

**Same-Gender Relationships in the Church:  
Seven Theological Viewpoints**

A study paper prepared for the  
Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1976, two presbyteries sent overtures to the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) asking for “definitive guidance” concerning whether a person who is otherwise qualified but is an “avowed homosexual” could be ordained to church office.<sup>1</sup> This question set off a debate that has been raging ever since—a debate that has caused pain and discord to many and threatens to diminish the peace, unity, and purity of the church.

### **Have we been asking the right question?**

Much of this debate has focused on who has the right answer. Seldom has the church stopped to ask whether it has been asking the right question.<sup>2</sup>

From one point of view, the question was the wrong one from the start. It was wrong because it was thought to be inappropriate. People should not even be allowed to pose such questions, at least not in polite company. Besides, how dare one raise a question that challenges centuries of settled Christian teaching?

And yet, things were never quite so “settled” in Christian understanding as they may seem. Attitudes about same-gender affection, including the attitudes of Christians, have varied in different times and different places.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, if merely asserting that a question has been “settled” by tradition served to settle it in fact, then the church today would accept monarchy and not democracy; slavery and not abolition; women’s subordination and not equality; a ban on interracial marriage and not freedom to marry the person of one’s choice; plus a ban on remarriage after divorce.

### **A critically important question**

This is why, from another point of view, the question being asked in 1976 was necessary and important. All four of the Presbyterian reports that focused upon this question from 1977 to 1979 considered the issue to be a new one, a case of first impression.<sup>4</sup> This was true in part because of the new way in which the issue was being framed—not only in the church, but in the society at large. Only three years earlier, in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association had decided to remove homoerotic desire from its list of “mental disorders,” no longer defining it as an illness or moral depravity.<sup>5</sup> The following year, in 1974, the American Bar Association affirmed that adult, private, consensual same-gender sexual conduct should not be criminalized.<sup>6</sup> Even in the 1970s, the actions taken by these professional associations, though controversial, were not wholly unexpected. They represented professional viewpoints that had been gathering strength based on research begun in the 1940s and 1950s. This research challenged the perennial assumption that the “natural” sexual orientation of all human beings is heterosexual.

In light of this moral reassessment, the question that arose in 1976 was not only necessary and important, but for many it had become urgent. Beginning in 1969, but with antecedents that went back much further, a new gay rights movement was emerging that challenged the scorn,

aversion, hatred, and even violence that many gay and lesbian people have experienced over the years.<sup>7</sup> The same year the two presbyteries posed their question, Richard Heakin, a 21-year-old gay man, was beaten to death by four teenagers who, in view of Heakin's sexual identity, were given probation, but no time in jail.<sup>8</sup> More recently, in 1998, the murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay man who died after being brutally beaten and left hanging upon a fence in Wyoming, provided the nation with horrific evidence that the longstanding antipathy directed toward gay and lesbian people was still alive and well.

In the meantime, greater social and scientific awareness about a closely related issue was slowly emerging, namely, the reality of transgender, intersex, and other gender-varied persons.<sup>9</sup> In all times and places, there have been individuals who did not fit within society's typical expectations of masculine and feminine traits. Much about gender variation remains a mystery, but there is also much we do know with scientific clarity.<sup>10</sup> For example, we now know that there are some persons whose genetic makeup is male, but whose anatomical appearance is female, and vice versa.<sup>11</sup> We know that at least one in a thousand infants is born with genitalia that are neither clearly male nor female. We know, too, that there are people who are anatomically of one gender, but feel that emotionally, psychologically, and otherwise, they are of another gender.<sup>12</sup> Beginning in the early part of the twentieth century, medical professionals began to counsel, treat, and advocate for such persons. Conservative estimates place the number of persons in the United States seeking sex reassignment surgery in their lifetime at 1 in 30,000 for male to female and 1 in 100,000 for female to male.<sup>13</sup>

It has become clear over time that the question first posed by the two presbyteries in 1976 was really about something much larger than the particularities of ordination to church office. The question touched an exposed nerve concerning how the church should think theologically in reference to gender, sexuality, the Bible, and the conviction that all people are created in the image of God.

### **A problem with terminology**

Seen from this perspective, the question posed in 1976 was unavoidable and necessary. But it soon became clear that the specific way the question was framed was also inadequate and misleading, both in terminology and in focus.

Words shape the way the world is viewed. The 1976 question was problematic in its *terminology* because the continued use of words like "homosexual" and "homosexuality" can lead us into assuming there is a unique type of person—a "homosexual"—and a peculiar sort of condition—"homosexuality"—that are the same in biblical times, in contemporary times, and in all times.<sup>14</sup> This is an assumption that an abundance of evidence unearthed in the last several decades no longer supports, but it is an assumption that still haunts the pages of much of the church's scholarship on this subject. It is certainly true that there have been people with homoerotic desires in all times and places, and in all cultures, races, and religions. The way such same-gender desire works itself out practically and culturally, however, has differed dramatically through the centuries. Hence, there is no such thing as the single, monolithic abstraction we call "homosexual-ity." Instead, there are many "homosexual-ities," which differ profoundly

according to time, place, social condition, and culture.<sup>15</sup> For example, hedonistic or exploitative sexuality is not the same thing as the loving, egalitarian, and mutually committed love of a gay or lesbian couple who together are raising a child. To apply the same moral judgment to both of these contexts, without nuance or exception, is too simplistic.

Therefore, I will avoid the use of the terms “homosexual” and “homosexuality.” Instead, I shall strive to speak about the issue in a way that is respectful of the real people behind the issue. Although I shall be engaging in complex theological reflection, my hope is that the discussion will enable “the issue” to acquire a human face.<sup>16</sup>

### **A misplaced focus**

Paying attention to context enables us to see something else about the question raised in 1976. In hindsight, the question was not only unhelpful in its terminology, but it was misleading in its *focus*. By beginning with the question of ordination, the two presbyteries in 1976 were asking for churchwide recognition of gay *leadership* when a majority in the church had yet to recognize gay *identity*. For many, the word “homosexuality” was still an abstraction. A poignant example of this arises from a comment of the late Justice Lewis F. Powell, Jr., a Virginia Presbyterian who served on the United States Supreme Court from 1972 to 1987. Looking back with regret over a vote he had cast against gay rights, Justice Powell mused that in all his seventy-eight years he had never met a gay person.<sup>17</sup> Years later, we know just how astonishing was this comment. It turns out that in the 1980s Justice Powell had worked on a day-in and day-out basis with at least six law clerks who were gay.<sup>18</sup>

In light of anecdotes like this, it is now clear that what the two presbyteries were asking for in 1976 was the politically impossible. They were asking leaders of the “establishment” in church and society to recognize a group of people that, according to the establishment’s own rules, did not exist. Or at least their existence was expected to remain out of sight, their identity buried in the closet. The phenomenon of “coming out of the closet” was just beginning in earnest in the 1970s. In this sense, the church was following the lead of the wider culture rather than setting its own agenda—and this was true of both progressives and traditionalists. On all sides of the debate, advocates tended to mirror the arguments and strategies of their secular counterparts.

This reminds us that the ordination disputes have not been merely about theology, but also about a clash of political commitments. A new gay politics of recognition was clashing with old establishment politics of social control. Through the politics of recognition, gays have been asking for public acceptance both from society and the church. Ordination has become one of a number of indices for that public acceptance. This does not mean that the church never before ordained persons with homoerotic sensibilities. In fact, the church had been doing so for two millennia. What was new in the 1970s was the public recognition of this fact.

## **Reversed priorities**

What this suggests is that, in following the lead of the wider culture, the church in 1976 may inadvertently have had its questions exactly backwards. For society at large, civil rights for gay individuals (the presenting question of the 1970s) logically had to precede the question of civil rights for gay relationships (the presenting question today). Yet things sometimes work differently in the church. Because of the priority the church places on the exemplary character of ordained leadership, the legitimacy of gay relationships logically precedes the question of the integrity of gay leadership. In other words, if the church were to create an appropriate context and standards for same-gender relationships, then the question of gay leadership would quickly fall into place.

Continued focus on ordination to the exclusion of other issues may also explain why the church's discussions surrounding these matters have become so strained and attenuated from its traditional modes of theological reflection. As with all topics in Christian theology, this one needs to be situated not only as a matter of biblical interpretation, but as a broader question of where gay and lesbian people find their place within the unfolding Trinitarian drama of creation, reconciliation, and redemption. Much of the talk about same-gender relationships in the church makes little effort to do this. It is not enough to marshal every biblical text that speaks about homoerotic activity and remain satisfied that one has thereby uncovered all the gospel has to say about the topic, any more than citing every biblical passage on "kingship" or the "reign of God" would automatically yield a blueprint for governing the nations and peoples of a globalized world, or that cataloguing every biblical reference to war and peace would thereby give us a workable foreign policy for the nuclear, post-September 11 world. Besides this, the Bible itself extols the leadership and gifts of people who clearly departed from various moral commandments. Moses was a murderer, David an adulterer, Paul a persecutor of the church, and the genealogy of Jesus himself is replete with persons of questionable sexual purity. This observation does not imply that murder, adultery, persecution, or other sinful behavior should be approved. What it suggests is the fact that a person is a "sinner" is not the only, and certainly not the final, thing the church has to say about that person. All persons are sinners. The question is how to situate the lives of all sinners—gay or straight—within the arc of the unfolding drama of salvation.

## **Framing a different kind of question**

Instead of continuing to debate ordination and "homosexuality" in the abstract, let us begin to ask a different, more concrete series of questions. Imagine that your child, a sibling, another family member, or a friend is a lesbian woman or gay man. How do you think about the sexual identity of this person? How do you relate to this person? Is your stance to affirm and support, to rebuke and correct, or to remain undecided?

Imagine that this person tells you about finding a life partner. You hear about how wonderful and life-giving this newfound relationship is, and how more than anything in the world these two now want to give themselves to each other. In short, they tell you they plan to commit themselves in an exclusive, lifelong, covenantal union, and then they ask for your response.

What is your response? What should be the church's response? Should we express disapproval or approval? Should we criticize or congratulate? When they invite us to a ceremony aimed at blessing their life together, do we attend or not? What is our attitude if we attend? At this turning point in their lives, to what extent do we allow ourselves to enter into the joy of their celebration?

Further questions arise. Suppose this couple adopts a child. What will be our posture toward the child and this new family? Do we rightly consider them a family? Do we allow the child to be baptized? If so, do we allow both of the adults to stand with their child? What happens at other turning points in their lives? Suppose one of these two same-gender partners is killed suddenly in a tragic accident. What shall our response be then? What is the appropriate measure of pastoral care? What language will we use to interpret what is happening to this couple? To their child? To the body of Christ of which they are a part?

These questions of acceptance or non-acceptance are being posed everyday in congregations around the country and around the world. Recently, a United Methodist minister refused church membership to a gay man who was active in the life of the church, but who was also in a relationship with another man.<sup>19</sup> Considering the question of baptizing the children of gay couples, a Roman Catholic cardinal in Canada recently said that if both partners were present, he would deny baptism to the child.<sup>20</sup> What understanding of the gospel stands behind these actions?

Scenarios such as these enable us to see the necessity of wrestling with these questions theologically—and perhaps the necessity of posing a new sort of question. Perhaps we need to pose the questions in a way that the “issue” no longer obscures the people behind the issue. Perhaps we need to begin to ask questions such as these:

- Where do persons who are baptized members in good standing of a Christian congregation, whose sexual orientation is firmly established, and who desire to enter into a lifelong, same-gender relationship with another baptized Christian find their place within the fellowship of the church?
- More importantly, where do such persons find themselves within the unfolding gospel drama of creation, reconciliation, and redemption?

These are the sorts of questions that guide the reflections that follow.

### **Moving beyond the impasse**

For decades now the church has framed its debate regarding gay and lesbian people as a clash between two antithetical viewpoints. One side passionately calls for the affirmation of gay identity and life; the other argues with equal vigor that the church must maintain its present non-affirming stance. By framing things in this way, the church has forced its membership year-after-year to join sides in a series of winner-takes-all battles. One author has compared the resulting impasse to a pair of wrestlers who have fought each other to a draw, each remaining locked in

the other's grip, with neither able to achieve a decisive win and neither willing to quit the contest.<sup>21</sup>

This impasse is accentuated by the claim that there are only two views on this subject: the biblical view and the non-biblical view. A moment's reflection will demonstrate that this either/or way of framing the matter is seriously flawed. For any given passage of Scripture, there are scores of commentaries on the library shelves, each of which has a very different interpretation of what the passage in question is saying. There may be one or two dominant views, but there are always alternative possibilities to be considered. Such is the nature of textual interpretation. An old joke in the synagogue goes, ask any two rabbis how to interpret a passage of Scripture, and you will get at least three opinions. Every biblical passage has a range of possible meanings, and sorting through these meanings is a task not just for academic experts, but for the whole church—reasoning together under the guidance of the Spirit. This is one reason we Reformed Christians read Scripture aloud weekly in worship: Because we believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, we rightly expect the biblical texts to call us to new faithfulness in new situations. If every biblical passage had a single, straightforward, and easily ascertainable meaning, then all we would need is a bevy of biblical scholars to tell us that meaning once and for all, and that would settle the matter. We would no longer need to read Scripture again and again. Indeed, if it were possible to nail down meaning in such a clear-cut way, we would no longer need a bevy of scholars. A single, authoritative scholarly voice would do. The one biblical scholar who finally got the meaning right would become the new Protestant pope, not only controlling scriptural meaning, but the believing consciences of all the faithful.

This has never been the way scriptural meaning is determined in Reformed churches. The Second Helvetic Confession, which, among our confessions, contains the most sustained discussion of biblical interpretation, rejects the notion of a single interpretation “thrust upon all for acceptance.”<sup>22</sup> To be sure, not all possible interpretations are permitted, but there is a range of permissible interpretation that edifies the church. The test is whether it accords with the Trinitarian conviction of the church (its rule of faith); with its expectation of divine deliverance (its rule of hope); and with its intention of caring for the neighbor as for oneself (its rule of love).<sup>23</sup>

Framing the church's debate over same-gender relationships as an either/or war of biblical texts not only misconstrues how the Bible ought to function in the church, but as a practical matter it has left the church exhausted and many within its fellowship feeling wounded. It has also obscured the fact that there are not simply two views on this topic, but a range of views, each of which draws upon biblical and theological traditions to make its claims. Nor may these views be divided up neatly into the categories of “conservative” versus “liberal,” or “traditional” versus “modern,” and least of all, “biblical” versus “non-biblical.” There are liberals who find themselves unable to affirm homoerotic sexuality, and there are conservatives who argue for blessing exclusive, committed, gay and lesbian unions out of a deep desire for the moral ordering of individual life within the broader religious community. All sides draw upon biblical warrants for their views; all claim to be espousing points of view that resonate with the Christian gospel.

So then, how do we move beyond the impasse? The present study is a modest effort to help provide a framework and create a space within which to enable the church to carry on faithful conversation about same-gender relationships. It discusses a spectrum of seven theological ways of looking at same-gender relationships.<sup>24</sup> These include both non-affirming and affirming viewpoints, with perspectives ranging from the categorical prohibition of all such relationships (Viewpoint One) to the advocacy of full ecclesiastical consecration of such relationships (Viewpoint Seven).

Instead of an analysis focused on “liberalism” and “conservatism,” what is presented here is a certain theological “logic” that is at work across a range of viewpoints advocated within the church. No claim is made that these seven viewpoints exhaust all the possibilities. Indeed, it is likely the reader will find that his or her own views do not line up neatly with any one position sketched here, and that he or she may resonate with aspects of more than one viewpoint in forming his or her own understanding.

Each viewpoint is considered in its relationship to the work of the Triune God—the one who is for us and with us in Jesus Christ and who invites us by the Spirit’s power to be for and with one another. It is the doctrine of the Triune God that forms the theological grammar of any proper understanding of what it means to be a Christian human being. When we say that God is Triune, we are not invoking theological abstractions. Instead, we are speaking concretely about God’s identity. God is not some deity we happen to dream up on our own. Rather, God has been revealed as *someone*, namely, the God of Israel—the one, true God who is revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ and who is made real in our midst through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Triune God is not asking us to believe the mathematically impossible (that one is somehow three). Instead, Trinitarian theology is saying something eminently practical.<sup>25</sup> It locates the identity of God and the way that identity is worked out in Christian experience, i.e., we have known God in Christ through the Spirit’s power. Trinitarian theology is pointing to an intelligible, incarnate drama that is still unfolding in our midst.

This Trinitarian drama has traditionally been conceived as an unfolding work of creation, reconciliation, and redemption. Through the act of *creation*, God thought of us before we were and brought us into being. To believe in creation is to know our absolute dependence upon God for all that we are and all that we are called to be and do. To know that we human beings are creatures is to recognize both the limits placed upon our lives and the possibilities that creaturely existence places before us. It is also to search for the purposes God has for us as creatures. One of the main issues in a study such as this is to discern where homoerotic desire or sexual orientation fits within the scheme of creation. Some see same-gender sexual orientation as a violation of creation, while others point out that same-gender sexual desire seems to be a fairly consistent feature of the natural world as we know it. Permeating discussions such as this are notions—both implicit and explicit—about the nature of bodily existence. Contained in all these reflections, too, are assumptions about the character of sin, whereby human beings turn aside from God’s purposes.

The divine act of *reconciliation in Christ* presupposes that human beings have sinned and are in need of restoration of a right relationship with God and with one another. The term “reconciliation” is one of many biblical words that speak about what God does to save us from our rebellion and sin. Other words include atonement, ransom, victory, and transformation.<sup>26</sup> Reconciliation is, in the first instance, a gracious act of God, but it also calls forth a human response. This response includes faith, repentance, and living a life of holiness. One of the pivotal biblical passages concerning reconciliation makes very clearly this connection between God’s action and our own:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

A key question in the discussion concerning gay and lesbian Christians is how this reconciliation becomes real in lived experience. Some speak of the need for gays and lesbians to repent of their lifestyle. Others remind the broader church that it, too, needs to repent of sins of hatred and exclusion directed toward gay and lesbian people. Through it all, it needs to be remembered that reconciliation includes both a vertical and a horizontal dimension. We are to be reconciled both to God and to one another.

Through the gracious act of *redemption in the Holy Spirit*, God enables us more and more to become what God would have us be. Sometimes, it is not easy to see the difference between these two “R” words: reconciliation and redemption. Reconciliation is something that was accomplished in the past by the gracious act of God in Jesus Christ and that is working itself out still today. By contrast, redemption in the New Testament is more of a future-oriented reality.<sup>27</sup> We have been reconciled to God and are being reconciled to one another. And now we are moving forward toward redemption in the power of the Spirit. As with reconciliation, the power of redemption is already being experienced; but the fullness of our redemption awaits the final consummation of all things. Therefore, when we speak of redemption, we are asking what sort of life we need to be living in order to anticipate and live into the fullness that God desires for each one of us. To speak of redemption is to speak about the ethical life one must live by grace in order to become what God would have us be.

