

Without Form & Void

SCRIPTURE, TRADITION & REASON ON HOMOSEXUALITY

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In the past several decades, mainline denominations particularly have struggled with maintaining official policies faithful to the biblical norms regarding homosexuality. In the early 1990s, the Reverend Kendall Harmon, an Episcopal priest, wrote a paper, "Should Practicing Homosexual Persons Be Ordained in the Episcopal Church Today?" What follows is a lengthy excerpt from that paper—specifically his sections on Scripture, tradition, and reason. (—Ed.)

SCRIPTURE

When the scriptural data is discussed on the topic of homosexuality, it is common to focus exclusively on the few passages that traditionally have been understood to forbid homosexual activity for the people of God. This approach fails to take account of the full biblical theology of human sexuality. When the discussion begins with a thorough analysis of the Creator's differentiation of humanity into male and female (Genesis 1) and his intention for them to enjoy an exclusive heterosexual marriage covenant (Genesis 2), the larger context for all other biblical teaching, such as Jesus' witness to the importance of marriage (Mark 10) and Paul's argument that homosexual activity is "against nature" (Romans 1), becomes evident. The biblical witness is entirely clear in its view of homosexual activity as sinful, and to dismiss this teaching is to dispose of not only a few isolated passages but also the whole biblical theology of human sexuality. So the central focus must be on what Scripture as a whole actually says.

Beginning at the Beginning

Where the discussion starts is crucial. As Don Williams, in his book *The Bond That Breaks: Will Homosexuality Split the Church?* (1978), writes:

When turning to the Bible for its understanding of homosexuality we must not jump in at any point which we choose. We must begin where the Bible itself begins: "In the beginning God . . ." This becomes a critical point for us. The modern interpreters who claim that the Bible is not opposed to homosexuality per se start, not with the opening chapters of Genesis, "the beginning," but with the account of Sodom and Gomorrah. This is true of D. S. Bailey, Robert Treese, and John McNeill.

But why not begin with Sodom and Gomorrah? Why begin with the creation narratives? The answer is simple and crucial. We begin with the creation narratives because there the meaning of human sexuality is given. For the Bible, homosexuality is always considered in relationship to human sexuality. It does not stand isolated or alone. To examine specific texts on homosexuality without understanding the biblical revelation on human sexuality is like trying to account for a tree without reference to its trunk or roots. Genesis, chapters 1–3, stand behind all else the Bible says about God and man (p. 47).

The British scholar Gordon Wenham agrees with Williams, explaining that the early chapters of Genesis "are fundamental to the teaching of both Jesus and Paul about sex and marriage. Both make repeated quotations from and many allusions to Gen. 1:27 and 2:24 in particular" (*Sexuality and The Church: The Way Forward*, ABWON, p. 17).

Given the importance of Genesis 1–3, what do they tell us in this crucial area of sexuality? Two important truths emerge. First, God creates man in his own image as male and female. As Karl Barth comments, "Man never exists as such, but always as the human male or the human

female. Hence in humanity, and therefore in fellow-humanity, the decisive, fundamental and typical question, normative for all other relationships, is that of the relationship in this differentiation” (*Church Dogmatics*, 1961, III.4, p. 117).

Second, whereas the equality of the sexes is stressed in Genesis 1, the complementarity of the sexes is emphasized in Genesis 2. In Genesis 1 both man and woman share in the divine image and each is called to populate the earth and to rule it in cooperation with the Creator who ordered the universe. In Genesis 2, since nothing else in all creation is fit for Adam, he is only fulfilled in community with another being like himself (Gen. 2:19–20). Matthew Henry comments that Eve “was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, 1706). It is as man and woman, equal yet different, that God calls them into an exclusive marriage bond (Gen. 2:24,25), a relationship that should be characterized by permanence (the word in Gen. 2:24, often translated “cleave,” means “to stick” and is used of bones that stick to the skin, of a tongue that sticks to the roof of one’s mouth).

Traditional Christian ethics derives its understanding of the purpose of Christian marriage from Genesis 1 and 2. First, it is a relationship intended for procreation (Gen. 1:26,27: “Be fruitful and multiply. . .”). Second, this union is planned for mutual joy and comfort (Gen. 2:25, where there is the shared openness and intimacy of being “both naked and unashamed”). Third, the new community is designed for pleasure (the “one flesh” of Gen. 2:24), the erotic love that is celebrated in the Song of Solomon. The language of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer reflects some of this perspective:

The union of husband and wife in heart, body and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God’s will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord (p. 423).

This understanding of marriage, endorsed by Jesus (Mark 10:4–9), is directly related to the present debate because, as John Stott observes,

Scripture envisages no other kind of marriage or sexual intercourse, for God provided no alternative. Christians should not therefore single out homosexual intercourse for special condemnation. The fact is that every sexual relationship or act which deviates from God’s intention

is ipso facto displeasing to him and under his judgment. This includes polygamy and polyandry (which infringes on the “one man-one woman” principle), clandestine unions (since these involve no public leaving of parents), casual encounters and temporary liaisons, adultery and many divorces (which are incompatible with “cleaving” and with Jesus’ prohibition “let not man separate”) and homosexual partnerships (which violate the statement that “a man” shall be joined to “his wife”) (*Involvement: Social and Sexual Relationships in the Modern World*. vol. II, 1984, p. 230).

The Sin of Sodom

With this crucial foundation laid, we now turn to the specific passages that deal directly with homosexual behavior, the first of which is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. The interim report of the diocese of Washington’s Task Force on Issues of Human Sexuality gives a typical reappraiser’s analysis of this passage:

Contemporary linguistic and historical scholarship finds that the Sodom story concerns hospitality, not homosexuality. In the key passages [sic] of the Sodom story, the men of Sodom exclaim to Lot: “Let the strangers come out that we may know them.” Traditionally, this passage has been interpreted to mean that the men of Sodom wanted to have sexual intercourse with the male strangers. Modern scholarship has shown, however, that the Hebrew verb translated as “know,” however [sic], rarely has any sexual connotations, and only in the Sodom story has it ever been associated with homosexual behavior, and that association appears to be a late phenomenon. We cannot in good conscience continue to insist that the main theme of the story is homosexuality and that the destruction of Sodom represents God’s judgment on homosexuals. A more natural, less forced interpretation suggests that the main theme concerns the hospitality ethic (p. 4).

The reappraiser tells us that this scene involves a breach of hospitality, an important insight that has not often been recognized by commentators in an age in which hospitality is neglected rather than considered sacred. The crucial point, however, is whether the sin of Sodom is one of hospitality rather than sexual immorality.

