the role of the believing community for the proper reception of the power of Scripture as the Word of God. He affirms the need to recognize that 'church tradition is not the container of the truth of the gospel but the sign and witness of the forward movement of this truth in history.' However, he warns that the gospel is 'imparted in such a way that it is never our possession but always our goal and hope'.

The second half of the book, which is more tightly constructed than the first, turns to the important issue of hermeneutics. A general discussion of the topic is followed by a chapter devoted entirely to 'Rudolf Bultmann: An Enduring Presence'. Bloesch regards Bultmann as one of the most influential figures of the twentieth century in regard to biblical studies and especially hermeneutical issues. This judgement is reinforced in the concluding chapters on the Bible and myth, and biblical and philosophical perspectives on truth. Bloesch recognizes that the Bible contains various literary forms, some of which may be described as 'mythopoetical' by which he means p. 89 an 'imagistic language describing the dramatic interaction between divinity and humanity ... that cannot be captured in literal or univocal language'. However, this does not imply that the 'reality that this language describes is mythological' and nor does it limit the ability of Scripture to convey the truth of God's word. Nevertheless, Bloesch asserts that the forms must be taken seriously since we have access to the Word only in its literary form. But the 'transformative and informative' truth of God's Word is to be found in obedient faith rather than in assent to some rationalistic concepts or being caught up in some moral or mystical experience.

Bloesch's dependence on key mentors such as Barth and P. T. Forsyth is once again clearly apparent, as are his skilful presentations of insights from historical theology and his creative integration of theological insights with spiritual realities. Similarly, crucial interpretative concepts such as paradox and Christological gospel-centred hermeneutics are used extensively. Bloesch devotes special attention, (sometimes in appendices attached to the relevant chapters), to topical issues such as theological method, inerrancy, narrative theology and the status of the Apocrypha. These, and discussions of some prominent evangelical positions, together with extensive documentation, combine to make this volume an important point of reference for the thinking of one of evangelicalism's most respected senior theologians.

EVANGELICAL INTERPRETATION: PERSPECTIVES ON HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES

by Millard J. Erickson
(Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1993)

(Reviewed by David Parker)

Evangelical Interpretation is the second volume of M. J. Erickson's essays to appear since he became research professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, the largest seminary in the United States.

It consists of five chapters, each one of exactly twenty-two pages. The essays deal with the wider philosophical questions of hermeneutics such as meaning and language so popular today, rather than techniques of exegesis.

The first chapter is devoted to 'The nature of authorial intent', especially as seen in the work of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and as expounded in evangelical circles by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. In general, Erickson approves the use of this approach to counteract unduly subjective and arbitrary methods of interpretation, but briefly suggests a number of ways of refining the concept to avoid ambiguity and to provide a positive role for the Holy Spirit.

He makes the role of the Spirit in biblical interpretation the topic for chapter two. It is largely a response to an article by Daniel P. Fuller, in which Fuller suggested that in the work of illumination, the Spirit changes the interpreter's attitude to the biblical message rather than p. 90 aiding in understanding the text, as is normal in evangelical doctrine. After a detailed analysis of the presuppositions and logic of Fuller's approach, Erickson

argues for a third alternative, viz., the Holy Spirit 'gives insight or understanding of the meaning that is in the biblical text' (p. 52). According to this view, 'Illumination does not involve the communication of new information, but a deeper understanding of the meaning that is there' (p. 54).

Erickson moves on in the third essay, to explore how the Bible, which is set in another time and culture from our own, can be a genuine authority today. This is the problem of contemporization. Rejecting Hirsch's distinction between the original *meaning* and the present *significance* of the text, Erickson opts for a scheme which focuses on the overall *meaning* of the text, which encompasses both the relationship between the text and that to which it refers (which Erickson calls *signification*) and the relationship between the text and the reader either at the time of writing or later (called *significance*). By analyzing this more comprehensive approach, Erickson shows that it is necessary to think also in terms of a further universal sign or underlying principle conveyed by the text which is the ultimate object of the interpreter's labours. So hermeneutics does not consist of merely exegeting the text in grammatical-historical terms to obtain the original author's meaning and then applying that to our present situation. Instead, there are three steps in the process—exegeting the text, discovering the underlying principles (taking due notice of signification and significance) and then applying them to the present situation (which may also need to be analyzed for essential meaning or 'principlized').