In summary, the words creation, reconciliation, and redemption give us shorthand for speaking about the grand narrative or drama in which God is at work to bring us to salvation and wholeness. To avoid confusion, we need to remember that the work of creation, reconciliation, and redemption is the work of all three “persons” of the one God—“Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Yet, the focal point of each of the three—creation, reconciliation, and redemption—is God, Christ, and Spirit. Without intending to separate the work of God, we can say that God loves us; God saves us in Christ; and God empowers us by the Spirit to be what God would have us be. And thus, we can think about this unfolding narrative of God’s grace in the following way:

<b>Creation</b>	<b>Reconciliation in Christ</b>	<b>Redemption in the Spirit</b>
God's gracious act of bringing the world into being.	<p style="text-align: center;">[<i>God's Act</i>]</p> God's gracious act in Jesus Christ of reuniting us with God and one another.	God's gracious work by the power of the Spirit of enabling us to live a life of holiness.
Human beings are created in God's image.	<p style="text-align: center;">[<i>Human Response</i>]</p> Human beings have sinned and need to be restored through repentance to right relationship with God and one another.	Human beings are renewed in the image of Christ and enabled to enter into the joy of salvation.
<b>God Loves Us</b>	<b>Christ Saves us</b>	<b>The Spirit Empowers Us</b>

Building on this Trinitarian framework, in what follows I present a typology of seven viewpoints on same-gender relationships that are currently espoused in the church.<sup>28</sup> The seven positions I examine in this chapter are: prohibition, toleration, accommodation, legitimation, celebration, liberation, and consecration. A brief and simple description of each of these categories goes something like this:

- Prohibition: does not approve and would bar the activity
- Toleration: does not approve the activity but would not prosecute it when it occurs
- Accommodation: does not approve the activity ordinarily, but would allow for exceptions on a "lesser of the evils" rationale
- Legitimation: wants to prevent the activity from being singled out unfairly
- Celebration: the activity should no longer be scorned, but affirm as good
- Liberation: sees societal attitudes about the activity as caught up in wider injustices that need to be remedied
- Consecration: argues for the blessing of the activity in a religious context

It needs to be underscored that the most important thing about the present study is the application of the Trinitarian creation/reconciliation/redemption framework to each of the seven viewpoints. The purpose of making this application is to set the discussion of same-gender

relationships within a broader theological framework and thereby avoid the superficiality of biblical proof-texting or of thinking that the label we attach to a position communicates all the intellectual and spiritual depth of that position. Indeed, it is the particular way each viewpoint handles creation, reconciliation, and redemption that gives it its unique shape and definition.

This study is divided into three parts:

- Part One: Non-affirming Viewpoints (Prohibition, Toleration, Accommodation)
- Part Two: Critique of Non-affirming Viewpoints (Legitimation)
- Part Three: Welcoming and Affirming Viewpoints (Celebration, Liberation, Consecration)

A diagram of the basic framework of this study is found on page 108.

Perhaps the best way to approach this study is to take each part one-by-one. At the end of each part is a chart and short set of study questions, which are provided as an aid to reflection. In addition, the accompanying facilitator's guide offers suggestions about how to approach this study in a one-hour presentation, a two-week study, a three-week study, a four-week study, or an eight-week study.

The best way to think of this study is as a survey of some of the theological literature and positions presently influencing the church's thought and action regarding persons in same-gender relationships. The goal is to help church leaders and members clarify what is at stake in recent church debates. To that end, the study provides a critical and constructive treatment of a cross section of opinion. It is "critical" in that every viewpoint considered here is subjected to scrutiny and questioning. It is "constructive" in that it draws out the implications of each of the seven positions for a contemporary theology of human sexuality.

I have made every effort to treat each of the seven positions fairly. What appears here is my own analysis of the issues. It does not represent an official position of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church. Instead, it is an expansion of what the task force studied in a three-hour session I led in Dallas in August 2004. The aim of this expanded study is not to take a definitive position on the issue, but to present seven positions as fairly and as critically as I can. Inevitably my way of putting the material together will reflect judgments with which others will differ. However, it is my hope that people in the church can learn from this study no matter where they happen to fall on the spectrum themselves. For my own part, I find elements of truth worth considering in all seven of these positions. In a forthcoming book-length study, I intend to state a constructive position of my own that draws upon all seven of these positions. Although it is not logically possible for all seven viewpoints to be correct in every respect, it is also not theologically possible for any one of them to possess a monopoly on the truth. Each position seeks to give an account of Christian truth from a particular perspective. Each is currently being put forward by fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are seeking to discern the will of God in the Spirit-led interpretation of Scripture. In affirming that there can be elements of Christian truth in all seven positions, one is not thereby committed to some sort of bland "relativism" or "pluralism" in which all viewpoints are equally valid and in which

religious and moral truth is not ascertainable. Rather than committing one to “pluralism,” a study of this sort actually depends on a belief that God is always at work in the midst of God’s people, and that when different Christian perspectives are brought together in Spirit-led dialogue and discernment, the whole that emerges is often greater than the sum of its parts. It is hoped that, through God’s grace, the exploration of these seven positions will contribute to mutual understanding as together we seek the peace, unity, and purity of the church.

## PART ONE NON-AFFIRMING VIEWPOINTS

Many Christians believe that same-gender sexual behavior of every sort departs from God's highest and best intention for humankind. Thus, they find it impossible to "affirm" homoerotic conduct.<sup>29</sup> These theological positions are based on four interconnecting layers of argument:

- A negative argument drawn from biblical prohibitions against certain same-gender sex acts;
- A positive argument based on the institution of marriage as a divinely-ordained "order of creation";
- An appeal to natural law, often in the form of the presumed "complementarity" between male and female in nature;
- An appeal to the moral tradition of Judaism and Christianity, including an appeal to evidence of promiscuous sexual behavior among certain persons, especially gay men.

In what follows, I summarize these four layers of argument. Other perspectives on these arguments are provided later in the study, especially in the section on welcoming and affirming viewpoints.

### 1. The biblical witness

Two sets of biblical texts have had the greatest influence upon contemporary Christian attitudes against same-gender sexual acts:

- The legal pronouncements in parts of Leviticus directed against certain sex acts performed by one man upon another (Lev. 18:22; 20:13);
- Three references written by (or attributed to) the apostle Paul concerning same-sex acts within the world of Roman antiquity (Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-10).

A third set of texts, which includes the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, cluster around violent sexual acts and possible cultic prostitution.<sup>30</sup> Since most commentators agree there is something *other than* the same-sex character of the conduct in these passages that makes it bad, I shall concentrate on the first two sets of texts.

#### *Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13*

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination (Lev. 18:22).<sup>31</sup>

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).<sup>32</sup>

The non-affirming positions point out that these two texts from Leviticus are clear and unambiguous. The penalty they call for is the severest possible: death. Every other biblical text that treats same-gender eroticism is consistently negative. Moreover, Jewish interpretation of

these texts, as evidenced in Philo and Josephus, considered homoeroticism of every type to be religiously and morally repugnant. Some advocates for non-affirmation of gay and lesbian conduct acknowledge that there are counter-arguments to their interpretation of Scripture; however, they argue that the burden of proof lies on those who disagree with what they consider to be the historic position of both church and synagogue.

### *1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10*

Certain same-gender sex acts are also mentioned in two New Testament vice lists. The apostle Paul states the following in 1 Cor. 6:9-10:

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, *male prostitutes*, *sodomites* [italics added for emphasis], thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.

The term translated by the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) as “sodomites” is more literally, “males who go to bed with males.” The word in Greek, *arsenokoitai*, appears to have been coined directly from the Greek translation of the original Hebrew of Lev. 20:13. The word combines the Greek words *arsenos*, meaning “male,” and *koiten*, meaning “bed,” both of which appear side-by-side in the Greek version of Lev. 20:13.<sup>33</sup> The word translated by the NRSV as “male prostitutes” is *malakoi*, which literally means “soft ones.” Many believe it refers to the receptive, penetrated partner in male-on-male sexual intercourse, probably in the context of male prostitution.

The word *arsenokoitai* appears again in 1 Tim.1:9-10. Many consider this to be a so-called deuterio-Pauline, that is, one written not by Paul himself, but in his name. The text reads:

This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, *fornicators*, *sodomites (arsenokoitai)*, *slave traders* [emphasis added], liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching.

(For more on the connection between the words sodomites and slave traders, see the discussion in the welcoming and affirming section of this study.)

### *Romans 1:18-32*

In Romans, the apostle Paul places same-gender desire and conduct within a theological frame. He treats such desire and conduct as an example of Gentile idolatry. By so doing, say the non-affirming, Paul demonstrates that the prohibition of Leviticus was not merely arbitrary or time-bound. Rather, it fits within an overarching understanding of God’s intention for human sexuality as established in creation. Rom. 1:24-27 reads as follows:

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

Unlike Leviticus, which only applies to men, the Romans passage refers to the unnatural sex acts of women, which could cover same-gender eroticism between women, but may also refer to aggressive heterosexual conduct of women.

Paul continues in the very next chapter to say if religiously observant Jews think that by comparison with Gentiles they stand secure in God's embrace, they are mistaken. Both the Gentile world, with its sexual chaos and hedonism, and the Jewish world, with its rules and regulations, are equally in need of God's grace. In a gloss on the theology of "vanity" in Ecclesiastes, and with an allusion to Psalm 143:2, Paul observes of both Jew and Gentile, "there is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God." The apostle then goes on to declare that, "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," therefore all must be "justified by [God's] grace as a gift" (Rom. 3:23-24). The implication is that no one has become a part of the church, nor has anyone been made an officer of the church because of his or her intrinsic merit. We all depend upon grace.

### *Jesus and the Fulfillment of the Law*

Jesus himself never uttered a word about homoeroticism. From this silence, some argue that Jesus would have agreed with other pious Jews of his day that homoerotic activity is wrong. Certainly, Jesus never said anything explicit that we know of to indicate otherwise, and he says specifically that he came not to abolish the law and the prophets, but desires that every "jot and tittle" of the law must be kept (Matt. 5:17-18). If anything, Jesus intensifies the demands of the law, indicating that even to look lustfully upon a woman is to violate the commandment against adultery in one's heart (Matt. 5:19-20, 27-28).

## **2. Marriage**

The negative argument based on biblical prohibitions is linked with the positive claim that God intends for human sexuality to be expressed solely within the institution of marriage between a man and a woman. The non-affirming argue that since marriage is a divine institution between a man and a woman, same-gender relationships are not an option for Christians.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, marriage is not a changeable, humanly conceived institution, but a divinely fixed and unchangeable "order of creation" that calls for the categorical prohibition of all sexual acts, including homosexual acts, that occur outside its bounds.

### **3. Natural law**

Either explicitly or implicitly, almost all advocates of non-affirming positions draw upon a third resource: the appeal to the natural law tradition. This tradition has its roots in ancient Greek and Roman Stoic philosophy and in the later Christian theology of St. Thomas Aquinas and others. Protestant theology has sometimes looked askance at natural law on the grounds that the truth about God is known primarily through the word of God, written and incarnate in Jesus Christ. Yet even Protestants tend to draw upon natural law arguments when it comes to the issue of same-gender relationships.<sup>35</sup>

Not surprisingly, the most impressive contemporary use of natural law against such relationships is by a group of Roman Catholic legal scholars, principal among them: John Finnis and Gerard V. Bradley of Notre Dame; and Robert P. George of Princeton University.<sup>36</sup> The basic natural law argument is that marriage creates an organic communion between a man and a woman, a so-called “one-flesh union” (cf. Gen. 2:24) that is by definition meant to be committed, exclusive, and indissoluble.<sup>37</sup> When experienced within marriage, sexual intercourse is said to be an intrinsic good. Intrinsic goods are those that are valuable in themselves, in contrast to instrumental goods, which are pursued for the sake of something else. According to this way of thinking, sex outside of marriage is merely instrumental, because it serves only to advance the private pleasure of the partners. Sex between a man and a woman within marriage, by contrast, promotes an organic fellowship that is intrinsically open to bringing new life into the world, as well as contributing to the goods of love and companionship between spouses.

### **4. Jewish and Christian moral tradition**

Non-affirming viewpoints appeal to several thousand years of Jewish and Christian moral teaching against same-gender sexuality. This tradition, on the whole, has condemned homoeroticism in the strongest terms. (For a discussion of exceptions to this, see the welcoming and affirming positions later in this study.) Indeed, some insist that when compared to the rest of the world, Jews and Christians have been unique in their consistent denunciation of homoeroticism. One is free to disagree with this, say advocates of this position, but one is not free to claim that one’s disagreement is in keeping with traditional Jewish and Christian moral teaching.

In addition to the tradition itself, those who refuse to affirm homoerotic behavior appeal to evidence of variety-seeking or promiscuous homoerotic behavior, especially among some gay men, as to whom some studies suggest that only a minority are monogamous.<sup>38</sup> In response to the claim that affirming civil unions or gay marriage would actually decrease such variety-seeking behavior, many non-affirmers claim that expecting faithfulness from gay men is unrealistic. They contend that the male sex drive is voracious and needs to be domesticated and constrained by the influence of women, and particularly the needs of women for monogamy. Women demand sexual and emotional exclusivity from men because it supports the goals of parenthood and a stable environment for rearing children.<sup>39</sup> The implication of this argument is that persons in male-male relationships will not have the strength of will to avoid casual sexual encounters with persons outside the relationship.

Sometimes, this non-affirming viewpoint is buttressed by the fact that in Jewish and Christian traditions, God is desexualized, especially in comparison to the fertility cults against which Hebrew religion defined itself. God creates the world by moral will and not by procreative activity. In keeping with this, human sexual life is seen as set apart and consecrated within the confines of the family. Many advocates of this position fear the slippery slope, worrying that opening the doors to sanctioning gay and lesbian love will undermine the commitment to monogamous marriage.

### **Suggested reading**

Robert L. Brawley, ed., *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2001.

Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. New York: Harper and Row, 1996.

Marion L. Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.

## **VIEWPOINT ONE: PROHIBITION**

The first non-affirming viewpoint—prohibitionism—considers all homoerotic behavior to be an absolute violation of the will of God.<sup>40</sup> Prohibitionists believe that the biblical teachings on homoeroticism speak in one voice. They point out that when the church has changed its position on matters such as slavery and the subordination of women, there were biblical arguments to be made for such change.<sup>41</sup> The aspect of the divine character emphasized by prohibitionists is that of God as lawgiver. Strict adherents of this position believe that not only the behavior itself, but also any form of homoerotic desire is an expression of something God has declared to be perverted and wrong. Therefore, sexual acts between persons of the same gender should be categorically prohibited. Many believe this prohibition should apply both within the fellowship of the church and civil society at large.

Within the church, the debate has centered mostly on ordination. All prohibitionists agree that persons who engage unrepentantly in same-gender sex acts should be rendered ineligible to hold church office. Some advocates of this position also favor withholding membership from persons who engage in same-gender sex acts, as evidenced in a recent case in the United Methodist church.<sup>42</sup> Others would allow membership, but impose church discipline on such persons. Withholding church membership does not represent the current stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as will become clearer in the discussion of Viewpoint Two.

Within society at large, the prohibitionist concern about gays is part of a larger concern for upholding traditional morality, including concerns about sexual promiscuity (especially among teenagers), the decline in marriage rates, the rise in divorce rates, the dramatic increase in out-of-wedlock childbirths, and the legalization of abortion. Prohibitionists think that support of gays and lesbians also lends symbolic support to the decline of marriage and other social ills. Some express concern about a “homosexual agenda” to undermine the family. In keeping with this, some prohibitionists favor laws that would criminalize same-gender sexual behavior. Many believe that certain leadership positions should not be occupied by gay people, as recent controversies over gays in teaching positions, the military, and the Boy Scouts attest.<sup>43</sup> Although the U.S. Supreme Court recently invalidated laws that criminalize same-gender sexual behavior between consenting adults, many advocates of the prohibitionist position have accused the high court of “judicial activism” as a result of this decision.<sup>44</sup>

One presupposition of prohibitionists in the civil arena is that society should actively encourage some types of behavior and discourage others. In particular, society should affirm marriage between one man and one woman and discourage all forms of homoeroticism. It is not appropriate to allow gay marriage, say prohibitionists, because this would only encourage more people to adopt a gay lifestyle. The way prohibitionists see it, homoeroticism is not simply a “given” that a person is powerless to resist. If this were so, advocates of this position ask, then why have there been so many practitioners of homoeroticism in societies like ancient Greece, which encouraged such activity, and so few practitioners in a society like orthodox Judaism, in which such activity was discouraged?

Even if it is true that gays and lesbians did not “choose” their condition—and this is something many non-affirming types are not prepared to concede—this still would not, in itself, invalidate the prohibition against homoerotic conduct. Society frequently takes some involuntary acts and discourages or even criminalizes them, as, for example, the act of involuntary manslaughter. The prohibitionist viewpoint worries that removing various societal constraints designed to discourage homoerotic conduct would invite more, not less, such conduct.

Theologically speaking, some advocates of this position claim that the very economic and social stability of Western civilization itself was made possible by the Hebrew decision to restrict sexual activity to marriage.<sup>45</sup> This argument from stability appeals to moral conservatives who argue for the ordering of sexual life. They point out that, apart from some sort of ordering, human sexuality in general and male sexuality in particular, tends to be polyamorous and even chaotic. A logical corollary is that any move to loosen the marital standards of our culture places the vitality of our civilization at risk.

It is not enough to know that categorical prohibitionists speak an absolute “no” to the sexual conduct of gay and lesbian people; we also need to consider where this “no” fits within the drama of creation, reconciliation, and redemption.

## **Creation**

Prohibitionists are against expressing one’s gay or lesbian identity sexually because they consider such acts to be evil in all cases. They believe such acts deny God’s intention for creation. In no sense do prohibitionists consider homoerotic desire or behavior a part of God’s “good gift” of creation. For example, the Vatican has taken a hard prohibitionist line, stating that homoerotic conduct “is intrinsically evil, and therefore must be considered objectively disordered.”<sup>46</sup>

All human beings are created in the image of God, but committing acts of sin tarnishes that image. For prohibitionists, this is especially so in the case of homoerotic behavior. St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, held that one man having sex with another is more morally reprehensible than a man engaging in a violent act of rape against a woman.<sup>47</sup> At least an act of rape was a “natural” act, so he reasoned, whereas a homoerotic act is not only sinful, per se, but one of the worst sins a person can commit.

Historically speaking, prohibitionists have not relied upon an understanding of sexual orientation to explain same-gender sex acts. In fact, many prohibitionists deny that sexual orientation originates from a source that would excuse homoerotic conduct—whether from genetics, or hormonal imbalance, or what-have-you. Whatever may be the source of sexual orientation, the tendency of prohibitionists is to view homoerotic acts as a perverse and disobedient choice that deserves to be condemned, and engagement in which may, following 1 Cor. 6:9-10, endanger one’s salvation.