Several pieces of evidence indicate that the reappraisers reach an unwarranted conclusion. First, J. Robert Wright of General Theological Seminary has evaluated ten major commentaries on Genesis since 1955 and finds that they say



or imply that “Sodom’s sin consisted in the violation of hospitality by homosexual conduct,” (*Anglican Theological Review*, LXVI:1 [1984], p. 82). Second, the biblical book of Jude explains that the people of Sodom “acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust,” (v. 7). This unnatural lust was not (as some reappraisers maintain) that they lusted after angels but that they sought to engage in homosexual conduct, which was a violation of the created order in Genesis 1 and 2. The scene in Genesis 6:1–4, which some early Christians understood to be lust of angels after mortal women, was compared by Jude to Genesis 19 because it, too, was a violation of God’s created order. Third, even noted reappraiser Sherwin Bailey acknowledges that “the Fathers of the Christian Church . . . entertained no doubt whatever that the Sodomites were peculiarly and inordinately addicted to homosexual practices, and that they were punished on this account” (*Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, p. 25).

A fourth problem is the linguistic data. It is true, as reappraiser Sherwin Bailey has argued, that 10 out of 943 times the verb “to know” appears in the Old Testament it refers to sexual intimacy. What Bailey and the diocese of Washington’s Task Force fail to mention, however, is that 6 of these usages are in Genesis and one in the narrative under consideration (in which Lot’s daughters are said not to have “known” a man, v. 8). The offer of Lot’s daughters instead of the men strengthens the suggestion of sexual immorality. In addition, the Hebrew verb used in verse 7 (and also in Judges 19:23) to denote activity contrary to God’s will (RSV “act wickedly”) seems too strong to describe a breach of hospitality, as does the ensuing judgment visited upon the whole city.

The parallel story in Judges 19 adds further weight to the case that Sodom’s sin involved sexual immorality since in Judges 19:23 the offer of the mob “to know” the male visitor is termed a “vile thing.” The unusual feminine noun used here frequently has sexual overtones: it is used to describe the sexual assault Shechem made on Dinah (Gen. 34:7), the sexual infidelity of a man’s daughter (Deut. 22:20,21), Amnon’s rape of Tamar (2 Sam. 13:12,13), and the adultery of the Israelites with their neighbors’ wives (Jer. 29:22,23). The use of this word four times in the sad episode of Gibeah (Judges 19:23,24; 20:6,10) paints a pathetic portrait of sexuality that is predatory and violent. Such a gross violation of God’s intent in creation results not in the destruction of an entire city, but in the civil war of a whole nation.

All of the evidence supports the Church’s traditional understanding that both of these passages concern the violation of hospitality by homosexual activity, a serious breach of God’s intention that sexual intercourse may only be enjoyed between a man and woman in marriage. But what of the allegation made by some reappraisers that the many other references to Sodom in the Scriptures do not mention homosexuality? It may be, as the recent study of the Lutheran Church in America (1986) suggests, that later prophets only knew part of the original story. It is also possible that the sexual dimensions of this

episode were so well known that their repetition was not necessary in the particular cultural context of the later prophets. In any case, arguments from silence are notoriously inconclusive.

The Holiness Code, the Song of Songs

We now turn to the next clear reference to homosexual practice in the Old Testament in the Holiness Code: “You shall not lie with a male as with a female; it is an abomination” (Lev. 18:22); “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). Even Sherwin Bailey asserts that “it is hardly open to doubt that both the laws in Leviticus relate to ordinary homosexual acts between men, and not ritual or other acts performed in the name of religion” (Bailey, *op. cit.*, p. 30).

Some scholars have tried to argue that these verses refer to cultic prostitution since the general context is one of ritual cleanness, but the specific context is of sexual contact within the extended family. Also, ritual prostitution is clearly forbidden elsewhere (Deut. 23:17). Other scholars have maintained that violent homosexual practice is in view. But as Gordon Wenham explains: “The use of the term ‘lie’ without any qualifying verb, e.g., ‘seize and (lie)’ and the equal punishment shows that consent to intercourse is assumed between the partners. Comparison with the laws on adultery shows that if it were a question of homosexual rape only the rapist would have been executed (cf. Deut. 22:22,23,25),” (Wenham, *op. cit.*, p. 30).

This clear prohibition of homosexual behavior in the Israelite community then raises the difficult hermeneutical question of the way in which it applies to us as Christians. Simply to argue that the law is overturned by the gospel is too facile; what is meant by “the law”? Jesus said, “I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it” (Matt. 5:17). What is superseded in Christ is the ceremonial law, the sacrificial system which is so much the focus of the book of Hebrews. But what the Protestant Reformers called the moral law, the will of God as revealed for example in the Ten Commandments (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 350), is still a valuable guide to the community of faith today. Whereas certain specific cultural applications of the principles underlying many proscriptions in Leviticus are not relevant, the principles are. Seen in the light of Genesis 1 and 2, the principle underlying these two passages is that homosexual activity violates God’s intention in creation, as does adultery (Lev. 20:10) and incest (Lev. 20:11,12).

It would be quite usual at this point to continue into the New Testament, but that would eliminate another important Old Testament contribution to the debate on human sexuality, the Song of Solomon. Because of its tender sensuality, the Church has had an unfortunate tendency to ignore this book, or, when it taught on the subject at all, to view this part of the Bible typologically as a depiction of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel and between Christ

and his Church. Many recent commentators, however, have recognized the Song as a simple presentation of the relationship between the lover and his beloved. The poetic celebration of this love includes detailed descriptions of the human body (e.g., in 4:1–7) as well as of nature (e.g., in 4:8), each of which reflects the doctrine of God’s creation in which he made everything “very good.” The physical enjoyment of sexuality also reflects the Creator’s intention that this gift be enjoyed between a man and woman in an exclusive relationship (the marriage is implied by the prominent roles given to friends and to the perfumer). *In the only book of the Bible that depicts two people’s mutual delight in sexual expression, that expression is between a married heterosexual couple.*

The New Testament Testimony

Having seen that the Old Testament is consistent and directly applicable to the sexuality debate, what about the New Testament? The first argument made by some reappraisers is that Jesus said nothing that has been recorded about the subject. This is highly misleading. First, Jesus consistently affirms that sexual intimacy belongs only within marriage, an understanding he derives from Genesis 1 and 2 (cf. Mark 10:4–9; Matt. 19:3–12, etc.). Second, he frequently uses the Greek word *porneia* (RSV “fornication”) to describe something evil which men and women engage in (Mark 7:23, etc.), an umbrella term that may also apply to homosexual practice. Third, the argument from silence cuts both ways: we know that Jesus affirmed the Old Testament, so why would Jesus differ in any way from the Torah on the question of homosexual practice?