Since systematic theology takes on such an important role in this process by providing the overall framework of interpretation, it is appropriate that Erickson devotes his fourth chapter (not part of the original lecture series) to a summary of how theology, church history and cross-cultural studies contribute to hermeneutics. He thus enriches the discipline beyond the more traditional appeal to biblical studies and practical theology only.

The final chapter is the most creative as Erickson explores the impact of post-modernism on evangelical hermeneutics. After providing useful descriptions of issues involved in pre-modernism, modernism and post-modernism, he calls for a radical awareness of the post-modernist rejection of foundationalism, i.e., the assumption that there 'are some absolute or nonrelative tenets upon which knowledge can be based'. (p. 114) He thinks this means a presuppositionalist approach will be more useful than the traditional foundationalism. Then he suggests that a new evangelical hermeneutics will see language signs as referring to concepts rather than objects as in pre-modernism or to other words as in post-modernism, a position which harmonizes with his system of principlizing (ch. 3). It also allows for hermeneutics to emphasize the overall meaningfulness or relevance of the text rather than its historical-grammatical content or its truth value. It also places the focus not on p.91 isolated texts or even longer passages interpreted in exclusively literary and individualistic terms, but on the overall system reflected in the texts, especially as it relates to basic human needs treated phenomenologically and in corporate, cross-cultural contexts. In these ways, says Erickson, hitherto unexpected riches of the biblical text may be opened up to serious interpreters, with radically transformational results.

While not a comprehensive textbook on contemporary hermeneutics, Erickson's small book is a helpful contribution even if it is hard reading in some places. Of particular value is its success in highlighting a number of theoretical issues which are important in the contemporary context and showing how they impact upon the day by day work of the biblical reader and expositor. What remains to be debated is whether or not Erickson has conceded too much to post-modernism with his proposals about principlizing, overall meaning and the role of interpretive frameworks in the process of interpretation. p.92

Journal and Book Information

Journals

Crux

Published quarterly by Regent College, 5800 University Boulevard, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 2E4. Subscription rates \$14.

Evangelical Ministries

Published 3 times a year by AEAM, P.O. Box 49332 Nairobi, Kenya.

The Master's Seminary Journal

Published twice a year by The Master's Seminary, 13248 Roscoe Blvd., Sun Valley, CA 91352 USA. Subscription \$10 per year.

First Things

Published 10 issues a year by The Institute on Religion and Public Life, Dept. T, P.O. Box 3000, Denville NJ 07834 USA. Subscription USA \$29, worldwide \$41, two years \$52 and \$76.

Third Way

Published monthly. Third Way, St Peter's, Summer Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA2 4BX, England. Subscription £29 in UK and £30 rest of the world (sent by air mail).

Reformed Theological Review

Published 3 issues a year, P.O. Box 635, Doncaster, Victoria 3108, Australia. Subscription, Australia, NZ, SE Asia \$AU 12.00. Other countries \$US 15.00.

Re Source

Published by Presbyterians for Renewal, 8134 New Lagrange Road, Suite 227, Louisville, KY 40222.4679 USA. \$2.75 plus postage. [p. 93](#)

Books

Craving for Love, by Briar Whitehead published by Monarch, Tunbridge Wells, 1993 pb. pp. 316. £8.99, ISBN 1-85424-182-6.

Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues by Millard J. Erickson published by Baker Books, Grand Rapids.

Sane Sex: Christian Thinking on Sexuality ed. Francis Foulkes published by ANZEA Publishers and available from Scripture Union bookstores NZ\$15 ISBN 0 85892-526-5.

Readings in Missionary Anthropology II ed. William A. Smalley published by William Carey Library, South Pasadena, USA.

Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation by Donald G. Bloesch published by Paternoster, Carlisle and Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove Hb. pp. 384.