So then, same-gender sexuality is said to be a violation of nature and thus a departure from God’s best intention for human beings in the created order. In recent years, many have argued

this on the basis of gender complementarity. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth argued, based on Genesis 1, that the image of God consists in the fact that human beings are created as male and female. That is, the complementarity of male and female, and the co-humanity it represents, is what *constitutes* the image in human beings. Barth himself was not a strict prohibitionist, but his exegesis of Genesis 1 has been influential in prohibitionist circles.<sup>48</sup> A more straightforward form of the argument bases the prohibition not in complementarity itself, but in God's intention for humanity. God forbids it, so we must obey.

### **Reconciliation in Christ**

Human beings are not only created; we are also fallen and in need of reconciliation. To speak of reconciliation is to focus on the way human beings come back into right relationship with God and with others, thus overcoming the alienating effects of sin.

Once we know where same-gender desire and behavior fit within the order of creation, then we also know where they fit within reconciliation and redemption. To be fallen and in need of reconciliation means that we must be "justified," or made right with God and forgiven through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. On this all Presbyterians would agree. But our justification by grace through faith does not absolve us from the need to grow in grace, i.e., sanctification. One of the first steps in sanctification is repentance. Because the biblical teachings are clear, gays and lesbians must repent not only of homosexual deeds, but even of homosexual desire, for both the deed and the desire contradict God's intention for creation.

To achieve this repentance, many prohibitionists recommend reparative therapy. This is a form of counseling designed to help gays and lesbians give up their homosexual desire and either remain chaste or enter into marriage with a member of the opposite sex. Proponents of such therapy acknowledge that the success rate is not high. Still, they argue that gays and lesbians have a moral obligation to at least try reparative therapy before rejecting it.

### **Redemption in the Spirit**

To be redeemed is to be liberated or set free by the Spirit from one's present situation of bondage to sin. A vision of redemption tells how life ought to be lived, both individually and in community. We affirm this redemptive vision whenever we repeat the words of the Lord's Prayer, "thy will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven." The question becomes, how do we need to live so that God's will is done? Given that same-gender sex is considered to be perverse in every case, the only way for a gay or lesbian person to gain a foretaste of redemption in the present life is to be renewed in one's God-given heterosexual self. Barring that, one at least must constrain one's sexuality altogether by the discipline of abstinence.

### **Summary and reflection**

The primary strength of categorical prohibition is its tight internal consistency. The conclusions follow effortlessly from its major premise, which is that certain forms of homoerotic behavior have been clearly prohibited by Scripture, tradition, and morality. Something is so

fundamentally wrong with having a same-gender orientation, that one is barred from professions such as the military or the ministry. If this is true, then such behavior must not be sanctioned, and society must do what it can to discourage it.

Nevertheless, a position's greatest strength sometimes points us to its greatest weakness. One obvious problem with the prohibitionist position is that it seems to engage in circular reasoning. Gay and lesbian relationships are wrong by definition. They are wrong because the particular prohibitionist's "take" on Scripture, tradition, and morality says they are wrong. A certain interpretation of these sources is held up as true for all time. One of the problems is that prohibitionists resist allowing the truth of their interpretation to be tested in the light of everything else we know. Some prohibitionists either ignore or belittle other alternative readings of Scripture, tradition, and morality. Everything rests on deductive reasoning derived from definitions put forward in advance. Little attention is paid to empirical or scientific study, except where it supports the prohibitionist agenda. For example, stories of gay male promiscuity are emphasized, but counter-balancing evidence of gay or lesbian faithfulness is usually ignored.

Many prohibitionists worry that openness to same-gender conduct is a slippery slope leading to the legitimating of other forms of objectionable conduct, such as polygamy or incest.<sup>49</sup> Where does society draw the line? This worry leads some prohibitionists to paint all gays and lesbians with the same brush as child molesters and other sex offenders and, in general, to claim that gays and lesbians are somehow worse sinners than people who are heterosexual.

Many Christians will, no doubt, agree with prohibitionists that society has an interest in encouraging marriage and in regulating conduct that is demonstrably harmful. Yet, critics of the prohibitionist perspective point out that supporting monogamy and spousal rights for gays and lesbians actually promotes this goal of moral conduct. A few conservatives have argued that supporting gays and lesbians who are ordering their lives in committed, covenantal ways is the true conservative position.<sup>50</sup> This is especially true, now that well over half a million gay and lesbian families are raising children.<sup>51</sup> To say that every child deserves a mother and a father is a nice ideal, but children who are being raised by two mothers or two fathers also deserve societal support. Supporters of some form of spousal equality for gays and lesbians point out that if the husband of a stay-at-home mom dies, the mother and her child receive numerous forms of state and federal help to sustain them through their loss, including survivor benefits under the Social Security system. If the same stay-at-home mom loses her female partner, neither she nor her child receives any federal help; few receive any state help. The pro-gay conservative argument is that exclusive committed unions should be protected by society.

Regarding the prohibitionist way of reading Scripture, there can be no doubt that Scripture does contain certain prohibitions of at least some forms of same-gender sexual behavior. The question is how to interpret these prohibitions. Should they be interpreted broadly, so that all gay and lesbian relationships are rendered morally invalid? Or should they be restricted to their own ancient context, thus opening the door to some gay and lesbian relationships being approved?

The prohibitionist case from nature does not always meet the high standard for consistency that prohibitionists set for themselves.<sup>52</sup> For example, if one wishes to prohibit all unnatural

sexual acts, then, to remain consistent, should one not also accept Roman Catholic prohibitions against contraception and divorce? If one wants to argue that gay and lesbian relationships are deficient on the grounds that their unions cannot produce children, then how does one make a case for the marriages of couples who are sterile or post-menopausal? Another related incongruity is that the appeal to nature tends to reduce sexual intercourse to a single function. Marital sex is said to be good and gay sex bad, because in marital sex the male and female come together as a single reproductive system. By focusing so much on procreation, some prohibitionists downplay the giving and receiving of pleasure, even though most people would mark such reciprocity as a chief feature of a sexual relationship. For the natural law theorists, pleasure without procreation is meaningless. Yet this way of thinking runs up against a considerable problem. For if the non-procreative giving and receiving pleasure is meaningless, then what are we to make of female orgasm in sexual intercourse? As long as male ejaculation has occurred, sexual activity has been successfully completed from the standpoint of traditional natural law theory. Never mind that many, perhaps most, women are not able to achieve orgasm through vaginal sex alone. On traditional natural law grounds, especially as articulated by the ancients, efforts made by a man to bring the woman to orgasm were deemed meaningless or beside the point. Among the Romans, they were deemed to be degrading to male dignity. In some traditional societies, efforts to please a woman were actually considered to be “unmanly.” Moreover, for centuries, the Christian tradition taught that having pleasure while engaging in sexual intercourse was a sin. Within certain forms of prohibitionist reasoning, the teaching against pleasure during intercourse has been lifted for married couples, but it is still in full force for gays. The giving and receiving of pleasure within marriage is now said to be part of God’s beautiful plan for sexuality, but this is contrasted with the meaninglessness of what happens between people committed to one another who are gay.

These and other dissatisfactions with the prohibitionist position have led some in the church to seek a different way of thinking about these issues. Some have come to believe that sexual orientation is not a straightforward choice, that an absolute prohibition is unworkable, and thus they have sought to devise a more tolerant approach to the subject. This position of toleration is the dominant position of the mainline Protestant churches today, and it is to this position that we now turn.

### **Suggested reading**

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 43, 2a2ae, questions 153-154.

James Dobson, *Life on the Edge: A Young Adult’s Guide to a Meaningful Future*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995.

Stanton L. Jones and Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church’s Moral Debate*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Joseph Nicolosi, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality: A New Clinical Approach*. New York: Jason Aronson, 1997.

Pope John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*. Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997.

Jeffrey Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996.

John R. W. Stott, *Same Sex Partnerships? A Christian Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1998.

## VIEWPOINT TWO: TOLERATION <sup>53</sup>

Most mainline religious communities in the 1970s underwent a major shift in their view of same-gender sexuality. In the PC(USA), this shift was expressed in a document adopted in 1978 in the UPCUSA (1979 in the Presbyterian Church in the United States). The document has been referred to variously as “Policy Statement and Recommendations,” “Theology and Homosexuality,” and “Definitive Guidance.” I shall refer to it as the 1978 Policy Statement, or simply, the 1978 Statement. The status of this policy statement has been defended and disputed ever since it was first drafted. Some maintain that the document was a departure from traditional Presbyterian polity. Others contend that the document has since been superceded by other policy statements. Still others insist that it continues to represent a good statement of PC(USA) policy.

Perhaps it is best to begin with what the document itself did. It set forth for the presbyteries what it called a “definitive guidance” concerning the ordination question, namely:

That unrepentant homosexual practice does not accord with the requirements for ordination set forth in Form of Government.... <sup>54</sup>

The 1978 Statement sought to give an answer to the question with which we began, the question posed by two presbyteries in 1976, whether the ordination of what the 1978 Statement would call “self-acknowledged, practicing homosexuals” was permissible. The authors of the statement understood the question being asked of the church in this way: “Should the General Assembly foster a new situation in the church in which practicing homosexual persons would be free to affirm their lifestyle publicly and to obtain the church’s blessing upon this through ordination?”<sup>55</sup>

In giving its negative answer to this question, the authors of the 1978 Statement crafted a response that was traditional and innovative at the same time. It was innovative in pushing the church beyond blanket condemnations and toward a more welcoming stance toward gay and lesbian persons as church members. The difference between the toleration espoused in the 1978 Statement and absolute prohibition advocated by Viewpoint One needs to be emphasized. At the same time, the 1978 Statement was traditional in keeping in place a modified form of categorical prohibition, only now focused more narrowly on the issue of ordination: people in open, gay or lesbian relationships were not to be ordained.

To understand the 1978 Statement and the positions it staked out, it is important to remember that, from 1977 to 1979, Presbyterians in the North and South authored not one, but four different studies on same-gender sexuality.<sup>56</sup> Three of these received affirmative votes from General Assemblies. Two different documents were affirmed in the South (one in 1977 and another in 1979). Only one document received affirmation in the North (1978), though another was sent to presbyteries for study despite the rejection of its recommendations by the General Assembly. The striking thing is that the four documents—all of which received at least some nod of affirmation from the church—offered very different perspectives, nuances, and resolutions of the issues presented. The documents were:

1. "The Church and Homosexuality: A Preliminary Study," approved for study by the 117th General Assembly (1977) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States<sup>57</sup>
2. "The Church and Homosexuality," a January 1978 report based on the work of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America task force established by the 188th General Assembly to study "Christian approaches to homosexuality, with special reference to the ordination of avowed practicing homosexuals," written by the Reverend Byron E. Shafer<sup>58</sup>
3. "Policy Statement and Recommendations" (UPCUSA, 1978), which is what I am referring to as "the 1978 Policy Statement"<sup>59</sup>
4. A revised version of the preceding document entitled, "Homosexuality and the Church," a position paper that was adopted by the General Assembly of the PCUS in 1979.<sup>60</sup>

The first two documents stand in obvious contrast to the third and fourth. The first two present a range of scholarly and ecclesiastical opinion concerning biblical passages on same-gender sexuality, as well as a survey of information from the social sciences. The first document, the 1977 "Preliminary Study" prepared by the PCUS, declined to adopt a single position for the church, noting the following:

Since homosexuality itself is such a complex phenomenon and since every homosexual person is a unique human being, it may be that no one theoretical position could be formulated which would be adequate to deal with every form of homosexuality and every homosexual person...[I]n view of the complexity of the issue, the disagreement among Christians and the variety in the character and experience of homosexual persons themselves, it seems unwise at this time to propose any one position as *the* position of our Church (emphasis in the original).<sup>61</sup>

The second document, "The Church and Homosexuality," authored by the Reverend Byron Shafer, was the report commissioned by the UPCUSA to answer the 1976 ordination question of the two presbyteries. It offered over twenty pages of double-columned, single-spaced exegesis and reflection on the relevant biblical passages, as well as other information reflecting the state of scholarly opinion on the topic as of the mid-1970s. The number of studies on this subject matter has proliferated since the 1970s, becoming a separate academic field in itself; but the Shafer document is a remarkably full account of the range of opinions that existed at the time.

In the midst of their reflections, the committee, which was chaired by Virginia West Davidson, reached a majority and minority conclusion to the ordination question. The majority conclusion was that the General Assembly should do the following:

The General Assembly may state...that no prohibition of the ordination of a self-affirming, practicing homosexual person currently exists in the explicit words of the Constitution; that a valid pluralism of methods of biblical interpretation and of theological thinking currently exists within the church; and that it is the traditional duty and prerogative of presbyteries to make individual judgment concerning the fitness of a candidate for ordination.<sup>62</sup>

The minority disagreed and would have urged the General Assembly to take specific action proactively to prevent the ordination of any “self-affirming, practicing homosexual person.”<sup>63</sup>

At the subsequent General Assembly, some became concerned that, in seeking to lead the church, the majority report had managed to leave the church. It was to defeat the majority recommendation and advance the position of the minority that the 1978 Statement was crafted. This turned out to represent the will of a majority of the UPCUSA assembly in 1978. The PCUS assembly followed suit in 1979 with its own, revised version of the 1978 Statement.

As noted, the 1978 Statement departed decisively from a number of aspects of the strict prohibitionist stance. Most significantly, the document acknowledged new information derived from biology and the social sciences, and clearly embraced the contemporary category of “sexual orientation.”

What is sexual orientation? It is a psychological term that refers to the predominant focus of a person’s erotic desires. Research beginning in the 1940s and 1950s challenged the prior assumption that sexual orientation in all persons is naturally heterosexual. It demonstrated, at least to the satisfaction of many, that for a small minority of people, a same-gender sexual orientation is experienced as a stable and enduring feature of their lives. That is to say, their attraction to persons of the same gender is as powerful and feels as “normal” as the attraction of others to persons of the opposite gender. In short, sexual orientation is experienced as a given rather than a simple choice.

This has led many in the church to conclude that being gay or lesbian is not a sin, but a condition of life. The section entitled “Homosexuality Within a Theological Context” in the original version of the 1978 Statement is ambiguous on this point. The theological section does not define homosexuality itself as straightforwardly sinful, and it contains some language suggesting that sexual orientation is a condition of life. In wrestling with whether the church should “value it, disvalue it, or find it morally neutral,” the document simply states, “it is not God’s wish for humanity.” Yet, this is a conclusion that could be said about many human conditions: poverty, loneliness, illness, and so forth. In obvious dissatisfaction with this lack of clarity, the 1979 Southern version of the document added the following language:

While the practice of homosexuality is called a sin, the paper does not speak of the homosexual condition as a sin. Rather, to avoid falling into a shallow and moralistic view, it takes the homosexual condition to be an effect of sin whether its origin is thought to be willful, congenital, or social. It is one of those configurations of human character which results from the power of sin in human will, in society and the world.<sup>64</sup>

In other words, gay or lesbian identity was not to be condemned, though gay or lesbian conduct was still to be prohibited.

Another departure from the prohibitionist stance was the advocacy by the 1978 Statement of civil rights for gay and lesbian persons. It called for the decriminalization of “homosexual and heterosexual acts in private between consenting adults” so long as there is no “public offense,

personal injury, or exploitation.” It also called for an end to discrimination in “employment, housing, and public accommodation.” Ironically, it specifically exempted church employment practices from this precept of non-discrimination.<sup>65</sup>

One of the most interesting features of the 1978 Statement is its treatment of Scripture. Although it departed from the prohibitionist stance in some respects theologically, it followed the prohibitionist exegesis of Scripture almost to the letter.<sup>66</sup> In doing so, it differed significantly from the 1977 PCUS Preliminary Study and the Byron Shafer document. Whereas the 1977 and Schafer documents present a range of biblical opinion, the 1978 Statement adopts a single interpretation of each biblical passage. It does not acknowledge the existence of counter-interpretations. The rhetorical effect was to shut down alternative viewpoints and shore up a single exegetical position for the church.

In the end, the UPCUSA and the PCUS both adopted the 1978 Statement, but with different constitutional results. In the PCUS, it became a study document, which was commended along with the earlier 1977 “Preliminary Study” for use in the church. In the UPCUSA, the document served, in effect, as the theological rationale for the specific polity recommendation aimed at guiding presbyteries as they considered the ordination of persons who owned and lived out their same-gender sexual orientation. The wording of the preceding sentence is important. The recommendation of the 1978 Statement was specifically framed as “guidance” as to which presbyteries were to be “informed.” Although this guidance was said to be “definitive,” it is clear that this looser phraseology was chosen to preserve the traditional Presbyterian conviction concerning the discretion of local governing bodies in deciding the merits of a candidate on a case-by-case basis.

In 1993, ten years after the 1983 reunion of the UPCUSA and the PCUS, the successor denomination, the PC(USA), adopted a one-sentence recommendation from the 1978 Statement as an “authoritative interpretation” of the Constitution. It did not specifically adopt the supporting theological rationale of the 1978 Statement, though many continue to refer to that rationale even today.

In the ensuing years, controversy continued concerning the meaning of the one-sentence recommendation. Since governing bodies were instructed to be “informed” by the “guidance,” many argued that the guidance was not binding unless it was made part of the *Book of Order* with the approval of the presbyteries. As a response to this controversy, an amendment was adopted to the *Book of Order* in 1996 stipulating, in effect, that church officers must practice fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness. Prior to this addition, G-6.0106 had provided simply that an ordinand’s “manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world.” The new provision added a new subsection “b,” which reads:

Those who are called to ordained office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to

repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

Since the enactment of G-6.0106b, there has been further debate about how it should be interpreted. Did it state a per se exclusion or, in keeping with long-standing Presbyterian practice, were ordinands still to be evaluated on their individual merits? To clarify this, the General Assembly in 1998 adopted yet another Authoritative Interpretation—this time an Authoritative Interpretation of G-6.0106 and G-4.0403, the latter of which pertains to full inclusion within the church. The 1998 Authoritative Interpretation provides as follows:

Standing in the tradition of breaking down the barriers erected to exclude people based on their condition, such as age, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) commits itself not to exclude anyone categorically in considering those called to ordained service in the church, but to consider the lives and behaviors of candidates as individuals.

This indicates clearly that sexual orientation alone should be no barrier to ordination. It also suggests that in interpreting G-6.0106b, governing bodies are to exercise their discretion in examining the lives and behaviors of candidates on a case-by-case basis.

In short, the PC(USA) has struggled for some years now with the proper balance between setting a uniform standard for the whole church and the application of that standard in individual cases. In one sense, this is a perennial issue in the church, and one that is embodied in G-6.0108 of the *Book of Order* with its insistence that freedom of conscience be maintained but exercised within constitutional bounds.