The next passages that deal explicitly with homosexual practice are from the Pauline Epistles:

Make no mistake: no fornicator or idolater, none who are guilty either of adultery or of homosexual perversion, no thieves or grabbers or drunkards or slanderers or swindlers, will possess the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9,10, NEB).

The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:9,10, NEB).

The interpretation of these texts turns on the understanding of the two Greek words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*; both appear in 1 Cor. 6:9,10 (lumped together by the NEB as those guilty “of homosexual perversion”) and only the second appears in 1 Tim. 1:9,10 (translated “sodomites” by the NEB).

Robin Scroggs has recently argued that these two words refer to the adolescent “call boy” and his older male counterpart; what Paul is condemning is pederasty and therefore these passages do not apply to the contemporary debate. Bailey, however, argues that *malakoi* refers to those involved

in passive homosexual acts and *arsenokoitai* to those engaging in active homosexual acts.

Two pieces of evidence suggest that Bailey may be right. First, Paul adopts Greek words almost certainly formed on the basis of the Septuagint (an early translation into Greek of the OT) version of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, which describe general homosexual practice. Second, the list in 1 Cor. 6:9,10 is a very general list of vices: “Why would the Apostle single out ‘male prostitutes’ when he is referring to ‘idolaters, adulterers, thieves, greedy,’ etc.?” (Williams, op. cit., p. 84). A similar conclusion may be reached on 1 Tim. 1:9,10 (which comes in the context of the proper use of the law, and may have in view Genesis 1–2).

The last biblical section for scrutiny is Rom. 1:26,27, described in a 1973 position paper of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops as “the clearest condemnation of homosexual acts” in Scripture. In a crucial opening section of his letter, Paul looks at fallen humanity as a whole (1:18–3:20) in our rejection of God. In verse 18 the Apostle begins his diagnosis of the degree of humanity’s need for God by arguing that God’s wrath, his righteous reaction to human unrighteousness, is revealed from heaven against “all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth” (RSV).

What is the truth to which Paul refers? The truth of God’s character as it is made clear in creation, a creation that shows such a majestic design that we know there must be a designer. How do we suppress this truth? Although it is clear through creation that there is a Creator, we are unwilling to acknowledge him to be the Lord who deserves our worship and submission. The result of this rebellion against the Creator is a distortion of our relationships in two directions. We no longer worship the true God, but we still have a created desire to worship which becomes perverted into the worship of “images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles” (v. 23). Also, our relationships with our fellow human beings no longer function as God intended them, and both women and men exchange the natural created desire for a consummated relationship with the opposite sex and engage in same-sex relationships: “women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another” (vv. 26,27).

The key question for biblical interpreters is the meaning of the RSV phrase “unnatural” (v. 26), which in the Greek literally reads “against nature.” Understood in the light of the whole of the Bible which begins in Genesis 1 and 2, Paul sees these acts as contrary to God’s intention that sexual intercourse belongs only within heterosexual marriage. As C. K. Barrett comments, “In the obscure pleasures to which he refers is to be seen precisely *that perversion of the created order* which may be expected when men put the creation in place of the creator,” (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 1957, p. 39, my emphasis).

Kicking Against Nature

Two alternatives to this interpretation of Romans 1 have recently been proposed. The first is by the late Yale historian John Boswell in his work *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (University of Chicago Press, 1980), described by Robert Wright of General Seminary as “the most sophisticated revision of church history to date from a pro-gay or pro-homosexual viewpoint” (Wright, op. cit., pp. 89–90). When examining verse 26 in Romans 1, Boswell maintains that rather than meaning “contrary to” nature, the Greek preposition in this instance should be rendered “more than” or “in excess of.” “The persons Paul condemns are manifestly not homosexual,” argues Boswell; rather “what he derogates are homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons” (Boswell, op. cit., p. 109; Bishop John Shelby Spong makes the same case without citing Boswell as a reference in *Living in Sin? A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality*, reprinted by HarperSanFrancisco, 1990, p. 150). On this reading, “unnatural” would mean homosexual acts outside the bounds of the heterosexual nature of the agent.

A careful and systematic refutation of Boswell’s exegesis has been made by Richard Hays of Yale Divinity School (“Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14/1 [1986], pp. 184–215). Hays shows convincingly that Boswell’s use of the linguistic evidence is forced because in a number of instances the phrase *para physin* means “contrary to the structure of creation.” Further, in discussing Paul’s exegetical argument, Hays demonstrates that the Apostle is making an indictment not of a specific group of heterosexuals tempted to engage in homosexual behavior, but of all humanity in our rejection of the Creator. Paul’s charge that we fallen humans have “exchanged natural relations for unnatural” means “nothing more nor less than that human beings, created for heterosexual companionship as the Genesis story bears witness, have distorted even so basic a truth as their sexual identity by rejecting the male and female roles which are ‘naturally’ theirs in God’s created order” (Hays, op. cit., p. 200). By using the anachronistic idea of “sexual orientation” and applying it to Paul, Boswell reads his own bias into the text and draws it back out again.

Another approach to the Romans 1 passage has been articulated by William Countryman, Associate Professor of New Testament at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, in his work *Dirt, Greed, and Sex* (Fortress Press, 1988). Countryman’s book has become influential in the Episcopal Church (it features prominently in the diocese of Washington’s Task Force report, for example), and it therefore also deserves our attention.

According to Countryman, two ethics, the purity ethic and the property ethic, explain all of the passages in the Bible. The first means “avoidance of dirt” and involves “all rules that govern the boundaries of the human body” (p. 11). The second understands property as “something which

is . . . an extension of the self, so that a violation of my property is a violation of my personhood” (p. 147). Countryman’s thesis is that whereas the Old Testament upholds both ethics, God’s new covenant in Jesus Christ overturns the purity ethic yet affirms the property ethic.

Countryman contends that in Romans 1, Paul described homosexual acts “as being unclean, dishonorable, improper, and over against nature,” but “he did not apply the language of sin to them at all. Instead, he treated homosexual behavior as an integral if unpleasingly dirty aspect of Gentile culture” (p. 117) in order to bring the Jews and Gentiles in his audience into his argument. In other words, Paul was temporarily using a purity ethic which he no longer believed.

But Countryman cannot stretch the evidence to fit the Procrustean bed of his thesis. In a footnote, he admits that Yale scholar Richard Hays claims that Paul’s phrase “against nature” (v. 26) is based on the creation narratives in Genesis, but argues that “there is no strong evidence for such a conclusion” (p. 114). This puts Countryman on a collision course with himself, since he argues that elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Corinthians) Paul appeals to the creation story (p. 204) when dealing with sexual ethics. It also fails to note that earlier in the Romans passage Paul has spoken about the confusion of the creature with the Creator, so that exegetes such as C. K. Barrett and C. E. B. Cranfield understand him to be referring to the created order in verse 26. Even Bishop Spong is forced to conclude that “with the context explained and the words analyzed, it still appears to me that Paul would not approve of homosexual behavior” (Spong, op. cit., p. 151).

Our examination of the evidence indicates that the biblical witness is entirely clear in its prohibition of homosexual activity since it is outside God’s created intention for those whom he has made. Gordon Wenham’s comment on the seriousness of rejecting this witness needs to be carefully heeded:

To set aside the biblical teaching on homosexuality as no longer applicable to our era is doubtless possible, but in so doing one is not simply eliminating one uncomfortable feature of scriptural teaching. At the same time the whole biblical teaching on creation, sex, marriage, forgiveness and redemption will be fundamentally altered. The remarks condemning homosexual practice are the tip of an iceberg of biblical theology. They cannot be set aside without at the same time melting down very major parts of biblical teaching. For a church which affirms that the Holy Spirit spoke by the prophets and prays that we will read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures, this is a serious step (Wenham, op. cit., p. 38).

GRASPING THE TRADITION

The witness of the Church through history is consistent and clear in its repudiation of the practice of homosexuality from the earliest Church fathers to Thomas Aquinas in the

medieval period, to Martin Luther during the Reformation, to Karl Barth in the twentieth century. A vigorous challenge to this consistent rejection thesis has been put forth by John Boswell of Yale University in his *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, but because of the author's obvious bias and glaring inaccuracies he fails to convince the reader. Particularly damaging to Boswell's case is his inability to produce a single text from the early centuries of the Church, a period considered crucial by Anglicans, that approves of homosexual activity.

Although often neglected in the contemporary debate over sexual ethics, the Church's traditional understanding of this subject has an important contribution to make. "A Christian theology can no more fly in the face of the mainstream of tradition than it can in the face of scripture," writes John Macquarrie (*Principles of Christian Theology*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966, p. 12). Macquarrie understands Tradition to be the consistent witness of the Church through time, "that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all," in the celebrated words of St. Vincent of Lerins.

What does the earliest Christian Tradition actually say about the practice of homosexuality? Peter Coleman, bishop of Crediton in England, summarizes it in this way:

Although the evidence is sparse, documents surviving from that period [the first century onwards] usually express undeviating hostility, and show that the leaders of the early church were aware of homosexual practices and firmly opposed to what they considered an immoral aspect of the pagan society in which they lived (*Gay Christians: A Moral Dilemma*, SCM Press, 1989, p. 4).

Richard Hays of Yale Divinity School reaches a similar conclusion:

Every pertinent Christian text from the pre-Constantinian period (Romans, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Testament of Naphtali [if this is indeed a Christian text], the Apostolic Constitutions, Clement of Alexandria, Minucius Felix, etc.) adopts an unremittingly negative judgment on homosexual practice, and this tradition is emphatically carried forward by all major Christian writers of the fourth and fifth centuries (Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, et al.) (Hays, op. cit., p. 202).

Because of the limited scope of this paper, only three texts that support these statements may be included here. The first is from the Apostolic Constitutions, a collection of ecclesiastical principles collected by the Syrian Church, which serves as a good example of the way in which the Church functioned at the end of the fourth century. In book seven of this work the seventh of the Ten Commandments is elucidated in the following fashion:

Thou shalt not commit adultery, for thou dividest the one flesh into two. They two shall be one flesh, for the husband and wife are one in nature, in consent, in union, in disposition, and the conduct of life; they are

not separated in sex and number. Thou shalt not corrupt boys; for this wickedness is contrary to nature, and arose from Sodom, which was entirely consumed with fire sent from God. Let such a one be accursed, and all the people shall say "So be it." (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Eerdmans, reprinted 1985, vol. VII, p. 466).

The biblical references listed to support this argument are Gen. 2:24, Lev. 18:20, and Gen. 19. The placing together of the positive teaching of the creation narrative with the prohibition against homosexual activity is highly significant.

Another source of early Church teaching in the area of sexuality is the biblical commentaries of St. John Chrysostom, who became patriarch of Constantinople in the year 398. In his fourth homily on Romans, Chrysostom has these comments to make on verses 26 and 27 of chapter one:

Having reproached the women first, he goes on to the men also and says, "And likewise also the men leaving the natural use of the woman." Which is an evident proof of the last degree of corruptness, when both sexes are abandoned. . . . For he does not say they were enamoured of, and lusted after one another, but "they burned in their lust one toward another." You see that the whole of desire comes of an exorbitancy which endureth not to abide within its proper limits (*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Eerdmans, reprinted 1979, vol. XI, p. 356).

John Boswell translates this last line "You can see that all such desire stems from a greed which will not remain within its usual bonds," a wording that also makes clear Chrysostom's sense that this activity is outside the Creator's will.

St. Augustine, the famous convert to Christianity who became the bishop of Hippo in Africa, also writes about homosexual practice in the same period as Chrysostom, around the year 400. In his autobiographical *Confessions* Augustine poses a question and answers it with a reference to Sodom:

Can it at any time or place be an unrighteous thing for a man to love God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind, and his neighbor as himself? Therefore those offenses which be contrary to nature are everywhere and at all times to be held in detestation and punished; such were those of the Sodomites, which should all nations commit, they should all be held guilty of the same crime by the divine law, which hath not so made men that they should in that way abuse one another. For even that fellowship which should be between God and us is violated, when that same nature of which he is author is polluted by the perversity of lust (*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Eerdmans, reprinted 1988, vol. 1, p. 65).

Augustine bases his remarks on Scripture: he focuses on the way in which "men" are "made" (creation) and views homosexual acts as "contrary to nature" (echoing Paul in Romans 1).