From a theological point of view, the interplay between conduct and repentance is a key focus of both the 1978 Statement and G-6.0106b. The 1978 Statement (as reiterated in the 1993 Authoritative Interpretation) referred to withholding ordination from persons who persisted in “unrepentant homosexual practice.” G-6.0106b spoke similarly of not ordaining those “refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin.”

In both cases, the acceptance of the new category of “sexual orientation” was pivotal. This new category led to a new way of understanding God’s work of creation, reconciliation, and redemption in the lives of gay and lesbian people.

## **Creation**

The 1978 Statement marked an important shift away from the language of condemnation and disgust adopted by some advocates of the prohibitionist stance. Although the 1978 Statement does not take a position on what “causes” sexual orientation, it recognizes that for many people sexual orientation is not experienced as a straightforward “choice.” Hence, it insists that same-gender sexuality should no longer be viewed as a “perversion” to be condemned, but as something more akin to a “tragic condition” that needs to be understood. It is tragic, not in the theatrical sense of a fatal personality flaw that leads to a person’s downfall. Rather, it is tragic in the sense that

something unfortunate has befallen the gay or lesbian person that was not of his or her own doing. As such, being subject to a same-gender sexual orientation is riddled with complexity. One is not responsible for the condition, yet one is responsible for what one does with the condition. The condition is not something to be condemned, but neither is acting out the condition something we can say that God approves. The document puts it this way:

We conclude that homosexuality is not God's wish for humanity. This we affirm, despite the fact that some of its forms may be deeply rooted in an individual's personality structure. Some persons are exclusively homosexual in orientation. In many cases homosexuality is more a sign of the brokenness of God's world than of willful rebellion. In other cases homosexual behavior is freely chosen or learned in [an] environment where normal development is thwarted. Even where the homosexual orientation has not been consciously sought or chosen, it is neither a gift of God nor a state or a condition like race; it is a result of our living in a fallen world.<sup>67</sup>

This new teaching about sexual orientation also carried with it recognition of a new phenomenon called "homophobia," which is the irrational contempt, hatred, or fear of gay and lesbian people. According to the 1978 Statement, gay and lesbian persons are to be valued for who they are as fellow human beings made in the image of God.

How far does this new valuing of gay and lesbian persons extend? The 1978 Statement handled this by erecting a distinction between sexual orientation, on the one hand, and sexual practice, on the other. It is this distinction—orientation versus practice—that forms the glue that holds the theology and polity recommendations of the 1978 Report together. The document's key move was to *acknowledge* "homosexual orientation" while *rejecting* "homosexual practice." The church was advised to "welcome" the person while remaining "non-affirming" of the practice. This, in turn, allowed it to move from condemnation to non-condemnation of gay and lesbian people, while retaining a scaled-down version of categorical prohibition. A gay or lesbian person could not help their orientation, but they could help, and thus should repent of, any conduct deemed to be sinful.

### **Reconciliation in Christ**

How does the distinction between orientation and practice work itself out in the world of lived experience? Because the connection between *who one is* and *what one does* is complex, the decisive arena of theological reflection shifts for the 1978 Report. Whereas, for prohibitionists the key doctrine is creation (same-gender orientation is a perversion of the created order), for the 1978 Report the weight shifts to the doctrine of reconciliation (how we respond to the grace that is ours in Christ).

Recall that the prohibitionist position spoke in strong terms of the need for gays and lesbians to repent of homoerotic desire and conduct. The 1978 Report sees things differently. In keeping with the theology of the Confession of 1967, reconciliation is an event that involves the entire community and not just the isolated individual. For all of us to be reconciled in Christ, a "double

repentance” is required: Straight people must repent of acting hatefully toward gay people; gay people, even though they cannot help their gay *identity*, must repent of their gay *behavior*.

This double repentance is easy to state in theory, but what this means for rank and file members of the church is not entirely clear. Remember the case we have suggested the church needs to consider, namely, that of an exclusively committed gay or lesbian couple? Under the 1978 Statement, it is unclear what support from the church such a couple can expect to receive. On the one hand, by rejecting all same-sex practice, the statement seems to make no place at all for such relationships. On the other hand, by affirming sexual orientation and freely inviting gays and lesbians into the fellowship of the church, the statement opened the door for individual congregations to support gays and lesbians in ways they consider appropriate. And this is exactly what has happened, with predictable results. Some congregations welcome not only gay individuals, but gay couples in their midst, while other congregations welcome individuals but are ambivalent about gay relationships. It is within this tension that the church presently lives.

This tension is accentuated when it comes to ordination. Again, the orientation/practice distinction is pivotal in two ways. First, the 1978 Statement makes it very clear that, at one level, sexual orientation alone is no bar to ordination. And yet there remains a tension between this principle and prohibitionist sentiment that had not fully assimilated this principle. Some still speak disparagingly of any gay or lesbian person becoming ordained, irrespective of the person’s lifestyle. Second, at the level of practice, the 1978 Statement set up an inquiry into whether a gay or lesbian person’s sexual practice is “self-affirming” and/or “unrepentant.” Under G-6.0106b, the operative question is whether a person “refuses to repent” of a practice the confessions “call sin.” These terms are somewhat lacking in precision. To be disqualified, does a person first need to be asked to repent and then “refuse”? Or, if the person engages in a persistent course of behavior, does that fact in itself constitute a “refusal” to repent? And how are these distinctions from G-6.0106b to be applied to persons in the church who run afoul of other forms of behavior that the confessions “call sin,” such as greed, pride, arrogance, and so forth? What are the implications if the church ignores non-sexual departures on moral issues, but continues to target persons who are gay or lesbian?

Some have interpreted the net result of the 1978 Statement and G-6.0106b as something akin to the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that is in effect in the U.S. military.<sup>68</sup> They see it working something like this: If gay and lesbian persons play by the rules and are circumspect about who they are, then certainly they may be ordained. However, if a gay or lesbian person insists on being (as the 1978 document puts it) both “self-affirming” and “practicing,” then ordination is prohibited.

A key component runs throughout the 1978 Document that is not specifically acknowledged. This is the phenomenon of the “closet.” It is sometimes forgotten that the church has always ordained people with a same-gender sexual orientation. What is new is the acknowledgment of this fact, both by the ordinands and by the ordaining body. What precipitated the 1976 question from the presbyteries was the fact that gay and lesbian people were no longer willing to keep their private lives “closeted.” When the Presbytery of New York presented its question about

ordination, it did so because an ordinand with clear gifts for ministry and a call from a church decided to place the issue of his partnered lifestyle before the decision-making body.

One way to interpret the 1978 Statement is that it prefers the compromise of a “don’t ask, don’t tell” world. To some, such a compromise looks like a formidable theological and political achievement, moving the church away from prohibitionism while still keeping prohibitionists content with the church’s policy. It lifts any prohibitions on the conduct of members, allows gays and lesbians who are discreet (remain “in the closet”) to become ordained, but it keeps in place a categorical prohibition against those who insist on being indiscreet or making an issue of their lifestyle.

The theological settlement represented by the 1978 Statement seeks to be welcoming but non-affirming—welcoming of the identity of the person, but non-affirming of what that identity really means.<sup>69</sup> We are left by design with a functional ambivalence toward gay people, because the “guidance” that the 1978 definitive guidance offered the church included a continuing uncertainty about what to do with them once they were admitted into the church doors.

### **Redemption in the Spirit**

That leads us to the question of redemption. When one thinks through the logic of the 1978 Statement all the way to the end, it is not clear what redemptive word the church has to say to gay and lesbian people. Whereas all the other positions are clear about what redemption means, it is not apparent under the 1978 Statement what a redeemed sexuality would look like for gay and lesbian people. Is such a thing possible? The teaching appears to be that gays and lesbians should not feel guilty about their sexual orientation, but they should refuse to act upon it. They are best advised to accept their sexual orientation as a tragic burden and live life in a sort of Stoic abstinence. The question is whether this is a tension within which either gay and lesbian individuals or the church as a whole can live.

### **Summary and reflection**

The strength of the 1978 Statement is that it attempts to hold together a commitment to certain traditional biblical understandings about sexuality with a recognition of new understandings about sexual orientation. Any approach that jettisons standards for sexuality altogether would find it hard to claim Christian legitimacy. Another advantage of the church’s current approach is that it tries to avoid the blanket denunciations that have sometimes characterized prohibitionist rhetoric.

Some of the weaknesses of this approach will become apparent in the discussion of the remaining positions. But the major weakness is its inherent instability, as witnessed in the protracted conflict it has engendered in the church for more than a quarter of a century. The principal instability is the bifurcation between orientation and practice, identity and behavior. Many people find it inconsistent to accept a person’s sexual orientation, only to condemn the behavior to which that orientation naturally leads. If the church does not choose to condemn people for their gay identity, then how does the church rightly reject their gay behavior, provided that the behavior is ordered in an ethically responsible way?

The net result is that gay and lesbian persons are told that they are respected, but not affirmed in them. They are told not to be ashamed of their desires, but also not to act on them. They are welcomed as church members, but not as ordained leaders; they are told to be visible in worship, but to hide in personal matters.

If “don’t ask, don’t tell” summarizes the ethos of the 1978 Statement, then how does that help the church negotiate a world in which circumspection about sexual matters is a thing of the past? Today, the establishment politics of social control have collided disastrously with the anti-establishment politics of social recognition. Even if we would rather “not ask” and “not tell,” there are people who are doing the asking and telling for us. If a gay or lesbian person gets “outed” through no choice of his or her own, which has happened more than once, then the 1978 approach fails miserably. A person whose life is exposed in this way may be barred from ordination or installation, even though he or she made no issue of his or her sexuality. To that extent, the 1978 Statement places a much greater burden upon gay and lesbian people than it does upon others: they cannot be transparent about their lives.

Imagine a young gay man, actively committed to the local ministry of his church and quietly committed to a lifelong partner. If this person is asked to become a deacon or elder in a congregation, the practical result of the 1978 Statement and G-6.0106b is this: No matter which way he turns, he must sacrifice either his identity, his integrity, or his calling—probably, at some deep level, all three.

The policy also places governing bodies in a difficult position. Typically, they will accept a gay or lesbian person as a candidate for ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament on the grounds that sexual orientation is no bar to ordination. But then, when it comes time for the candidate to receive a call, the governing body may find itself in the awkward position of asking personal questions of some ordinands it is not willing to ask of all ordinands.

Another problem is that gays and lesbians are being told that their position is no different from that of a heterosexual person who, for whatever reason, is without a marriage partner. Yet this way of thinking is predicated on a hidden double standard. Even if a heterosexual person is presently without a mate, he or she still may nurture the hope of a union the church will gladly bless. This is not so for the gay or lesbian person under the 1978 Statement. He or she is told to renounce any such hope.

Tensions such as these have left the church in its present ambivalence concerning gay identity and gay life. It is these sorts of tensions that have led to various modifications and further critiques of the church’s current position as represented in the viewpoints that follow.

## **Suggested reading**

*Definitive Guidance: The Church's Statements on Homosexuality.* fwd. Clifton Kirkpatrick. Study guide by Jack L. Stotts. Louisville, Kentucky: Geneva Press, 2004.

Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality.* Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

*Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Guide to the Debate,* a discussion document from the House of Bishops' Group on Issues in Human Sexuality. London: Church House Press, 2003.

## Comparison of Viewpoints One and Two

### *Non-affirming Viewpoints*

<b>Prohibition</b>	Same-gender desire and behavior = <i>perversion</i>	Repent of <i>gay identity</i> ; the church prohibits gay desire and behavior	Return to true heterosexual nature
<b>Toleration</b>	Same-gender sexual orientation = <i>a tragic burden</i>	Repent of <i>gay choices</i> ; welcoming of persons, non-affirming of deeds	Stoic acceptance of one's tragic fate through abstinence

### Questions for discussion

1. What is the difference between thinking of homoerotic desire as a “perversion” and a “tragic burden” one is forced to bear?
2. What is “sexual orientation”? God creates each of us; so does God create our sexual orientation? How do you think the distinction posed by the 1978 Statement between identity and choice plays out in the lives of gay and lesbian people? Does it work similarly or dissimilarly for heterosexual people?
3. Why did the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) adopt the 1978 Statement and G-6.0106b?
4. Read the major biblical passages discussed above. How do we arrive at the word of God regarding persons who are gay or lesbian?

## **VIEWPOINT THREE: ACCOMMODATION**

This viewpoint seeks to live within the standards set by the theology of G-6.0106b, but to interpret those standards with pastoral sensitivity, accommodating gay relationships in quiet and compassionate ways. Its goal is to do this without compromising traditional ethical standards for sexuality. While upholding the standards, the accommodationist position allows that there may be gracious exceptions made on principles of compassion and the biblical view that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

This position was first put forward years ago by the German Lutheran theologian, Helmut Thielicke, in *The Ethics of Sex* (1964).<sup>70</sup> Thielicke described same-gender eroticism as presenting a “borderline” ethical case, that is, an issue where the answer is neither straightforward nor obvious. According to Thielicke, the person who is constitutionally gay or lesbian (following the custom of the day, Thielicke spoke of the “homosexual”) exhibits a disordering of God’s intention in creation. As such, he or she should be open to a “re-ordering” if possible. Barring that, the gay or lesbian person should live out his or her sexual orientation in an ethically responsible way. According to Thielicke, the church is empowered to extend pastoral acceptance of faithful gay or lesbian partnerships.

Advocates of this position in the PC(USA) tend to agree with the official teaching contained in G-6.0106b, but they also hold that the church needs to extend a gracious accommodation to persons who are doing the best they can to live their sexual lives with integrity. Some same-gender relationships may deserve a qualified acceptance. Though such relationships are disobedient in form, they may be obedient in substance. That is, there may be many virtuous aspects of such relationships even though they depart from the perfect will of God.

Advocates of this position offer interpretations of the same biblical passages drawn upon by the other non-affirming types. Rather than duplicate all those passages here, I limit the discussion to an accommodationist approach to two illustrative biblical passages.

### **Illustrative biblical interpretation: Romans 1 and John 8:2-11**

Paul’s discussion in Romans 1 has usually played a pivotal role for accommodationists. Thielicke, for example, considered it unclear what direct injunctions for today should be drawn from the biblical passages on same-gender eroticism, considering that their context differs significantly from ours today. He pointed out that no New Testament passages lists a particular imperative on this subject. Paul does list homoeroticism in his lists of vices, but in Romans he does not treat it as an “especially horrible” offense, nor is it an offense that should segregate gays and lesbians as a special class of sinners. Given the fact that the New Testament does not speak about the phenomenon of sexual orientation, the church is left with freedom in Christ to formulate pastoral advice to Christians who are living out a gay or lesbian existence in good faith.

Similarly, Richard Hays, a noted evangelical biblical scholar, has pointed out that neither Romans nor any other New Testament passage articulates a clear “rule” about how to handle homoerotic conduct.<sup>71</sup> Rather, what Paul provides in Romans is a “diagnosis” of the human

condition, in particular a description of how human beings have fallen into a condition of idolatry, namely, by worshiping the creature instead of the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Paul then speaks of the homoerotic practices of the Greco-Roman world as a vivid example of refusing to acknowledge God and the ways of God. In Hays' interpretation, it is a misreading to see homoerotic conduct as something that especially provokes God's wrath; instead, it is the result of God leaving human beings to their own devices.<sup>72</sup> Hays is very clear in his judgment that the Bible is uniformly negative in its assessment of homoerotic conduct. It is a "tragic distortion of the created order." At the same time, he notes, "such a judgment leaves open many questions about how best to deal with the problem pastorally."<sup>73</sup>

Another illustrative biblical passage that fits the accommodationist approach comes from the eighth chapter of John's Gospel. Jesus is in the midst of teaching the people, when some of the scribes and Pharisees, to test him, bring before the crowd a woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery. They remind Jesus and all assembled that the law of Moses commands that the woman be stoned to death. What, they demand, has Jesus to say about this? Jesus says nothing, but stoops down and begins writing with his finger in the dust. They continue to question him, and Jesus rises to his feet and says, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (v. 7).

This is a key text for the pastoral view that law must always be interpreted and applied graciously. The texts in Leviticus that prohibit certain same-gender sexual conduct are part of the Jewish law. Like all laws, they need to be interpreted and applied. The preceding story gives us an example of Jesus applying the law in a way that makes accommodations for human weakness and shows profound insight into the complexities of human experience. There was no question in this case about what the law said or whether the woman had violated it. If Jesus had followed the letter of the law, the woman would have been stoned. Period. Yet, he operated with the premise that all biblical texts are interpreted in the light of other biblical texts. Stoning the woman would have been true to this one text on adultery, but what about being true to the countless other texts about God's mercy and the fact that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory?

Convicted by what Jesus says, those who condemned the woman departed one by one, beginning with the elders. Then, being left alone with the woman, Jesus declares that neither does he condemn her, and he admonishes her to go and sin no more. The question, of course, is what does it mean for the constitutionally gay or lesbian person to live with integrity, given who they are?

### **Finding a gracious way forward**

For many in the church, the primary way of approaching the biblical and theological issues surrounding same-gender relationships is through their own personal experience with gay and lesbian people. While they wish to honor traditional biblical and theological standards of the church, they desire to do so in a way that makes practical sense in the lives of people to whom they are connected in the church and beyond. They may be less persuaded by slogans and more convinced by what makes sense of their own lives and the lives of people they know. Many in the church know gay and lesbian people whose relationships are based in lifelong fidelity and

exclusive commitment, and so they want a biblical and theological approach that takes account of this fact. They have seen gay and lesbian couples form families, rear children, care for one another's aged parents, and watch with wonder as their children bring grandchildren into the world. They have witnessed gay or lesbian partners caring selflessly for each other through times of illness or trial, exhibiting the very same "til death do us part" sort of love that is the ideal of Christian marriage.

Even those who have only limited experience with gay and lesbian people are aware that the real issues of life are complex and not easily amenable to pat answers or superficial nostrums. They know that the formation of sexual identity in all persons—gay or straight—is a mystery fraught with potential for good and for ill. They know, too, that to reduce the relationship of any gay or lesbian couple to sexual intimacy they may (or may not) be sharing is just as offensive and wrong-headed as declaring that heterosexual marriage is all about sex and nothing else.

Further, many in the church have watched the promulgation of supposedly "correct" teaching on homoerotic relationships lead to disastrous results in the real lives of real people. Take, for example, the advice given to gay and lesbian people by advocates of strict "prohibition." Is it really right to encourage gay and lesbian people to enter into marriages with members of the opposite sex when so often such marriages end in tragedy? It is true that some people have made such marriages work. It is true, too, that some of these marriages have ended and the former spouses still remain friends. Yet, how does one compensate for the ruined dreams of a woman who has given her life in good faith to her husband, only to find herself devastated and alone when he finally explains to her that he is gay, that he has known he was gay from his earliest days, and that he cannot force himself to live a charade any longer? What is the church's word to her? And at what point does the practical, human un-workability of a church teaching call into question the validity of that teaching?