A Continuous Tradition

The consistent condemnation of homosexual acts by such early Church witnesses as The Apostolic Constitutions, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Augustine was continued by the Church into the medieval period. This age's most notable theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, considers homosexual practice, fornication, adultery, incest, seduction, and rape under the heading of the six species of lust. Aquinas emphasizes the procreative purpose of human sexuality:

Wherefore just as the use of food can be without sin if it be taken in due manner and order as required for the welfare of the body, so also the use of venereal acts can be without sin if they are performed in the proper manner and ordered to the preservation of the race. . . . Since by unnatural vices man transgresses that which has been determined by nature with regard to the use of venereal actions, it follows that in this matter this sin [homosexual genital activity] is [the] gravest of sins (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Question 153, 2, as reprinted in *Homosexuality and Ethics*, Edward Batchelor, Jr., ed., Pilgrim Press, 1980, pp. 40, 46).

In support of these arguments, Aquinas uses Scripture and the quote from St. Augustine's *Confessions*.

Many similar citations could be used to show that the Church's leading thinkers during the Reformation adopted the stance of the early Church. Luther's comments on Genesis 19 may serve as an example:

The heinous conduct of the people of Sodom is extraordinary, inasmuch as they departed from the natural passion and longing of the male for the female, which was implanted into nature by God, and desired what is altogether contrary to nature. Whence comes this perversity? Undoubtedly from Satan, who, after people have once turned away from the fear of God, so powerfully suppresses nature that he blots out the natural desire and stirs up a desire that is contrary to nature (*Luther's Works*, Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., Concordia Publishing House, 1961, vol. III, p. 255).

After the Reformers, according to Peter Coleman, the Church's traditional interpretation of sexual morality "continued unchanged until the call for reassessment" in England in 1954 (Coleman, op. cit., p. 89).

Avoiding Tradition

The apparent harmony of the Church's testimony rehearsed briefly above has met with an influential challenge by John Boswell in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. Although this book has received a mixed response in the scholarly community, it is quite often cited in the Episcopal Church without the slightest suggestion that Boswell's conclusions have been called into question.

The purpose of Boswell's ambitious study is to prove that the lack of the Church's acceptance of homosexual

Readers may be interested in a significant change made in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993) concerning homosexuality.

The official edition of this most important work is now not the French but the Latin (*Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, 1997), and it contains a correction of the official teaching of the Church.

In the French/English paragraph 2358, we read, "The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. They do not choose their homosexual condition; for most of them it is a trial."

"They do not choose their homosexual condition" was open to a reading contrary to the historic moral teaching of the Church, as articles in the liberal Jesuit magazine *America* illustrate.

The 1997 Latin edition (in translation) contains the received moral teaching of the Church in a much clearer manner in paragraph 2358. The second sentence reads: "This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial" (Latin, p. 598).

Objectively disordered, that is, contrary to nature, and contrary to God's purpose within nature and for the relation of the sexes and for procreation. However, as another Vatican document states, "it is not a sin as such but it is a more or less strong tendency towards an intrinsic moral evil and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder" (CDF-PCHP, 1986, note 3).

Thus, all the loving pastoral care of the Church is to be offered to those who have this objective disorder so that they may overcome its inclinations and be chaste for Christ's sake and for their own sanctification and maturity.

—Peter Toon

behavior on the part of her members, which he maintains only really arises with force in the late Middle Ages, is not at all based on religious belief but on social factors, especially increased urbanization and the growth of powerful government. Boswell begins by examining ancient Rome, which showed great tolerance of homosexual behavior, and moves from this "foundation" to the early Middle Ages, where he finds a growth in "narrowness." Why?

One possible cause would be the Bible, but Boswell interprets the few passages which make explicit reference to homosexual practice in such a way as to suggest that they have no bearing on the question of the sexual involvement of those who have a homosexual orientation. The sin of Sodom in Genesis 19, as discussed above, involved a breach of hospitality, and in Rom. 1:26-27, the Apostle Paul is urging those heterosexuals who are tempted to become involved in homosexual activity not to do so. Once he

concludes that the Bible “takes no demonstrable position on homosexuality,” he then insists that “the source of antigay feelings *must* be sought elsewhere” (Boswell, op. cit., p. 117, my emphasis).

The early fathers of the Church after the Apostles could be another factor, but Boswell says they are not. They make reference to the subject of homosexual activity only infrequently, and when they do their arguments seem peculiar to modern ears. One example is the Epistle of Barnabas’s use of the Mosaic prohibition against eating the hare (Lev. 11:15), which was believed to grow a new anus every year, to argue that Christians need to avoid homosexual behavior. Such an objection based on a fundamental misunderstanding of nature makes it clear to Boswell that the roots of the deep medieval anti-gay hostility must lie elsewhere, and he finds their true cause in social factors which emerged in the Scholastic period.

One great contribution of Boswell’s work to the present debate is his challenge to one way in which the evidence of Church history is used. As Peter Coleman comments:

It is clearly no longer safe to claim history shows that homosexual behavior in its many aspects thrived in Greece and Rome, was banished by the Christians, and has only revived in our modern secular and pluralistic society . . . it is all much more complicated than that (Coleman, op. cit., p. 90).

While the evidence may be complex, the crucial question is whether Boswell uses it convincingly to show that Christian opposition to homosexual behavior is *not* based on doctrine. In this he does not succeed. Although in the preface he denies having “a partisan point of view,” and in the introduction he claims that the book shows “little built-in theoretical bias,” Boswell nevertheless maintains a persistent pro-homosexual stance throughout his work. His title would better read *Homosexuality, Social Tolerance, and Christianity*, since this would more accurately reflect the author’s priorities. Boswell’s constant urgings about the reality of homosexual incidence and the use of what he considers appropriate language (a whole section on the importance of the word “gay”), as well as continual comments such as “it may be discomfiting to some modern Christian opponents of homosexual behavior that . . .” (p. 163), make clear the author’s polemical intent. His glaring lack of objectivity is all the more ironic in that he is so insistent that much of Christian history is tainted by an anti-gay bias.

Skewing Scripture

Boswell’s scholarship is also plagued by inaccurate conclusions, as his section on Scripture illustrates. As with so many other contributors in this debate, he begins his discussion with an examination not of Genesis 1 and 2 but of Genesis 19, in which he follows D. S. Bailey’s argument that it involves a breach of hospitality. In a comprehensive questioning of Boswell’s book, J. Robert Wright observes that

one of the three works Boswell cites, Marvin Pope’s *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Volume, actually claims the opposite of what Boswell says (Wright, op. cit., p. 82). This kind of inaccuracy is repeated again and again: “Genesis 19 was not a principal source of early Christian hostility to homosexual relations,” he claims (p. 97), in spite of the fact that Bailey, with whom Boswell is sympathetic, argues that it consistently is; “the Levitical regulations had no hold on Christians” (p. 105), in spite of some references to Leviticus in the subapostolic literature.

The author’s only reference to the creation narratives includes the following example of special pleading:

If the Old Testament had no specific positive role in creating early Christian attitudes toward homosexual acts, may it not have had a negative role? Would not the complete silence on the subject of gay sexuality and the predication of all Old Testament moral legislation on a heterosexual model have predisposed Christians to reject homosexuality as alien to God’s plan, no matter how they viewed the Jewish law? The assumption that the creation of humankind through heterosexual union in Genesis and the subsequent emphasis on marriage throughout the Old Testament demonstrates tacit rejection of gay sexuality is unsupportable in a modern context, and it does not seem to have occurred to early Christians. It . . . would have constituted an extremely weak argument if it had (Boswell, op. cit., p. 105).

Boswell makes the sweeping statements that a creation-based argument is unsupportable in a modern context (but he offers no reason as to why) and that it would be a weak case to make if it were tried (but he gives no evidence for its weakness). His claim that early Christians did not use this argument contradicts the data: Paul makes precisely this claim in Romans 1, and a number of early Church witnesses use a similar approach.

As with his treatment of Scripture, Boswell’s attempt to discount the significance of the early Church fathers suffers from a lack of logic and evidence. He asserts that the subject receives little attention (true) and that the reasons given for objecting to homosexual activity are not convincing (sometimes true, as in the zoological example above). From this foundation he then maintains that there is no “reason to assume that the specific objections of influential theologians played any major role in the development of antihomosexual feelings in society” (p. 164). He offers no factual support for this generalization and, perhaps more important, “he is unable to cite a single early Christian text which approves homosexual activity” (Hays, op. cit., p. 202).

In summary, Boswell’s book, while useful for its breadth of sources, fails to convince the reader because of the author’s frequently inaccurate and unsubstantiated claims. As Robert Wright concludes, “I do not find Professor Boswell’s case for retrospective revision of the scriptural/patristic/historical tradition convincing, and I see no reason to dissent on the basis of it from the resolution of the

1979 General Convention [i.e., traditional teaching of the Church]” (Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 88).

What does Christian Tradition say about the acceptance of homosexual practice? It agrees with Scripture in rejecting this behavior. As we approach the final area of reason with this conclusion in mind, two important considerations emerge. First, although Anglicans emphatically affirm the importance of reason in the contemporary dialogue (all truth is God’s truth), the burden of proof on those who wish to change the Church’s consistent stance in this area is considerable. Second, it needs to be appreciated that the argument for the public acceptance of homosexual relationships in the Church, seen against the wider backdrop of twenty centuries of Church history, is extremely recent (roughly since the 1950s). This does not mean that such an innovation is *a priori* wrong—there have been other changes introduced throughout the Church’s history—but it is coming at a time when many of our best cultural analysts are arguing that Western culture is morally awry, particularly in the area of human sexuality. The question of how to listen to what God is saying through our culture in this area is therefore a great challenge.

REASON

How to form the mind of Christ on the issue of homosexuality revolves around three specific questions. First, how many homosexuals are there in the general population? Reappraisers argue that they number 10 percent, but the number of those so oriented is probably between 3 percent and 5 percent. Even given its incidence, however, just because something *is* does not mean it ought to be. Second, what causes homosexuality? Reappraisers maintain that homosexuality is hormonally determined prior to birth and that the Church should accept those who cannot help the way in which they came into the world. The data fail to support this view: many researchers emphasize the role of environment in the development of homosexuality, particularly the family surroundings a person has in his early years. A final important question in the debate is: can homosexuals change? While such change is often difficult, many therapists maintain it can happen. The possibility of healing for those struggling with their sexuality needs to be taken seriously by the Episcopal Church in the future.

Right Reason

“Anglicans have consistently claimed,” writes Dr. Timothy Sedgwick of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, that “reason is the fulcrum by which the voices of scripture and tradition are lifted into perspective” (“Christian Ethics and Human Sexuality: Mapping the Conversation,” in *Continuing the Dialogue*, Education for Mission and Ministry Unit of the Episcopal Church Center, 1988, p. 9). The difficulty with much contemporary discussion on matters such as

human sexuality, however, is the question of the precise meaning of the term “reason.” Often this word is defined as human analytical capacity, and sometimes even as simple common sense. The picture seems to be of a person examining the evidence and then deciding what is the most “reasonable” interpretation.

But many of the prominent classical Anglicans—people such as Richard Hooker, Thomas Cranmer, and their contemporaries—meant something quite different when they used the term “reason.” Reason for them was the means by which they could try to understand God’s revelation in Jesus Christ; neither it nor Tradition was given equal weight with Scripture. Rather than being isolated from Scripture and Tradition, reason was formed by these two sources: it was a faculty saturated by revelation and grace. The closest idea in modern parlance may be Christian character or virtue.

Right Data

Given this understanding, then, how can we form the mind of Christ about the question of homosexuality? Clearly the best scientific research on the origin of homosexuality will need to be considered. At this point a deep irony about the sexuality debate becomes apparent, namely that a number of reappraisers who insist that the Bible needs to be understood in the light of its original cultural and historical setting, fail to apply the same standards when they consider the scientific data. But as Thomas Kuhn has demonstrated in his work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1962), science also has a context in which paradigms change, theories are discarded, and sometimes irrational decisions are made.

One aspect of the scientific evidence is the question of the incidence of homosexuality. Bishop Spong’s may serve as an example of the assertions made on this point: “We now know that homosexuality is part of the essential nature of approximately 10 percent of the population” (Spong, *op. cit.*, p. 67). Bishop Spong cites no evidence for this claim, but one presumes that he has in mind the pioneering work of zoologist Alfred Kinsey. Kinsey’s investigation into human sexuality led him to the proposal that every human being could be placed on a scale between 0 (an exclusively heterosexual bias) and 6 (an exclusively homosexual bias). Kinsey’s research showed that 10 percent of males were homosexual in orientation (scale of 5 or 6) for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55, and that 4 percent were “exclusively homosexual throughout their lives” (Alfred Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Saunder, 1948, p. 651). Bishop Spong’s statement, typical of those repeated in the popular literature, is not even supported by the Kinsey data since it fails to specify any time period during the life of the “population” in question.