These sorts of experiences, and countless more like them, provide the experiential lens through which many will form their judgments about these issues. Despite what theologians, biblical scholars, and other church leaders may think, a person's perspectives on these matters are more likely to turn on lived experience than abstract arguments.

Growing out of this lived experience, many Presbyterians have found it necessary to modify the church's teaching to allow for practical, pastoral exceptions, even though they may still agree in principle with the 1978 Statement that same-gender sex acts are not God's best intention for humanity. The pastoral accommodation approach includes at least two types of people in the PC(USA). First, there are those who firmly support G-6.0106b and do not want to see it either changed or relaxed, but who also believe there should be pastoral discretion in local contexts to deal graciously with all people, including gays and lesbians. Second, there are those who want to interpret G-6.0106b in a way that makes a greater allowance for exceptions. Because they believe that committed same-gender partnerships are morally superior to promiscuity, the second group is convinced that on humanitarian and pastoral grounds the church must find ways to accommodate—and perhaps even to encourage—committed same-gender partnerships.

The first approach is embodied in the thinking of former Princeton Theological Seminary president, Thomas W. Gillespie. Gillespie was chair of the committee that drafted the 1978 Statement and has been a strong supporter of G-6.0106b. Yet he also has spoken of “the pastoral dilemma” that arises in engaging same-gender erotic relationships in the church.<sup>74</sup> Gillespie has argued, on the one hand, that the church must be faithful to its understanding of what the Bible teaches. For him it is clear: The Bible teaches that same-gender eroticism is wrong. On the other hand, himself a long-time pastor, Gillespie is also convinced that the church must attend graciously to the concerns of real people, both within its fellowship and beyond. The gospel sometimes calls us to be “more concerned about people than principles, about relationships than arguments.”<sup>75</sup> This does not mean that one should dilute the power of the gospel “to liberate all from the oppression of sin, whether their particular vices are sexual or nonsexual, and, if the former, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual in kind.” Yet, it does mean that one should seek to proclaim the gospel with pastoral sensitivity, and as such, to “seek to overcome every form of systemic injustice that oppresses human life.”<sup>76</sup>

An example of the second approach has been provided by Princeton theologian George Hunsinger, who seeks to remain loyal to recent church teaching while avoiding the two extreme options of condemning gay people or fostering sexual license. In a series of nuanced reflections in the *Presbyterian Outlook*, Hunsinger has advocated a “generous orthodoxy,” one that upholds standards but insists that the standards be applied graciously.<sup>77</sup> He proposes a “third way” that maintains ideal standards concerning sexuality, while interpreting those standards in a way that seeks to embody practical wisdom. Drawing upon distinctions made by Karl Barth, Hunsinger argues that the church must not only “explicate” biblical texts, but “meditate” upon them and “apply” them graciously. He agrees with advocates of G-6.0106b in the way they explicate the meaning of Scripture. Some version of a “fidelity and chastity” standard must be upheld, since the church cannot say yes to infidelity and unchastity.<sup>78</sup> But he offers a different view of how Scripture should be lived out practically and pastorally. The biblical writers, he insists, knew little about sexual orientation as we conceive it, nor did they envision the possibility of reordering same-gender desire in faithful, exclusive, committed unions. Therefore, it is possible to maintain the current standards (keep G-6.0106b in the *Book of Order*) while still “allowing for responsible discretion on the question of ordination.”<sup>79</sup>

One of Hunsinger’s most important insights is that there is truth on all sides of this issue, but that the debate has become too polarized for opponents to find ways to accommodate one another’s perspectives. He proposes a new, more encompassing framework that is not a “compromise,” but a bringing together of truths that have become dis severed from one another in the heat of battle. Finding a new basis for unity in the church is crucial, according to Hunsinger, because subjecting the church to schism in the absence of any clear and persistent heresy is nothing less than subjecting the body of Christ to a kind of re-crucifixion. In short, the disputes over committed and faithful same-gender erotic relationships ought not to be treated as a church-dividing issue. Hunsinger argues that the church ought to extend “discreet tolerance” to committed same-gender partnerships and remain open to gay and lesbian ordinands who are doing their best to maintain integrity, given their sexual orientation. There is every reason to accept exclusive, committed, lifelong partnerships as more morally praiseworthy than promiscuity.

The reflections of Thielicke, Gillespie, and Hunsinger are all consistent with the view that real life involves complex calculations of better and worse options. This has especially been the case in the areas of marriage and family. Some advocates of a strict reading of G-6.0106b, for example, have claimed that marriage between “a” man and “a” woman represents the legacy of two millennia of Christian teaching. Yet this argument ignores that the very language of “a” man and “a” woman constitutes a change made by the church from the former Westminster Confession standard of “one” man and “one” woman, which was written that way to indicate a decisive “no” to divorce. In other words, the church has most certainly made an accommodation to those whose marriages have failed.

What this means is that the pastoral approach is looking for livable solutions for the real lives of real people. Accommodationists are sensitive to the fact that gay and lesbian couples are now rearing children. Is it really responsible of the church to treat the families of gay and lesbian people as though they are somehow less righteous or holy than other families?

Accommodationists refuse to buy the argument that absolute rigidity is necessary to avoid sexual confusion and to save the morals of Western civilization. The truth, according to the pastoral approach, is just the opposite. True sexual confusion results from the church telling people whose sexual orientation is toward the same gender that they ought to marry someone of the opposite gender, or, if they are gay, then they should curb their desires and never act on them.

Some of the seeds for this pastorally focused position were already planted in the Southern church’s 1979 revision of the 1978 Statement. Earlier we noted the additional paragraph added by the former PCUS to make clear that the document “does not speak of the homosexual condition as a sin.” The PCUS version went on to say that the document “does not preclude the possibility of relatively loving and faithful actions even within the framework of such a condition of sin.” In addition, the PCUS version was not content with the Northern statement that redemption comes to us only after judgment. Instead, the PCUS version says, “It is with a combination of judgment *and grace* that we are redeemed.” As noted earlier, the 1978 Statement invited people who engage in homosexual practice into our congregations as individuals. It was silent on how to treat them as couples or as families. The 1979 PCUS version does not officially endorse or affirm same-gender partnerships, but it does open the door to the quiet pastoral support of such partnerships.

So then, how does this accommodationist viewpoint conceive the divine drama of creation, reconciliation, and redemption as it applies to people who are gay and lesbian?

## **Creation**

Accommodationists usually agree with advocates of prohibition and toleration that a same-gender sexual orientation is a tragic distortion of creation. Nevertheless, all of life is marked by moral ambiguity, and the best each one of us can do—whether gay or straight—is to approximate goodness. Also, woven into the reflections of pastoral accommodationism is the recognition that a

theology that focuses overly much on creation is inadequate. Creation longs for and needs reconciliation and redemption.

Accordingly, accommodationists argue that same-gender erotic relationships call for fresh thinking. They may require us to think beyond Scripture, as George Hunsinger puts it, while still thinking with and not against Scripture. Citing the ambiguities of human life, Hunsinger notes that having a same-gender sexual orientation is not a straightforward choice; that “reorientation” is a realistic option for only a few; and that while “chastity” may be demanded of all people, lifelong “celibacy” is a special gift of grace not given to everyone.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, even though same-gender eroticism cannot be declared normative, it is within the range of permissible exceptions. Says Hunsinger:

Believers who form lifelong homosexual partnerships are sanctifying as best they can a condition that they did not choose. Although these partnerships cannot be placed on a direct par with marriage, they deserve the community’s “discreet toleration,” acceptance and respect. Apart from sexual disposition, sexually responsible homosexuals in the community differ from their other sexually responsible sisters and brothers in nothing. They have the same gifts, the same needs, the same foibles, the same virtues, and the same worth. It is high time for our church to stop stigmatizing them as a group. And that means, among other things, “responsible discretion” when it comes to candidates for ordination.<sup>81</sup>

### **Reconciliation in Christ**

Many accommodationists agree with the 1978 Statement that the church should be welcoming but officially non-affirming. Still, they are ready to make exceptions in practice, often in the case of committed partnerships between gays and lesbians they happen to know. They are likely to point out that one biblical meaning of sin, *harmartia*, is “missing the mark.” We all miss the mark and are in need of grace. Gay and lesbian relationships may be imperfect, but so are relationships between married couples. In fact, though gay and lesbian relationships may be disobedient to Scripture in form, when they involve lifelong, exclusive and committed love, they are actually obedient to Scripture in substance.

Sometimes the case for accommodation is made on a “lesser of the evils” form of argument. The church in the past has found it necessary, so the argument goes, to invest moral worth in relationships and deeds that do not, in themselves, reflect the perfect will of God. We know that the devastation of war is not God’s will, yet sometimes war is the lesser of the evils. We know that the Sermon on the Mount speaks ill of divorce and remarriage, yet the church has permitted married people in distress to divorce and later remarry. If calculating the lesser of the evils has proven necessary in so many arenas of human life, then it does not make sense suddenly to apply an either/or, take-it-or-leave-it approach in evaluating the lives and loves of committed, same-gender couples.

George Hunsinger is critical of interpreters who would read certain biblical admonitions literally and draw from them a mandate to strongly discipline or excommunicate gay and lesbian people. Such remedies he considers to be “more admirable in consistency than in wisdom.” In a

culture such as ours, in which marriage is being increasingly postponed until long after people reach sexual maturity, Hunsinger reminds us that the church has come to tolerate certain heterosexual “living together” arrangements. These arrangements are no more normative than same-gender partnerships, but neither are they outside the range of tolerance:

[W]hile living together is to be discouraged, it is not always completely impermissible, depending on the circumstances. We might say that living together without the intention to marry is strictly improper (and so proscribed), but that with the clear intention to marry (as soon as the way is clear), it is improper but not intolerable...

The question of living together, though never unambiguous, is thus to be judged, from case to case, by whether it supports or undermines the sanctity of marriage as a covenant, publicly avowed, of love and life-long commitment...

From these considerations, three points are especially relevant: (i) a principle of discreet toleration for ambiguous situations that are improper but not intolerable, (ii) a principle of full and mutual commitment as a precondition for sexual intercourse, and (iii) a principle of covenantal union in fidelity that is public, exclusive and permanent.

Homosexual partnerships between Christians can be accommodated within the scope of these points.<sup>82</sup>

## **Redemption in the Spirit**

Some accommodationists may say that in an ideal world gays and lesbians would abstain from sexual relations altogether. Yet most Presbyterians are also realists. Human beings were created to live in community. The desire to give and receive love is common to us all. Therefore, a committed partnership is better than promiscuity and may be the most morally excellent choice for non-celibate gay and lesbian persons. Therefore, seeing it as the lesser of the evils, many Presbyterians support sexually active gays and lesbians who find a monogamous partner.

George Hunsinger has reflected on how this view might work itself out in the practical application of the church’s current polity. Surveying the language of G-6.0106b, he notes that it allows for responsible gradations in judgment.<sup>83</sup> For example, its first sentence calls for “obedience to Scripture,” but no one fulfills this standard fully.<sup>84</sup> It calls for “chastity in singleness,” Hunsinger notes, but this gives the church language that is subject to responsible interpretation. After all, being “chaste” (or, one might add, being “holy” or “pure”) is a virtue that is incumbent upon all Christians, even those who are married. So then, chastity is not a simple synonym for “abstinence.” Abstinence is to be practiced by persons who are in search of a life partner. Until they marry, they are to shun casual sexual encounters or promiscuity. And this helps us to see, Hunsinger explains, why it is false to claim, “Christian homosexuals are in the same situation as heterosexuals who wish to marry but cannot find a suitable life partner.” To call upon single people to abstain is not the same as to ask them to renounce the desire for a life partner. In other words, the most “chaste” way for a gay or lesbian person to sanctify their desire for a life partner is to form a responsible, lifelong partnership.

Perhaps the key to the accommodationist position is its conviction that God's grace extends no less freely or lovingly to gays and lesbians than to any other group of God's children. One of the basic teachings of the gospel is that each one of us has been adopted into God's family, not through any merit of our own, but solely through grace (Rom. 8:1-17). And all of God's children are loved.

### **Summary and reflection**

A strength of this position is that it acknowledges that all are sinners in need of the mercy and grace of God. It demonstrates this grace by reaching out in compassionate solidarity to gays and lesbians as fellow children of God. Many people who embrace Viewpoints One or Two in principle find that when it comes to living out those principles practically, they have to operate within the framework of Viewpoint Three.

An accommodationist position may seem to attempt to have it both ways. And in this sense it may catch criticism from both directions. On the one hand, strict prohibitionists may object that this viewpoint leads to unacceptable compromises of biblical admonitions. On the other hand, gays and lesbians themselves may consider it condescending to have their commitments characterized as the "lesser of the evils." They may also wonder why accommodationists are only willing to affirm the elements of virtue in exclusive, committed gay and lesbian relationships, but not to officially affirm or bless the relationships themselves.

### **Suggested reading**

Timothy Bradshaw, ed., *The Way Forward? Christian Voices on Homosexuality and the Church*. Second Edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003.

Thomas E. Breidenthal, *Christian Households: The Sanctification of Nearness*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1997.

Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to Christian Ethics*. New York: Harper Collins, 1996.

Paul K. Jewett and Marguerite Schuster, *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human: A Neo-Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996.

Helmut Thieckicke, *The Ethics of Sex*, trans. John W. Doberstein. New York: Harper and Row, 1964.

### Comparison of Viewpoints One, Two, and Three

	Creation	Reconciliation	Redemption
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#### *Non-affirming Viewpoints*

<b>Prohibition</b>	Same-gender desire and behavior = <i>perversion</i>	Repent of <i>gay identity</i> ; the church prohibits gay desire and behavior	Return to true heterosexual nature
<b>Toleration</b>	Same-gender sexual orientation = <i>a tragic burden</i>	Repent of <i>gay choices</i> ; welcoming of persons, non-affirming of deeds	Stoic acceptance of one's tragic fate through abstinence
<b>Accommodation</b>	Same-gender desire = tragic burden, but open to traces of grace	<i>Focus: gay and lesbian relationships.</i> While these are disobedient in form, they may be obedient in substance, if monogamous.	Exclusive, same-sex partnerships are better than promiscuity, i.e., they are the lesser of the evils.

### Questions for discussion

1. The accommodationist approach depends on making practical judgments, weighing the “lesser of the evils,” and adopting a case-by-case approach to ethical issues. Are you comfortable with this approach? Why or why not?
2. Accommodationists hold that permitting a departure from the norm still implies that the norm is in effect. Permitting an exception, they maintain, is not the same as affirming that the exception should become the norm. Do you agree or disagree?

## **PART TWO**

### **CRITIQUE OF NON-AFFIRMING POSITIONS**

The next position offers strong criticisms of the three non-affirming viewpoints. Viewpoint Four—legitimation—steps outside the frameworks of prohibition, toleration, and accommodation in order to critique them from the standpoint of fundamental justice and fairness. It tends to focus on the unfairness of excluding from ordination non-celibate gays and lesbians as a category or class, analogizing current gay rights struggles to the civil rights struggles of the 1960s and to the struggle for the ordination of women. The criticisms set forth here, which aim at legitimating gay relationships, are presupposed in the welcoming and affirming positions considered in Part Three. However, the legitimation position stands on its own for two reasons. First, the legitimation position appeared on the scene before the other welcoming and affirming positions were developed. Second, there are some who hold the legitimation position in its own right and who do not embrace the celebration, liberation, or consecration stances.

Just as with the accommodation position, advocates of the legitimation viewpoint have interpretations of the same biblical passages invoked by the non-affirming types. Rather than reiterate that biblical material here, in what follows I have simply given some illustrative examples of legitimationist forms of biblical interpretation.

## VIEWPOINT FOUR: LEGITIMATION

Many in the church argue that the policy of welcoming gays and lesbians as members but denying them access to ordained leadership is unjust and rests on a fragile biblical basis.<sup>85</sup> They point to the witness of the Hebrew prophets who chastised God’s people when they failed to do justice. They point to Jesus’ practice of sharing table fellowship—a sign in that culture of acceptance—with those whom Jesus’ contemporaries considered outcasts and sinners. They point also to the fact that Jesus chose leaders who were deeply flawed, but who nurtured a passion for God’s reign. Above all, they remind us that in baptism each of us has acquired an identity in Christ that is more basic and more enduring than gender or gender orientation.

This perspective is not limited to those we sometimes label as “liberal.” Evangelical biblical scholar Richard Hays, for example, has reminded the church, “There is no one who is righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10). Although Hays does not think there is a biblical warrant for blessing same-gender relationships, he maintains there should be a “single set of moral norms” for all Christians. Moreover, he decries the arbitrary singling out of gays and lesbians for a special scrutiny to which others are not subjected.<sup>86</sup> Given this arbitrariness, he sees no reason to erect a ban against one group within the church. He insists that taking a stand against war and violence should be higher priorities for the church than enforcing certain rules about sexuality.

Some go even further, arguing that the current policy enshrined in G-6.0106b constitutes a denial of the Christian identity that rightfully belongs to gay and lesbian people by virtue of their inclusion in the covenant of grace. The current policy, these advocates argue, creates a division of first- and second-class citizens in the church, and there is a denial of the equality and justice to which all are entitled in Christ.

### Illustrative biblical interpretation: Galatians 3:28

Justice advocates draw upon many of the biblical perspectives treated elsewhere in this study, but one in particular merits discussion here. The baptismal formula in Gal. 3:28 tells us, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>87</sup> This verse mentions three sets of human characteristics, each of which is framed as a polarity: Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female. The breadth of these three polarities is quite astonishing. They comprise the most basic features of our human existence:

- Jew/Greek: ethnic, political, cultural, and religious identity
- Slave/free: legal status, economic and class distinctions, and social location
- Male/female: sexuality and gender roles

The gospel message here is that the religious, social, and gender realities that define our world do not define the ultimate identities of those who are baptized in Christ.<sup>88</sup>

The third polarity—male/female—is more than merely a statement of our equality in Christ. In Greek, the “or” (*oude*) that appears in the first two declarations—“there is no longer Jew *or* Greek,” and, “there is no longer slave *or* free”—has been changed in the final declaration to the

conjunction “and” (*kai*): “There is no longer male *and* female.”<sup>89</sup> If all the text had said was that in Christ “there is *neither* male *nor* female,” then it would constitute an admirable statement of the equality of men and women as individuals. Yet there is more.<sup>90</sup> The phrase “male *and* female” is a religious “term of art”—in this case a precise theological definition that comes from another text in Scripture. The “male and female” in Gal. 3:28 is an exact quotation of the Greek (Septuagint) version of Gen. 1:27, which tells us, “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; *male and female* he created them.”<sup>91</sup>

Notice what is happening here. It is not just one’s status as male *or* female that is declared irrelevant for one’s identity in Jesus Christ; there is also something about the foundational reality of gender itself—the pairing of male *and* female—that has no ultimate hold on the new community seeking to live out the gospel.<sup>92</sup> Invoking “gender complementarity” or even “gender identity” as a fundamental basis for drawing distinctions within the body of Christ is called seriously into question by the gospel pronouncement of Gal. 3:28. Gender roles and expectations need no longer determine the ultimate identity of the baptized, for all are now “Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). This is good news for all persons, and especially for those whose manhood, womanhood, or sexual orientation has been scorned either within the church or in society at large.