Even the Kinsey figures, however, have been subject to challenge. The eminent psychologist Abraham Maslow noted that Kinsey’s study was based on volunteers and was

HOMOSEXUALITY & TEEN SUICIDE

In an article in a recent *Ladies' Home Journal* (May 1998) a mother shares the tragic story of her homosexual son's suicide at age 14. The pain that a parent must go through in such a situation is unimaginable for most of us. Although it may have helped the mother to express her grief, it is obvious that the magazine's objective—and possibly the mother's—was not just to share an awful experience but to promote an agenda—the acceptance of homosexuality. This was done according to standard procedures for promoting such an agenda—to blame the homosexual child's problems on homophobia and to grossly exaggerate the occurrence of suicide among homosexual teenagers.

The article stated as a fact what has been treated in the same way by *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and hundreds of other newspapers and magazines: that 30 percent of all teenage suicides are by gay teens. This is the primary argument put forth to support adopting gay-affirmative programs in public and private schools.

The problem is that this statistic has no basis in fact. It is based on a 1989 study done by a San Francisco gay activist, Paul Gibson, who had it attached to a report by a federal task force on suicide for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). In fact, the HHS Secretary at the time, Dr. Louis Sullivan, stated that the conclusions of the study did not in any way express his views or the views of the department.

In 1994 representatives of the Centers for Disease Control, the American Psychological Association, the American Association of Suicidology, and gay and lesbian advocacy groups met to study the issue. They concluded that "There is no population-based evidence that sexual orientation and suicidality are linked in some direct or indirect manner" (quoted from a *Seattle Times* article of May 22, 1997).

therefore possibly distorted since those who volunteered were not representative of the general population. In fact, Maslow's examination of Kinsey's volunteers showed that those who came forward tended to be disproportionately representative of two groups: people who had very high self-esteem and who were therefore more aggressive and adventurous, and people with low self-esteem who tended to be very passive (A. H. Maslow and James M. Sakoda, "Volunteer Error in the Kinsey Study," *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, vol. 47 [1952], pp. 259–262).

Other studies since that of Kinsey in the late 1940s have shown different results as to the incidence of homosexuality. A recent study by the National Center of Health Statistics regarding male participation in homosexual activity since 1977, for example, found that only 3 per-

cent of the population *ever* engaged in homosexual intercourse (D. A. Dawson, National Center for Health Statistics, *Advance Data* 183 [1990]). A British study based on interviews with a randomly selected group of men also yielded a result of just under 3 percent (D. Forman and C. Chilvers, "Sexual Behavior of Young and Middle-Aged Men in England and Wales," *British Medical Journal*, 298 [1989], pp. 1137–1142). The array of statistics justifies the conclusion of Roman Catholic moral theologian James P. Hanigan:

Estimates of the number of people in the population whose sexual orientation is exclusively or predominantly toward members of the same sex vary rather widely, often in accord with the sexual orientation of those making estimates (James P. Hanigan, *Homosexu-*

Paul Gibson admits that he had done no original research, but that his statistics were based on other studies including one that reported there were 3,000 gay teen suicides a year—a figure that in fact exceeded the total number of *all* teen suicides in one year. Further, he extrapolated using the totally discredited Kinsey position that 10 percent of the population is homosexual. Gibson's study is virtually worthless—except to be used to promote a political agenda.

There is a strong chance that homosexual teenagers are more likely to commit suicide than other teens. Inherent in all homosexuality is the clash between the way one's body has been created and one's feelings. The homosexual teenager soon finds that he is seeking to fill deep needs in ways that never seem able to meet them, and this could lead to extreme anxiety and depression.

But the real tragedy in using such false statistics to promote homosexual-affirming programs in the schools is that it lays before children who already have strong homosexual feelings a false remedy for their problem. Furthermore, for those teenagers whose sexual identity may be in question, the programs will push them towards a homosexual identity with all of the negative consequences it will bring.

Society bought the 10 percent myth for many, many years. We should not let the 30 percent gay suicide myth go unchallenged on any front.

—Alan P. Medinger

For a detailed examination of this subject, see "The Gay Suicide Myth," Peter LaBarbera's contribution to the Journal of Human Sexuality (available from Regeneration Books; \$10.00 plus \$2.50 S&H).

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ality: *The Test Case for Christian Sexual Ethics*, Paulist Press, 1988, footnote 1, p. 30).

A generous estimate would seem to be that between 3 percent and 5 percent of the population is homosexual in orientation for some part of their lives; even this figure, however, does not take into account the complex relationship between orientation and practice.

Whatever the exact figures, the reappraisers are concerned with the number of homosexuals because they insist that since so many in society have this orientation, the Church is not being pastorally realistic unless she recognizes that for some this is a natural condition. But the logic of this argument is dangerous: the frequency with which a condition occurs is not related to whether it is right or wrong. *Is* never automatically means *ought*.

Right Causes

After the issue of the incidence of homosexuality among the general population, a second and more important area where the scientific evidence needs to be considered is the cause of homosexuality. Bishop Spong exemplifies the reappraiser's argument:

Specifically, research consistently seems to support the assertion that sexual orientation is not a matter of choice; that it is not related to any environmental influence; that it is not the result of an overbearing mother or an effeminate or absent father or a seductive sexual encounter. Some researchers are finding that certain biochemical events during prenatal life may determine adult sexual orientation, and that once set it is not amenable to change. Though new data are being gathered almost daily, few people working in the area of brain research expect these conclusions to be overturned (Spong, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–72).

Does contemporary research substantiate Bishop Spong's argument that one's sexuality is determined hormonally prior to birth? No. John Money, for example, writes, "whatever may be the possible unlearned assistance from constitutional sources, the child's psychosexual identity is not written, unlearned, in the genetic code, the hormonal system or the nervous system at birth" ("Sexual Dimorphism and Homosexual Gender Identity," *Perspectives in Human Sexuality*, 1974, p. 67). Masters and Johnson agree: "The genetic theory of homosexuality has been generally discarded today" (W. H. Masters, V. E. Brown, R. C. Kolodny, *Human Sexuality*, 1984, p. 319). Professor Thomas Bouchard of the University of Minnesota reported the conclusions of his study of 105 sets of twins who were separated within a few weeks of birth and brought up in different families. Although Dr. Bouchard found that genes did have an impact on various social attitudes, he "suggested that homosexuality

was not genetically determined, but a response to environmental pressure" (as reported in the *Times of London*, February 17, 1990).