One theologian has said, “Baptism is (or should be) the rite of inclusion par excellence.”<sup>93</sup> The church is only just now coming to appreciate the implications of baptism and the content of Gal. 3:28 for gender roles and sexual orientation. This is not surprising since, after all, only recently has the church acknowledged male domination, female subordination to men, and sexual exploitation as serious ethical and theological problems. They are problems that reside not only in our culture, but in the longstanding theological tradition that has influenced our culture. For too long, texts that supported women’s subordination to men were used to trump the broader, more positive testimony about women and men in Gal. 3:28 and elsewhere. If the Galatians text is given interpretive priority, however, then equality in church and world flow as logical consequences. So too, if the Galatians text receives interpretive priority in understanding sexual orientation, then gender roles and definitions, even the venerable pattern of “male and female,” do not establish the ultimate reality within which Christians are called to live.

## **Doing justice**

From the point of view of those who would legitimate the lives of gays and lesbians, the argument expressed by the tolerationists in Viewpoint Two, namely that one can be “welcoming, but not affirming,” is self-contradictory. It draws a distinction in theory that does not work in fact. To be non-affirming is itself to be un-welcoming. To single out one group of people for special scrutiny, based on their sexual identity alone, is to turn them into second-class citizens. Even worse from a Christian point of view, to do this is to deny the reality of their identity in Christ, not only as proclaimed in baptism, but also as enacted in the sharing of the Lord’s Supper.

Along with denying important features of our common Christian witness, advocates of justice and legitimation of gays and lesbians argue that G-6.0106b stands in profound tension with historic Presbyterian principles of government. Many contend that there are gays and lesbians in

the church whose overall “manner of life” (cf. G-6.0106a) *is* a demonstration of the gospel. If so, then governing bodies should have the constitutional duty and responsibility to discern such matters in making decisions about ordination.<sup>94</sup> In seeking to give greater specificity to the “manner of life” requirement, G-6.0106b added three sentences that, to many, seem to stand in serious tension with the rest of the Constitution.

First, there is a question of authority. The first sentence of G-6.0106b provides:

Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life *in obedience to Scripture* and in conformity to the confessional standards of the church. (Emphasis added)

However, the ordination vows (G-14.0207 and 14-0405) focus the matter of obedience differently:

Will you fulfill your office...*in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture*, and be continually guided by our confessions? (Emphasis added)

The failure to acknowledge the ultimate authority of Jesus Christ, say justice advocates, is a serious deficiency of the new standard.

Second is the question of fairness. Even though G-6.0106b does not target gays and lesbians explicitly, it appears to do so implicitly. The second sentence reads:

Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between *a* man and *a* woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. (Emphasis added)

Some have argued that this sentence gives more latitude to straight couples than to gay and lesbian couples. By speaking of “a” man and “a” woman, the current standard implicitly permits divorce, whereas the Westminster Confession clearly ruled out divorce by stipulating:

Marriage is the union between *one* man and *one* woman, designed of God to last so long as they both shall live. (Emphasis added)

If the church is prepared to accommodate divorce and remarriage, then why would it not rejoice that some gays and lesbians desire to commit themselves to a standard of monogamy?

Third is the question of hypocrisy. Jesus reminded us to judge not lest we be judged and not to pay attention to the “speck” in our neighbor’s eye while ignoring the “log” in our own (Matt. 7:1-3). The final sentence of G-6.0106b provides:

Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

By its language, this sentence was tied broadly to any sin designated as such in *The Book of Confessions*. In practice, the provision has been used to target gays and lesbians for special rebuke. After all, there are hundreds of sinful practices named in the confessions. When was the last time “gluttony” became a subject of special ecclesiastical inquiry?<sup>95</sup> Or what about “envying the prosperity of others?”<sup>96</sup> The confessions call “twisting anyone’s words” a sin, and this practice is amply evidenced in most church debates.<sup>97</sup> Or how about this: the confessions call sin “making any image or picture of God”; and yet emblazoned upon the seal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is the image of a dove representing the Holy Spirit.

Prohibitionists claim that the language of “self-acknowledgment” and “self-avowal” focuses on the acknowledgment of sexual practices that are sinful, but there is no other type of sin in the church for which this type of language is used. What is really at stake in targeting the “self-acknowledgment” of gay and lesbian people is their act of being honest about their sexual orientation. The language of “self-acknowledgment” came into use by virtue of the politics of gays and lesbians coming out of the “closet.” The 1978 Statement and G-6.0106b claim to be focused on the “self-acknowledgment” of practice; however, advocates for justice and gay legitimization point to the number of gay and lesbian people whose conduct is not in violation of G-6.0106b, but whose sexuality is nonetheless made an issue in the church.

Many advocates of this position want to take the same moral spotlight the church has been directing at gays and turn it back on the church itself. For a long time, the church has been asking gays and lesbians to justify themselves before the bar of a high moral standard. Yet the church itself needs to account for its own acts of commission and omission that have defined gays and lesbians as a special “problem” and that share complicity in fueling centuries of what the United States Supreme Court has identified as an anti-gay “animus.”<sup>98</sup> The 1978 Statement spoke in favor of civil rights for gay people, but little has been done by the church to make this a reality. The 1978 Statement opposed what it called the “sin of homophobia,” but the church’s own pronouncements against gays arguably has fueled homophobia. The 1978 Statement specifically rejected probing into the personal lives of ordinands, but every gay or lesbian person seeking ordination knows that his or her life is just a step away from being exposed to a level of scrutiny that few in the church have ever had to endure.

In short, advocates of justice and gay legitimization believe this heightened scrutiny of gay and lesbian people exposes the church to the charge of hypocrisy. Ironically, the current policy, at least as it is expressed in the 1978 Statement, adopts a lower standard of justice within its own fellowship than prevails in the society at large. Whereas many states extend non-discrimination protection to gay and lesbian people, shielding them from unfair treatment, these same principles of fairness are not honored in the church. Justice advocates cite examples of persons ordained and non-ordained who have been subjected to unfair treatment, some even in the absence of evidence that they were in violation of the conduct standards of G-6.0106b. Again, simply *being gay* triggers a higher level of scrutiny. Some gay and lesbian persons have been viciously “outed,” leaving them exposed through no “self-avowal” of their own, with the result that they both have lost their ordination and been jettisoned from their callings. And this goes on, say justice advocates, even while the church “winks” at heterosexual conduct that clearly falls short of the fidelity and chastity standards.

Prohibitionists claim that if the current church standards are changed, many in their camp will leave. If it is true that some would leave the PC(USA) if G-6.0106b were repealed, it is also true that current policy has forced many gays and lesbians already to leave for service in other denominations. An instructive example is provided by the case of Dr. Paul Capetz, who in 1991 was ordained a Presbyterian minister and invited to join the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in Richmond to teach historical theology. Prior to assuming his position, an anonymous accusation surfaced concerning his sexual orientation. The innuendo against Capetz was accompanied by no evidence that he was in violation of the then-applicable policy from the 1978 Statement, and Capetz in fact was not in violation. Nevertheless, the accusation meant that Capetz began his teaching responsibilities under a cloud. Profoundly hurt by this experience, he decided reluctantly within a year to take another position at a non-PC(USA) seminary, though he still remained a presbyter in good standing. Then, in 1996, the General Assembly proposed, and in 1997 the presbyteries enacted, G-6.0106b. In the ensuing years, efforts to delete or modify G-6.0106b failed. Although Capetz was not living a life in violation of this new provision of the *Book of Order*, its very existence presented him with a profound dilemma of conscience. On April 7, 2000, he submitted a letter to his presbytery stating, "It is with deep sadness that I request to be released from the exercise of the ordained ministry." The letter went on to say:

This decision results from my struggle to discern what it means to be faithful to the promises I made at ordination in the light of my experience as a gay man. After much prayer and examination of conscience, I have concluded that fidelity to God requires me to relinquish my status as a minister of the Word and Sacrament during this time of intense controversy within the church regarding the morality of homosexuality.

I have been unable to construe that clause in the *Book of Order* as implying anything other than commitment to a life of permanent celibacy on the part of a gay person who serves as an ordained officer in the church. In this connection it is important for me to clarify that as a single person I am not, strictly speaking, in violation of G-6.0106b. Nonetheless, I have to confess that a vow of lifelong celibacy is an unrealistic expectation for the church to ask of me. I fear that the prospect of having to face the future without hope of ever finding someone with whom to share my life in a loving relationship would result in unspeakable despair. If this clause had been present in the church's constitution [when I was ordained] in 1991, I would not have been able to assume the responsibilities of ordination in good conscience.<sup>99</sup>

Capetz hoped his letter would invite thoughtful conversation in the church; instead, he felt it was largely met with indifference.<sup>100</sup>

Advocates for gay legitimization complain that the consciences of many in the church are being unfairly bound. The biblical pronouncements set forth in the 1978 Statement—which, as noted earlier, were made without discussion of alternatives and without any effort to place the hotly-disputed sexuality passages in their social or historical context—have not only done an injustice to gays, but an injustice to the church at large by presenting as monolithic a biblical witness that is actually multi-vocal. Biblical interpretation should be gleaned not from experts on one side of

the aisle or the other, but “from the Scriptures themselves (from the nature of the language in which they were written, likewise according to the circumstances in which they were set down, and expounded in the light of like and unlike passages and of many and clearer passages) and which agree with the rule of faith and love, and contributes to the glory of God and [humanity’s] salvation” (Second Helvetic Confession, 5.101).

The legitimation argument is based not only on procedural complaints about fairness, but also upon substantive convictions about the nature of God. Our God is one who reaches out to embrace all people of every sort, especially those whom the world excludes. The founding narrative in Scripture is of God’s activity to bring release to the captives (Exodus) and deliverance to the despised and rejected (Resurrection). Advocates of justice see the drama of creation, reconciliation, and redemption as a story of ever-widening grace. For this reason, Princeton theologian Daniel Migliore insists it will not do to cobble together a theology of sexuality from a few isolated texts of Scripture. Instead, one must look to the overarching biblical story of God’s faithful, committed, covenantal love for God’s people. In keeping with this vision, “the central principle of a Christian understanding of sexuality is fidelity in self-giving and other-affirming love.”<sup>101</sup>

The appeal to justice is also at the same time an appeal to the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. We all know that no one “deserves” to be ordained except by the mercy of God’s grace: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). After Paul exclaims in Romans, “There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God” (Rom. 3:10-11), he then goes on to declare that, “since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” therefore all must be “justified by [God’s] grace as a gift” (Rom. 3:23-24). The implication is that no one has become a part of the church, nor has anyone been made an officer of the church, because of his or her intrinsic merit. The justice argument insists that all are equally sinners and, at least within the life of the church, all are equally saved by grace.

There are often significant overlaps between the commitment to justice and the pastoral concerns we reviewed earlier. Justice advocates emphasize that gay and lesbian people are our sons and our daughters, our brothers and our sisters, our co-workers and friends. They are children of God just like everyone else, and justice advocates feel strongly that the theology of the 1978 Statement, now codified in G-.06106b, has very, very badly let down these children of God.

In recent years, some advocates of gay legitimation have begun to argue in favor of civil unions or gay marriage in the political arena. Their reasoning is that marriage has historically been a civil contract in the United States defined by the individual states, and therefore it is a violation of equality principles for the government to withhold the status and benefits of marriage from gay couples. (For arguments concerning the consecration of gay unions within the church, see the discussion of Viewpoint Seven.)

## **Creation**

Advocates of the gay legitimization view have held various positions about where same-gender sexual orientation fits within God's ordering of creation. Some justice advocates may actually share the assessment of the 1978 Statement that being gay or lesbian is an unfortunate tragedy. It may not be something, frankly, that many of them would wish for their own children. And yet, neither would they want their children—or any of the church's children—to be subjected to the church's hypocrisy in handling this issue. To whatever extent being gay or lesbian is involved in sinfulness, a gay or lesbian is no more a sinner than anyone else. Besides, they argue, sexual offenses of an exploitative nature are more likely to be committed by heterosexual than by non-heterosexual persons. As the PCUS 1977 "Preliminary Study" observes:

When moral judgments are made in this sphere, they are inevitably moral judgments on ourselves also. The question cannot only be "Why are they like that?" It must also be "What have we the Church done or left undone that has contributed to what they are?" In this sphere as in others we will be more just and more compassionate if we remember the warning of our Lord that we ourselves will be judged with the judgments we pronounce.

Or as Reinhold Niebuhr famously observed, it is so much easier to fixate on the personal sins of the few and remain oblivious to the broader social, political, and economic sins in which we are all enmeshed.

## **Reconciliation in Christ**

As with the 1978 Statement, the key category from the standpoint of gay legitimization is not creation, but reconciliation. Advocates of this view feel, however, that the 1978 Statement did not carry reconciliation far enough. They reject the logic (to them the illogic) of inviting people into church membership while excluding them from one of the benefits of membership, namely, exercising leadership when one has leadership gifts. In particular, they object to treating the self-affirmation of gays and lesbians as somehow reprehensible. Each person should be treated as an individual created in the image of God. The PCUS 1977 "Preliminary Study" puts it this way:

The complexity and variety of homosexuality means that it is as wrong to say what "all" homosexual persons are like as to say what "all" black or white, rich or poor, male or female people are like. We can only deal responsibly with homosexual persons as with all other persons only when we rid ourselves of stereotyped presuppositions about them and treat each one as the unique human being and child of God he or she is....

Although this is a sentiment with which all Presbyterians should readily agree, advocates of gay legitimization insist that the church's present polity position falls far short of living out this sentiment.

As already mentioned, advocates for legitimization and justice consider it unseemly that the church has exempted itself from extending to its own members the rights it has advocated for others (however meekly) in the public sphere. The way these advocates see it, reconciliation

begins with commitment to fairness in local contexts and then extends that principle to more complex considerations of power, abuse, and violence in society at large. Advocates for legitimation of gays and lesbians have often been advocates for other oppressed groups, seeing justice as a seamless web and not just a single-issue reality.

Regarding criteria for ordination, advocates of justice and gay legitimation usually argue that the focus should be upon giftedness for ministry and not sexual identity.

### **Redemption in the Spirit**

To deal redemptively with gay and lesbian people, the church must offer them a greater hope than the Stoic acquiescence to fate articulated in the 1978 Statement. God wants more for people than a lonely life of unhappiness. Moreover, the model of what redeemed life looks like should not be taken from “Ozzie and Harriet” or other stereotyped versions of the good life. Instead, redemption flows from the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ. To those who say that gays and lesbians are “sinners” and, hence, unfit for church leadership, justice advocates point out that Christ invited sinners of every sort into table fellowship with himself, and he chose leaders for the Christian movement who were hardly conventional. So many of the church’s words and so much of its demeanor concerning gays and lesbians is profoundly contradictory to the gospel it proclaims. The church needs to quit speaking *to* or *at* gays and lesbians, say legitimation advocates, and begin walking in solidarity *with* gays and lesbians. And we should all yearn for that new form of community Jesus himself promised us, namely, a redeemed community in which our differences need no longer make a difference.

### **Summary and reflection**

It is hard to dispute the claim that gays and lesbians have been singled out for special scorn in the church. Yet one problem the legitimation position faces is how to translate this fact into change on the ordination issue. Even if some persons are being unfairly excluded from church office, many in the PC(USA) do not think of ordination as a “right” that can be demanded in the cause of justice. Instead it is a “privilege” that must be conferred for the benefit of the church. Genuine church leadership, many Presbyterians feel, should be servant leadership and not a leadership that draws attention to itself or is politicized.

Justice advocates would readily grant this point, but then quickly counter that the privilege of ordination should be extended to all who have the gifts, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, or gender orientation. They would also point out that gay and lesbian Presbyterians have already been ordained as servant leaders for years. Indeed, many have remained faithful to the church, even though they have experienced painful rejection at the church’s hands.

Still, not everyone would agree with justice advocates that the singling out of gays and lesbians is wrong. The church’s standards cannot be unjust, so the counter-argument goes, if they faithfully reflect the word of God in Scripture. The church is not excluding non-celibate gays and lesbians from eligibility for church office by its own authority, but by the authority of God. It may

be true that the church has not been even-handed in its exercise of discipline. Yet, just because the church has failed to discipline some does not mean it should refrain from disciplining anyone.

Sometimes the justice approach is off-putting to gays and lesbians themselves. It is not uncommon for some justice advocates to resort to the rhetoric of contemporary identity politics, adopting the language of “oppressors” and “oppressed,” or of “us” against “them.” Andrew Sullivan, a gay man and former editor of *The New Republic*, has argued that gay people, even with the burdens they sometimes face, should not be portrayed as mere victims without choices, nor are they without powers of self-determination.<sup>102</sup>

This places legitimization advocates in an awkward position as they seek to frame their message. On the one hand, gays and lesbians still suffer unfair abuse, sometimes of an outrageous sort. On the other hand, it is not accurate to portray gays and lesbians solely in terms of victimhood. A better approach might be to connect “justice” to “justification.” According to the doctrine of justification by grace, all are in need of grace; all must rely on the justice of God for grace; and God’s justice demands that all are entitled to equity and fair treatment.

### **Suggested reading**

James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998.

Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to Christian Ethics*. New York: Harper Collins, 1996.

David G. Myers and Letha Dawson Scanzoni, *What God Has Joined Together? A Christian Case for Gay Marriage*. New York: Harper Collins, 2005.

Jonathan Rausch, *Gay Marriage: Why It Is Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004.

Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? A Positive Response*, revised and updated. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1994.

Walter Wink, *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

### Comparison of Viewpoints Three and Four

**Creation**

**Reconciliation**

**Redemption**

*Non-affirming Viewpoints*

**Accommodation**

Same-gender desire = tragic burden, but open to traces of grace

*Focus: gay and lesbian relationships.* While these are disobedient in form, they may be obedient in substance, if monogamous.

Exclusive, same-sex partnerships are better than promiscuity, i.e., they are the lesser of the evils.

*Critique of Non-affirming Viewpoints*

**Legitimation**

Same-gender desire = like all other sinful conditions

*Focus: ordination.* Repent of singling out gay sins and ignoring other sins.

Create a just world in which difference no longer makes a difference.

**Questions for discussion**

1. Which is more important for the church to focus on—gay and lesbian relationships or the question of ordination?
2. One classical definition of “justice” is receiving what one deserves. In your view, how do gay and lesbian people deserve to be treated in the church?
3. Does your understanding of Viewpoint Four alter your perspective on Viewpoints One, Two, and Three? What impact does this new viewpoint have on your understanding of the biblical teaching on human sexuality?

## PART THREE WELCOMING AND AFFIRMING VIEWPOINTS

The current practice in the PC(USA), as noted above, is to welcome gay and lesbian people into the fellowship of the church, but to withhold any affirmation of their sexual identity. It withholds from non-celibate gays and lesbians the possibility of having their leadership gifts affirmed through ordination. It also remains ambivalent about whether to bless gay and lesbian unions, even if those unions are committed, exclusive, and lifelong.

The legitimation position expressed challenges to the current PC(USA) policy. Advocates of the three positions examined here in Part Three carry these critiques a step further. They argue that, to be consistent with everything we know about the gospel and everything we know about the lived experience of gay and lesbian people, the church needs to craft a new teaching that can guide the people of God into a new day. In answering the question posed by the 1978 Statement, they believe that we can and *should* “foster a new situation in the church, in which practicing homosexual persons would be free to affirm their lifestyle publicly and to obtain the church’s blessing upon this through ordination.”<sup>103</sup>

Proponents say that such a teaching should not only be *welcoming* of homosexual people but *affirming* of their lives. This possibility is championed not in contradiction of the gospel, but as a logical extension of everything the gospel teaches. More specifically, the gospel teaches that God has reached out in grace to embrace the human condition in Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit. In other words, the doctrine of the Incarnation contains at its heart the divine welcoming of the other. Embodying that same “welcome” is at the heart of our obedient response to God’s grace. The God who is for us and with us in Jesus Christ invites us by the work of the Spirit to be for and with one another.

The question, then, is whether there are good biblical and other warrants to adopt a stance that not only welcomes gay and lesbian people into the church, but affirms their committed, exclusive, covenantal unions. To make this case, the welcoming and affirming viewpoints challenge each of the five arguments that the non-affirming positions assert.

### 1. The biblical witness

*Leviticus 18:22, 20:13*

Welcoming and affirming approaches point out that these two texts prohibit *some* acts of same-gender intercourse, but not *all*. Furthermore, determining the original reason for the prohibition is the only way to interpret what it really means.<sup>104</sup>

One way of viewing this is that the prohibitions here are addressed to males who exercised authority within the ethos of an extended kinship system.<sup>105</sup> It is easy to overlook the fact that at

least some of these males were sexually polygamous. They were permitted more than one wife, and some most certainly had sexual relations with concubines and slaves.<sup>106</sup> Within this context, Leviticus imposes rules against taking as one's sexual object a woman connected to a man who was one's near relative. Such a rule not only protected the woman from abuse, but more importantly, it prohibited acting with disrespect *toward the man* to whom she belonged.<sup>107</sup>

Similarly, the directive not to have sex with another man "as with a woman" also exists to protect male dignity. Sex in the ancient world was conceived in terms of who did what to whom. One partner (a male) was to be active, while the other (usually a female) was to be passive. This meant there was no such thing as a sexual relationship between "equals."<sup>108</sup> To be the passive partner was by definition to be subordinate. When a male was forced into the subordinate, passive role (as, for example, when enemies captured in battle were sexually humiliated), that male symbolically ceased to be a male. Hence, the Leviticus texts exist to protect male gender roles.

The strongest textual argument for extending the Leviticus prohibition to consensual, loving relationships is that the penalty in chapter 20 applies to both parties—active and passive. Yet the bestiality penalty in Lev. 20:15-16 likewise applies to both the human being and the animal. Surely this is not because we believe the animal, too, is thought to "consent." The applicability of the penalty to both parties only goes to underscore the seriousness with which it is leveled: Israelite men are not to violate the established gender roles assigned to them, either with other men or with animals. The hyperbolic character of *all* the penalties in Leviticus 20 should give us pause. For instance, few would advocate the death penalty today for persons who curse their parents (20:9), and today only the most diehard prohibitionists would advocate the death penalty for gays and lesbians.<sup>109</sup>

Aside from these narrow prohibitions against sexually humiliating acts with other males, the text is actually silent about homoerotic affection more generally.<sup>110</sup> The point here is not to find loopholes in the text, but simply to read it for what it says. There is nothing here that prohibits holding hands, touching, kissing, or other forms of erotic intimacy. Nor is there any prohibition whatsoever of homoerotic affection between women. From the grammar of the text, we know that it only prohibits anal sex between men and remains silent about other forms of sexual expression. The claim that the text imposes a per se or absolute ban on all forms of homoeroticism is simply not true.

### *The covenant between Ruth and Naomi; David and Jonathan*

Welcoming and affirming advocates sometimes appeal to two stories in Scripture that involved intense relationships between persons of the same gender. The most responsible of these interpreters do not claim that these were sexual relationships; rather, they simply point out that the powerful connection between two people of the same gender can serve as a paradigm of exemplary human love.

The biblical story of Ruth is interesting because it is often quoted in wedding ceremonies. The story tells of an Israelite family that moves to a foreign country—the land of Moab—in order to escape a time of massive famine in Israel.<sup>111</sup> At first things seem to go well. The family prospers long enough for the two sons to marry Moabite women. Before long, however, the head of the household dies, followed shortly by the death of his two sons as well, making widows of all the women. Bereft of family and now with no means for her own provision, the matriarch of the family, Naomi, confronts her daughters-in-law with the crisis they all face. Putting forward a plan that seems imminently sensible, Naomi frees the two younger women to seek new families with new husbands among their own people, while she, Naomi, resolves to journey home to the land of Israel. In tears, the first daughter-in-law follows Naomi’s advice and departs. But the second daughter-in-law, Ruth, will hear none of it. Despite the fact that she is not an Israelite, and despite the fact that staying with Naomi involves substantial risk and an uncertain future, she feels bound to Naomi by covenant loyalty—in Hebrew, *khesed*.<sup>112</sup> The term *khesed* is used frequently in the Hebrew Bible of God’s own bond of covenant loyalty to God’s people. In a passage often quoted or sung in wedding ceremonies, Ruth refuses to “leave” Naomi (*azab*; Ruth 1:16) and insists on “cleaving” to her (*dabaq*):

Entreat me not to leave you (*azab*) or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God (Ruth 1:16, Revised Standard Version).

Ruth’s words echo the very same words that appear in this famous summary statement about the meaning of marriage from the book of Genesis:

Therefore a man leaves (*azab*) his father and his mother and cleaves (*dabaq*) to his wife, and they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24, RSV).<sup>113</sup>

The implication of this is that leaving and cleaving have more to do with becoming family than with sexual intercourse per se.

In keeping with this covenantal pledge, Ruth follows Naomi back to Israel where, to secure both her livelihood and that of Naomi, she marries Naomi’s kinsmen, Boaz. By the end of the book, the specter of famine has been replaced by a bountiful harvest, and Ruth gives birth to a son who will be the grandfather of Israel’s King David, who himself will be an ancestor of Jesus of Nazareth. David had his own powerful friendship with another of the same gender, namely, Jonathan, the son of King Saul. Despite the fact that Jonathan was the son of a king, he always deferred to David, made way for David, and even risked his life to save David. Later on, after Jonathan’s death, David provided for Jonathan’s son. When Jonathan died, David cried out:

I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

In both of these stories the point is kinship, not sex. But this in itself is instructive. Perhaps our own society makes too much of sex and not enough of kinship. When same-gender couples bind

themselves together as family, say welcoming and affirming advocates, there are good reasons to focus on the covenant itself and the integrity of the love shared between the two parties.

### *Galatians 3:28*

We have already encountered this baptismal text in the preceding discussion of the “justice” position. Now we need to consider it again, this time not only as a baptismal text, but as a text about the transformation of Christian identity after baptism. As such, it provides a unique window into how the church should regard committed same-gender unions.

The first polarity—“there is no longer Jew nor Greek”—tells us not only that whether one is circumcised or uncircumcised makes no difference for becoming a member-in-good-standing of the Christian community; it also tells us something about how life in the covenant community is to be lived.<sup>114</sup> Having been freed from slavery (Gal. 4:1, 7, 22- 25, 30-31; 5:1, 13), and given the status of God’s children (literally, “sons”: Gal. 4:4- 7, 22, 23, 30), we are freed for a life lived in the Spirit (Gal. 4:6). Indeed, it is “for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Gal. 5:1). So astonishing is this spiritual freedom that “if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law” (Gal. 5:18). This does not signify freedom *from* the law, but freedom *for* the law, as reinterpreted in the power of the Spirit. Quoting Lev. 19:18, Paul considers that “the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:14). How do we know we are loving our neighbor as ourselves? The interpretive key is whether we are following the “flesh” or the “Spirit” (Gal. 5:16-26). The fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things” (Gal. 5:22-23). By contrast, the works of the flesh are “fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these” (Gal. 5:19-21a). So then, in considering the case of committed same-gender unions, we need to ask whether such unions exhibit the “fruit of the Spirit” or the “works of the flesh.” Are persons in committed, exclusive, same-gender relationships exhibiting behavior more like the second list of vices or more like the first list of virtues?

The second polarity, “there is no longer slave nor free,” also has direct relevance to understanding the New Testament approach to homoeroticism in the Greco-Roman world. Slavery in the time of Paul was a thoroughly patriarchal institution and one that was rife with sexual exploitation. Under Roman law, to be a “slave” was by definition to be a sex object. Not only the labor of the slave, but also the slave’s body was captive to the will of the master. Since in Greco-Roman society same-sex gratification was widespread and accepted, male slaves were routinely forced to submit to same-sex intercourse with the master.<sup>115</sup> The very word “slave” was synonymous with being a sexual object.

Even though Christians have been freed from slavery, it is also true that many Christians in the Greco-Roman world remained slaves. This makes it all the more poignant that the apostle Paul adopted the metaphor of slavery and turned it into one of his most vivid ways of speaking of what it means to be a Christian disciple.<sup>116</sup> Just as Jesus took the form of a slave (Phil. 2:7), so also

Jesus' followers are to join him in slavery. In one of his most shocking images, Paul can even compare the Christian life to being led in a parade as a defeated prisoner of war (2 Cor. 2:14). Paul is referring here to the Roman "Triumph," a processional in which Rome's defeated enemies were led away either to slavery or to ritual death, as sacrifices to the pagan gods.<sup>117</sup> Paul's readers would have seen these bleak processions and would have known that before being put on display, such prisoner-slaves were routinely sexually humiliated by their captors. John Calvin even found Paul's imagery so abhorrent that he assumed the apostle must have meant something different, namely that Christians themselves are the triumphant ones rather than the subdued and defeated.<sup>118</sup>

Given the typical treatment shown toward slaves—abusive by our standards, accepted by Roman standards—how do we interpret Paul's admonition, "Slaves, obey your masters"? Or his advice to persons enslaved, "Remain as you are" (1 Cor. 7:26)? These imperatives are not meant to endorse the sexual abuse of slaves any more than the advice, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord" (Eph. 6:1) is tantamount to approving parental child abuse. Rather, the point is that baptism announces and anticipates a new situation in which the condition of slavery—even with the profound sexual stigma attached to it—is redeemed through the power of the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>119</sup> This is a radical redemption. Even if one is living the life of an abused slave, one's life is still redeemed in Christ!

This same redemption is also available within the realm of the third polarity, gender identity, where "there is no longer male *and* female." It would be ludicrous to claim that the early Christians, who first announced this new reality in Gal. 3:28, could have looked into the future and imagined the blessing of committed same-gender relationships. But neither could they have imagined the abolition of slavery in the 19th century or the establishment of women's social and legal equality in the 20th. They could not have predicted the end of slavery, but in our day it has come. They could not have predicted a world of gender equality, but in our day it has come and is still coming. They could not have predicted that the Spirit of God would be at work calling gay and lesbian people into committed, covenantal unions analogous to marriage, but it is happening.

#### *1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10*

The entire New Testament is an interpretation of Hebrew Scripture viewed in the light of God's work in Jesus Christ. Paul's statements about homoeroticism are no exception; they presuppose the prohibitions in Leviticus. Yet, we have already seen that Leviticus, according to its own plain meaning, does not speak explicitly about all forms of same-gender love, but merely refers to one type of sex act. Nor is there any exegetical reason to believe that these two New Testament texts (or the verses below from Romans) speak more broadly.

The discussion in the prohibitionist section above already made this clear. The NRSV takes these texts as most likely targeted at a widespread practice in the Roman Empire, namely, male prostitution. This sort of exploitative activity is not in keeping with the Christian faith. But to equate such promiscuous behavior with the conduct of gays and lesbians who are committing themselves in exclusive, covenantal unions is not only inaccurate; it is morally offensive.

In addition to male prostitution, one especially pernicious feature of Roman life was the lively trade of boys who were sold into sexual slavery. Slave boys of this sort often had been captured by the military as prisoners of war and soon found themselves in the hands of a slave trader. The boys were castrated by the slave trader and then quickly sold as sex slaves. This is almost certainly what stands behind the denunciation in 1 Tim. 1:10 of “fornicators, men who have sex with men, and slave traders.” The Romans themselves became so repulsed by this practice that on three different occasions they passed laws aimed at banning slave-boy castration. This fact alone testifies to its frequency, its lucrateness, and thus the difficulty in stamping it out. It is no wonder that Paul and other Jews had such a strongly negative opinion of homoeroticism in the days of the Roman Empire. It also may cause us to understand the various New Testament treatments of eunuchs in a new light. (See the discussion on “Jesus and the Fulfillment of the Law” below.)

### *Romans 1:18-32*

There is nothing in Romans (or anywhere else in Scripture) that says anything explicit to forbid committed, exclusive, same-gender unions. One can interpret Paul to be against all homoerotic unions, and he probably was. But the authority in the church is the word of God—as witness to Jesus Christ in the Spirit’s power—and not the limitations of Paul’s human imagination. Since homoeroticism in the Greco-Roman world was about who did what to whom, the notion of a “covenant” between same-gender equals was unheard of, and so it is no wonder Paul never thought of it. Moreover, Paul is referring here to the hedonistic homoeroticism of the Greco-Roman world as an example of what happens when human beings idolatrously turn away from God. Given what we know about the Roman slave trade, surely Paul was right. Yet what is at issue before the church today is not hedonistic and idolatrous homoeroticism, but just the opposite. It is Christian gays and lesbians who want to commit themselves to one another, not against God, but in the sight of God. Regarding this possibility, the New Testament is silent.

Since Paul’s comments make implicit reference to Leviticus, they are best read as a further elaboration of the culturally specific world that Leviticus envisions.<sup>120</sup> Regarding that cultural world, male homoerotic sex acts were always performed by social superiors upon social inferiors. In the Greco-Roman world of Paul’s day, the sexual ethos was marked by a glaring double-standard: For a freeborn male to allow himself to be sexually penetrated by another male was considered shameful, even criminal; but for him to gratify his own sexual urges with a male slave or other social inferior was considered appropriate, indeed even expected.<sup>121</sup> It is no wonder that Paul followed the opinion of Philo, Josephus, and other Jews of his day in rejecting such exploitative behavior, and surely to this extent most contemporary Presbyterians would agree with him.

So then, advocates of the welcoming, affirming stance argue that there are good reasons, when interpreting Paul’s use of homoeroticism as an “example” of Greco-Roman idolatry, to limit it to his own social and historical context. First, Paul’s own mode of argumentation points to this result. The genre here is not that of a command, but a letter addressed to a specific situation. He is not putting forward a codex of laws, as in the case of Leviticus. Instead, he is generalizing about the

tendencies of a group—the Gentiles—and not judging the specific facts of any particular case. In other words, he is repeating a standard Hellenistic Jewish slur against Gentiles, namely, that not honoring God has led them into fornication and immorality.<sup>122</sup> The argument also trades upon the belief of the Stoics that the passions (*epithumia*) should always be kept under control (cf. Rom. 1:24). Because Gentiles do not heed what has been revealed by God (vs. 19-20), they are “handed over” (vs. 24, 26, 28) by God to impurity (v. 26), to dishonorable passions (v. 27), and to a debased way of thinking (v. 28). This cannot mean, however, that they are abandoned by God, because Jesus himself was precisely “handed over” into the hands of sinful human beings and then was delivered by God through resurrection (e.g., Rom. 4:25; 8:32; Gal 2:20).<sup>123</sup> Moreover, the whole point of Paul’s argument is to show that God has now embraced the Gentiles, despite their idolatry. As Paul will say later, all have been consigned to disobedience, so that all may receive God’s mercy (Rom. 11:30-36). Thus, Paul’s pointing to Gentile sexuality as an example of idolatry is subordinate to a much larger argument about the grace of God being extended to these very same sexually-profligate Gentiles.

Second, the Presbyterian church has refrained from turning other culturally-bound assumptions of Paul about women and gender roles into a rule for all time, and the same should apply here. For example, Paul speaks in Rom. 1:24 of people who “degrade” their bodies and do things that are “unnatural.” Yet in 1 Cor. 11:14, Paul uses the very same language to speak of men who wear long hair: “Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him?” The cultural limitations of what Paul is saying appear again when he accuses Gentile men who have sex with other men of giving up the “natural use of women” (Rom. 1:27).<sup>124</sup> Here, the NRSV translation, “natural intercourse,” is too tame. The Greek actually means “use,” signaling a sex act with a subordinate, passive partner. This contemplates sex between men and women in which the desires of the dominant, male party are all-important. In the Judaism of Paul’s day, in fact, the woman was considered by her very makeup to be “inferior in every respect to the man.”<sup>125</sup> Similarly, Paul accuses certain Gentile women (“*their* females,” Rom. 1:26) of abandoning this proper subordinate role in order to carry on sex acts that are *para phusin*, which means “contrary to” or “in excess of” nature. And yet, the word “nature” here is closer in meaning to the word “convention.” That is, the pagan women have given up sex in the conventional way. What is offensive about homoerotic sex between women, in other words, is that they have given up the supposedly “natural,” passive role. That there is no Hebrew word for “nature” should give us pause before thinking Paul is speaking a word for the ages here. Just like Jewish contemporaries such as Philo, Paul is drawing upon the common Greco-Roman ideas of his day. Are these active and passive gender roles the word of God for the church today?

In addition to all this, there are elements in Paul’s argument that are actually consistent with the sort of change being advocated by proponents of a welcoming, affirming stance. Notice that the argument of Romans has a surprising twist in chapter 11.<sup>126</sup> There, Paul uses the very language with which he has just rebuked Gentile homoeroticism in chapter 1 to describe God’s own action of including the Gentiles within the covenant of grace. Paul observes that God, in God’s great mercy, has chosen to act “contrary to nature” (*para phusin*) to graft these very same Gentiles into God’s original covenant with the Jews.<sup>127</sup> It is to defend God’s activity among the Gentiles, in fact, that Paul constructs the argument of Romans in the first place. His goal as an apostle is to reach

“all” the Gentiles (Rom. 1:5). Yet, “all” people have sinned, including Jews as well as Gentiles (Rom. 1:18; 2:12, 16; 3:9). What we learn as the argument proceeds is that “God has imprisoned *all* in disobedience so that he may be merciful to *all*” (Rom. 11:32). That God shows mercy to the Gentiles, of course, does not mean they are entitled to continue their hedonism. Paul’s ethical advice to them is clear:

Let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires (Rom. 13:13-14).