A number of the theories about the cause of homosexuality emphasize the environmental influence to which Bouchard refers, particularly the role of the family in early childhood development. The psychoanalytic school holds that homosexuality arises because of the failure of the infant to pass through identification with the same-sex parent and differentiation from the opposite-sex parent. An adult male homosexual, in this view, would achieve masculinity through identification with and incorporation of the male sexual partner, an act which would diminish his feeling of "separation anxiety" from his mother (see, for example, Charles Socarides, *The Preoedipal Origin and Psychoanalytic Therapy of Sexual Perversion*, International Universities Press, 1988).

Dr. Elizabeth Moberly, a former research psychologist in Cambridge, argues that the homosexual person has "suffered from some deficit in the relationship with the parent of the same sex, and that there is a corresponding drive to make good this deficit—through the medium of same-sex, or homosexual relationships" (E. Moberly, *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*, Attic Press, 1983, p. 2, her emphasis).

A third theory is proposed by the Dutch psychologist Gerard van den Aardweg, who views homosexuality as a form of "neurotic self-pity," begun by a deep sense of sexual inferiority in early childhood which then manifests itself through an ingrained habit of compulsive complaining. All three of these theories emphasize the environmental influence that reappraisers such as Bishop Spong deny.

The influence of environment on the development of homosexuality occurs not only at the family level, but also at the societal level. David Greenberg, professor of sociology at New York University, argues persuasively for society's effect in *The Construction of Homosexuality* (University of Chicago Press, 1988). Greenberg regards the idea of the formation of a given and unchangeable homosexual identity (the "essentialist" view) as an invention of Western society in the modern era: "It was the production and dissemination of a medial discourse in the recent past that gave birth not just to the *concept* of a homosexual person, but also to homosexuals themselves, and at the same time, to their antitwins, heterosexual persons" (p. 487). Instead, he claims, homosexuality is a behavior produced and interpreted in various ways by different societies (the "social constructivist" view). Among the Akwe-Shavante of Brazil, for example, the availability of women is restricted, but little male homosexuality appears, whereas tribes in New Guinea have *all* their older male members involved in sexual relationships with younger males before they become exclusively hetero-

sexual, a practice they then maintain until death. The weight of evidence that Greenberg amasses crushes any idea of an unchanging sexual orientation given at birth.

Reorientation Is Possible

In addition to considering the cause of homosexuality, the contemporary evidence on the question of whether homosexuals can change needs to be examined. Many reappraisers maintain that homosexuality is not only given but also unalterable. For example, the Episcopal Church's pro-homosexual lobby group Integrity circulated a paper at the 1988 General Convention entitled "The 'Ex-Gay' Hoax." Can homosexuals change? All three of the theorists about the cause of homosexuality mentioned above believe that they can. Dr. Aardweg, for example, says that for those who remain in therapy, 65 percent end their active homosexual behavior. Another therapist, Dr. George Rekers of the Department of Neuro-Psychiatry at the University of South Carolina, asserts that for those who are young and strongly motivated he has had an 85 percent cure rate. While the claims of some of the Christian ministries of healing for homosexuals have been exaggerated, they have had enough success so that Tim Stafford of *Christianity Today*, doubtful upon his initial assignment to examine them, left them with a cautious optimism. The statement of Dr. Stanton Jones of Wheaton College is a fair summary of the evidence: "Every study of conversion [from homosexual to heterosexual] reports some successes, ranging from 33 percent to 60 percent. . . . But change is difficult" (*Christianity Today*, August 18, 1989, p. 29).

The Church needs to take seriously the possibility of healing for the homosexual. One exciting example of such healing ministry on the East Coast, *Regeneration*, meets at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Baltimore, and is headed by an Episcopalian, Alan Medinger. The testimony of John Christopher in *Regeneration's* newsletter illustrates the kind of transformation that God can bring to someone who has been living the homosexual lifestyle:

I am frightened and alone [wrote the author in his diary]. I don't know what to do anymore to relieve the fear. My family has become distant, my friends are asleep, Tom, my lover at this time, is not home.

It has been a severe winter for me, and this latest bout with anxiety, nerves and depression is draining my soul of any spirit which might be left at this hour, this day. I feel desperate for a solution. I cannot endure much more. . . . I have lived and have been living a life of sin. Is that what's destroying me? I have turned away from my own beliefs and ideals and have been drifting into hedonism and atheism with the rest of the world.

[The author then receives a telephone call from a woman friend who is about to enter an Episcopal convent as a postulant. She encourages him to get help.]

That telephone call in the midst of torment, struggle

and prayer led to many hours of counsel and prayer, and brought me back to the Lord and out of the bondage of homosexuality. It was the turning point of my life, a new birth in Jesus Christ (*Regeneration News*, December 1989).

What about those who find the change so difficult that they are not able to overcome their particular temptation before the end of their lives? As Helmut Thielicke urges in *The Ethics of Sex*, this pastoral struggle needs to be honestly faced by the Church. This is where Luther's concept of *simul justus et peccator*—that if we are in Christ we are simultaneously accepted by God through Christ yet we remain sinful—is so important. The Church should treat these people the same way she treats a person who is unable to overcome in this life the idolatry or envy (1 Cor. 6:9) that has become so much a part of his life—by holding out the hope of Christ's mercy while in no way legitimizing his sin.

The danger of affirming an immoral lifestyle brings us back to another question raised in Greenberg's book: if the author is correct about society's role in creating this practice, then might not the Church's acceptance of practicing homosexuals in the ordained ministry actually "create, not just liberate, individuals with gay and lesbian identities" (Don Browning in a review of Greenberg, *The Christian Century*, October 11, 1989, pp. 915–916, my emphasis)?

Following Scripture & Tradition

What does all this evidence tell us about the question of homosexuality? Clearly there is no scientific agreement as to the causes of homosexuality; various factors which fall on different sides of the classical nature-nurture debate are involved. It may be possible to show in the future, for example, that some people have a genetic predisposition that allows them to be influenced more than others in the direction of homosexuality. This is a far cry from arguing that homosexuality is determined prior to birth, however, an assertion that simply is not supported by the evidence. The possibility of healing, while it has sometimes been overstated, needs to be taken seriously by the Church. Overall, the data supports the teaching of Scripture and Tradition.

This study of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason makes clear that the will of God, as it is revealed in the Bible, and supported by the Tradition of the Church for nearly twenty centuries, is that sexual intercourse may take place only between a man and woman who are married to each other. Homosexual genital acts fall short of God's intention for his creatures and are to be seen as occasions for repentance and opportunities for healing. The Church's classical position on human sexuality should therefore continue to be vigorously supported. ■