Thus, they are to shun their former ways of immorality. But again, the immorality, debauchery, and licentiousness against which Paul complains bear little resemblance to a committed, monogamous relationship. By the end of Romans, Paul cites a litany of verses from Hebrew Scripture to make clear his true concern, which is God’s graciousness in dealing with both Jew and Gentile. (See Rom. 15:8-12).

### *Jesus and the fulfillment of the law*

Jesus himself never spoke a direct word about homoerotic activity. Based on this fact, advocates of a welcoming, affirming stance argue that such activity was not one of Jesus’ particular concerns. Still, there are aspects of his teaching and action that give us a basis for a more open stance.

For one thing, Jesus launches a massive reinterpretation of the Jewish law. When he says that he came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it, the meaning here is that Jesus himself is the fulfillment of the law. Therefore, we must look to the gestures of Jesus’ own life, such as his open embrace of outcasts and sinners, in understanding how to read and interpret the law in our own day. It is noteworthy that Jesus placed the admonition in Lev. 19:18 to “love your neighbor as yourself” at the center of his teaching.<sup>128</sup> This same central verse from Leviticus is reiterated by the apostles Paul (Rom. 13:9; Gal 5:14) and James (2:8). Is it really an act of neighbor love to require persons with a same-gender orientation to marry someone of the opposite gender or abstain? What if the tables were turned and a heterosexual person were told he or she must become gay? Would giving such advice count as loving the neighbor “as yourself”?

Jesus taught us that we will know people by their fruits, and that good fruit does not come from a bad tree (Matt. 7:18-20). Therefore, the good fruit of gays and lesbians in committed, exclusive relationships is relevant in judging the merits of their manner of life.

Immediately after pronouncing his teaching on the law in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus came down from the mountain and cleansed a leper (Matt. 8:1-4). This is important, because leprosy is one of the conditions that make a person ritually unclean in the book of Leviticus (chaps. 13-14), the same book in which the two texts proscribing certain homoerotic acts occurs. That Jesus had Leviticus in mind in healing the leper is clear from his instruction to “show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded” (Lev. 14:4, 10). Thus, in

Matthew's Gospel Jesus' first act of healing is aimed at making clean a person whom the prohibitions of Leviticus had declared unclean.

The same such reversal is going on in Jesus' second act of healing in Matthew's Gospel. It, too, may have a connection with Levitical law. In Matt. 8:3-13, a professional Roman commander, a "centurion," comes to Jesus saying, "Lord, my servant (*pais*) is lying home paralyzed, in terrible distress." Literally, the phrase *ho pais mou* should be translated not "my servant" (NRSV), but more literally "the one who is a boy to me." The parallel version in Luke 7 makes it clear that this is not a "son" as some interpretations have it, but a "slave"—*doulos* (Luke 7:2). Not unlike the usage in the American South, a "boy"—both in the Greek (Septuagint) version of the Old Testament and in the common Greek parlance of Jesus' day—was a word for a slave.<sup>129</sup> A slave could be called by the diminutive term, "boy," even after he had reached adulthood. As we know from our previous brief sketch of slavery in Rome, one of the functions a slave could perform for a Roman soldier would be sexual gratification. Thus, this "boy" may have been not only a slave, but more specifically a sex slave. This is not only a possible meaning of the term "boy," but in Greco-Roman society it was the most likely meaning. Indeed, the very word *pais* is the main root of the word "pederasty," which is a term in Greco-Roman society for the practice of having sex with a young man (though not necessarily a minor).<sup>130</sup> In other words, just as the previous healing story pertained to one category of Levitical uncleanness—"leper"—so this one may have to do with another category—a man who has sex with another man. The absolute submission of the slave is attested by the biblical narrative itself, for the centurion says to Jesus, "I say to...my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it" (Matt. 8:9).

It would be over-reaching to claim too much for this story, for we cannot know for sure what the nature of the centurion's relationship was with his slave. Moreover, it would be wrong to claim that Jesus approved of the relationship. But it is also interesting that Jesus does not rebuke the centurion, either for having a slave or for how he treated the slave. Instead, Jesus' focus was on something else altogether. Jesus praised the centurion's faith and used it as an object lesson for the ways of the "Kingdom." He tells those assembled, first, that in all of Israel he has not found such faith as exhibited by this Gentile soldier. He then pronounced an eschatological, end-time vision of Gentile inclusion into God's family: "I tell you, many will come from east and west [i.e., Gentiles] and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Then, finally, in response to the centurion's faith, Jesus healed the boy.

References such as these show us there is more going on in the New Testament than traditional exegesis sometimes allows. Another case is Jesus' reference in Matt. 19:12 to "*eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others*." Given what we now know about the practice of castrating slave boys, Jesus seems to be alluding to those who were victims of the homoerotic practices of the Romans.<sup>131</sup> The statement is made to the disciples, who in response to Jesus strict teaching on divorce (see Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10: 2-12), begin to muse aloud that if divorce violates God's will, then it would be better not to marry. To this Jesus gives the following strange response:

Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can (Matt. 19:11-12).

Why all of a sudden this reference to eunuchs? First, the thought of being a eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom constitutes another modification of Levitical law. According to Leviticus, a eunuch was not permitted to enter the religious assembly (Lev. 21:18-20; cf. 22:24). Yet here Jesus seems to be invoking the promise of the prophet Isaiah, given to Israel during the Exile, that even Israel's eunuchs would be given a future that is "better than sons and daughters" (Isa. 56:3-5). It is no accident that the Ethiopian eunuch, encountered by Philip in Acts, was reading the prophet Isaiah, where the promise to eunuchs occurs (Acts 8:26-39). He is reading but he does not understand. It just so happens he had turned to a passage that the church took to prophesy Jesus' death (Isa. 53:7-8), and Philip proclaims to him the gospel concerning Jesus. To this the eunuch responds, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:36). In light of what God is doing in Jesus Christ, nothing—not even the Levitical prohibition—is enough to exclude this eunuch.

Second, the reference is interesting because begetting and giving birth to children was a *mitzvah*, a commandment in Judaism. Thus, for Jesus to speak in this cryptic way of "making oneself a eunuch" for the sake of God's reign is quite astonishing. It is even more astonishing since, as mentioned already, to be a eunuch is to carry the stigma of being one who has sex with men. Again, the point is not that Jesus is endorsing homoerotic activity. The point is that Jesus includes those who stand under the stigma of homoeroticism as part of that great reversal brought about by God's reign, in which sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes receive salvation before those who think themselves righteous (Matt. 21:31).<sup>132</sup>

### *Acts 10—15*

In the 1990s, some Christians—among them New Testament scholars Luke Timothy Johnson and Jeffrey Sikers—began to ask whether the movement of the Holy Spirit among gay and lesbian people was analogous to the early church's experience of Gentiles among whom God was performing "signs and wonders."<sup>133</sup> The earliest Jewish Christians had assumed that if Gentiles were to enter the fellowship of the church, they could do so only by first becoming Jews, i.e., by observing the Jewish laws concerning circumcision, dietary requirements, and so forth. This assumption was based on texts such as Gen. 17:9-14, which demands circumcision of all males, including foreigners. From their experience of Gentile conversion, Peter and Paul came to a different conclusion. Gentiles were permitted to enter the church as Gentiles, although they were expected to put aside immorality.

Critics have countered that there is no analogy between being a Gentile, which is involuntary, and homoerotic practice, which one chooses to engage in voluntarily. Critics have also countered that listening to the Spirit never contradicts the plain meaning of Scripture. In response, those who seek to be both welcoming and affirming point out that the proper analogy is not one of voluntary

or involuntary behavior, but one of the presence of the Spirit. Moreover, they reply that Gentile inclusion required the church to countermand the plain meaning of the circumcision texts. Covenantal love between committed gays and lesbians, on this view, has been kindled by the same Spirit that inaugurated the Gentile mission.

## 2. Marriage

Speaking of marriage as an “order of creation” suggests there is only one divinely ordained structure for the family. The “orders of creation” thinking also posits a single divinely sanctioned form of government, or of the political economy that persists throughout time. A mere glance at biblical as well as secular history shows this claim to be invalid. Structures of government and the economy have changed dramatically through the ages. Does one unalterable “order” hold true for structures of marriage and family?

In fact, the organization of marriage and family life has varied significantly over time. Ancient kinship systems and extended families were not configured in the same way as the modern “nuclear” family.<sup>134</sup> Nor has the Christian tradition always held up marriage and family life as the highest norm. To the contrary, up until the Reformation, celibacy was recommended for the most devout, and it is still required for priests in the Roman Church and bishops in Eastern Orthodoxy. All of this underscores how misleading and problematic is the talk of so-called divinely sanctioned “orders.” It is more helpful to speak of a dynamic divine “ordering.”

What is most objectionable is not the distortion of history brought about by this language, but the misrepresentation of the basic teaching of the gospel. The language of “orders of creation” poses a false separation between what God *has done* creating the world and what God *is doing* in the work of redemption.

## 3. Natural law

The argument from “nature” appears nowhere in the biblical text itself. In fact, there is not even a word for “nature” in the Hebrew language. Christians should base their theology not upon “nature,” but upon the creative and redemptive power of God.

Not only do general arguments from nature fail, but so do arguments based on so-called “gender complementarity” and human anatomy. Using the concept of “gender complementarity” to interpret Scripture is reading into the Bible something that is not there. In standard histories of sexuality, pre-modern societies are characterized as thinking in terms of gender hierarchy, not gender complementarity. One influential historian has argued that the idea of complementarity did not emerge until the 18th century and did not come to fruition until 19th-century Romanticism.<sup>135</sup> In short, the notion of gender complementarity is a modern, not a biblical, concept.

Karl Barth’s exegesis of the opening chapters of Genesis equates gender complementarity with the “image of God.” Such reasoning is unconvincing. First, in Gen. 1:27 the phrase “male and female” underscores not complementarity, but the fact that God’s creative blessing belongs to

everyone. Consider the way the verse is constructed both grammatically and structurally, as made clear in Robert Alter’s translation:

And God created *the human* in his image,  
in the image of God He created *him*,  
*male and female* He created *them* (Gen. 1:27).<sup>136</sup>

In fact, the synonymous parallelism of the Hebrew (“in the image of God He created him/male and female he created them”) helps demonstrate that something is at stake other than a fixed order of gender complementarity. Since the phrase “male and female” sits in apposition to the phrase “in the image of God,” the point is not sexual anatomy, but the common character of the image—i.e., it belongs to *both* male *and* female.<sup>137</sup> This is underscored by the usage of the Hebrew *’adam* in 1:26 and 27, which is best translated not abstractly as “humankind” (NRSV), but more concretely as “a human” or “an earth-creature.” In other words, the single human being God creates in the beginning is a microcosm for all human beings. The love and blessing of God that applies to one applies to all. Regardless of gender—and, it needs to be added, regardless of gender orientation—all are creatures of God.

Second, the gender complementarity that Barth is advocating runs the risk of being understood in a merely sexual way, with the result that single people, including Jesus himself, would somehow not be able adequately to express the image without a partner of the opposite sex. Third, Barth’s exegesis stands in tension with an insight that he himself was instrumental in underscoring for the church, namely, that the image of God in the New Testament is defined Christ-centrally. In 2 Cor. 4:4 and Col. 1:15, we are told the place we look to learn about God’s image is Jesus Christ himself, who is the true image of God. If Jesus alone can be the image of God, then gender complementarity is not definitive or constitutive.

Similar problems attend arguments that there is something about heterosexual sex acts—or about male and female genitalia in union with one another—that make them especially suitable to symbolize God’s grace toward human beings in a way that same-gender sex acts are not.<sup>138</sup> This focus on body parts for the sake of body parts implies that every heterosexual union of body parts is uniquely able to symbolize God’s grace. We need only think of the examples of rape and incest to see that this is a false argument. People who use this argument counter that rape is wrong because of an *absence* of “intent” and “commitment.” Yet if this is so, then it is not clear why the *presence* of “intent” and “commitment” on the part of same-gender couples would not qualify as grace-filled expressions of love.

We can also demonstrate the inapplicability of the complementarity and anatomy arguments by looking at the text of Leviticus. Most of the passages that use the standard priestly phrase “male and female” speak neither of sexual intercourse nor of sexual anatomy. As is the case in the first biblical usage of the phrase “male and female” (Gen. 1:17), all the references in Leviticus have the sense of “*both* male and female” (Lev. 3:1, 6; 12:7; 15:33; 25:6, 44; 27:5-7). To be sure, the natural fecundity of “male and female” is always assumed in Scripture, and this is why Noah must stock the ark with two of every animal “to keep them alive with you” (Gen. 6:19). Still, affirming

the necessity of procreation for the sustenance of life is not the same thing as valorizing the “mechanics” of human sexual anatomy and faulting gays and lesbians because their body parts are somehow wrong, or because their unions cannot produce progeny.

If anything, the consistent polemic in the Old Testament against the phallic symbols of the fertility cult should lead us to a very different mode of reasoning. The polemic against the fertility cult should assure us there is no theology of sexual anatomy or sanctioned cult of fertility in the Bible.

#### **4. Jewish and Christian moral tradition**

Proponents of welcoming, affirming postures argue that the prohibitionist appeal to a monolithic “2,000 years of Christian history” will not stand the test of scrutiny. The Western moral tradition is neither as uniformly anti-gay nor as supportive of “middle class” morality as these arguments would lead us to believe.

Regarding how the tradition has regarded same-gender eroticism, welcoming and affirming types contend, in the first place, that the prohibition against the crime of sodomy in the West was based on a misreading of Gen. 19, which is a story condemning rape and the failure to extend hospitality to strangers, not homoeroticism in general. Since the tradition concerning sodomy is based on a false exegetical foundation, Christians with a high regard for Scripture should be the first to discard it.

Second, it is wrong to invoke sodomy as a peculiar prohibition against gays and lesbians. Historically speaking, the term sodomy was never limited to homoerotic acts, but also included sexual acts between a man and a woman that were deemed to be “unnatural,” such as oral sex. Since studies indicate that the vast majority of Americans have experienced oral sex, it is clear that sodomy is today as much a heterosexual as a homoerotic practice.<sup>139</sup>

Third, the morality of this so-called “moral” tradition is by no means clear. Even if one is opposed in principle to homoerotic acts, one should still be shocked by the way people engaging in those acts have been turned into scapegoats throughout Western history. Historians have observed that the persecution against “sodomites” in early modern Europe tended to be linked with a similar persecution of Jews.<sup>140</sup> To that extent, the consignment of gay men along with Jews to the gas chambers by the Nazis follows a typical European pattern. In addition, the punishment of sodomy was often extraordinarily cruel. One notorious incident is the way Balboa, the Spanish conquistador and explorer, had his dogs hunt down and dismember native peoples in Peru who had engaged in homoerotic practice.<sup>141</sup> In Europe itself, the preferred method of execution for “sodomites” was burning at the stake, although in Venice if a clergyman was convicted of sodomy, the punishment was being starved to death in a cage hung in St. Mark’s Square.

Fourth, despite this display of cruelty, some within the Jewish and Christian traditions have shown more flexibility concerning homoeroticism than prohibitionists have admitted. From the Renaissance to the early 20th century, there is significant evidence of Europeans accepting

romantic relationships between women.<sup>142</sup> Some have speculated that this is because what happens between women was not threatening to a male-centered view of sexuality. The acceptance of relationships between men has had a more volatile and at times even mysterious history. Renaissance Florence provides a good example of the volatility, as years of antipathy and persecution of “sodomites” alternated with years of benign tolerance.<sup>143</sup> Such famous Florentines as Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci practiced homoeroticism. A more mysterious case is the evidence of same-gender unions in the late medieval period. John Boswell has made famous the existence of “brotherly unions” that were sanctioned and blessed by the church.<sup>144</sup> His claim that these unions were similar to marriage has been met with skepticism by other historians. But the more recent work of historian Alan Bray—himself an early critic of Boswell—has revitalized the notion that certain same-gender relationships were accepted prior to the modern era.<sup>145</sup> His principal evidence is memorial tombs in Great Britain in which men were buried together, having been openly recognized by their peers as joined in love. He then connects this evidence to similar evidence for the acceptance of love between women. To the perennial question whether these bygone couples actually engaged in acts of sexual intercourse, Bray counters that this is the wrong question. A better question is to ask ourselves why our culture tends to reduce affection to genital sex. Evidence suggests that our forebears allowed for a wider range of acceptable forms of same-gender affection.

Finally, the prohibitionist argument trades upon stereotypes about gay promiscuity. The problem with this argument is that, like much of the prohibitionist case, it is circular. On the one hand, gays and lesbians are not allowed any legitimate arena of sexual expression by the church; and then, on the other hand, they are roundly blamed for acting out the narrative of deviance that has been assigned them. For that matter, they are blamed any time their commitments are expressed sexually, even if this occurs in contexts analogous to the covenant of marriage. If the prohibitionist claim is that sex should be confined to marriage, welcoming and affirming advocates ask why not create a marriage, or marriage-like context in which gay and lesbian relationships can be blessed? As a counterweight to prohibitionist stories about gay unfaithfulness, the truth is that significant numbers of gays and lesbians have demonstrated their committed faithfulness, and some are asking that their faithfulness be honored in the church and validated in the laws of the civil polity. Gay marriage is now permitted in the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Spain, and the State of Massachusetts. Many more jurisdictions permit marriage-like substitutes. The “civil union” pioneered in Vermont is a notable example.<sup>146</sup> Regarding gay fidelity, since gay marriage was introduced in the Netherlands, the divorce rate for gays and lesbians has not exceeded that of heterosexual couples.

Prohibitionists claim that the burden of proof rests upon those who would change the church’s teaching. However, once a plausible case has been made for the covenantal character of committed same-gender relationships, say welcoming and affirming advocates, then the burden of proof should shift back to those who would oppose them. If it is appropriate to respect the moral tradition of the past, it is also important to recognize the moral faithfulness of gays and lesbians in the present.

### **Suggested reading**

Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective*, trans. Kirsi Stjerna. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998.

Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.

Choon-Leong Seow, ed., *Homosexuality and Christian Community*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

## VIEWPOINT FIVE: CELEBRATION

This position, which calls for the celebration of gay and lesbian relationships, is the most direct counterpoint to the prohibitionist viewpoint. In some ways, it is prohibitionism's polar opposite, though at its best this position strives to be something more than merely a rebuttal. Whereas prohibitionists see nothing at all to "celebrate" in being gay, the advocates of this position argue that God wants gays and lesbians to celebrate the love they have found in their committed relationships, just as married couples do. Most married couples would consider it degrading to have their relationships reduced to nothing more than a series of sex acts. The same is true of gay and lesbian couples, many of whom resent the fixation by prohibitionists upon genitalia and types of sex acts.

The gay Roman Catholic priest, James Alison, provides a powerful statement of the celebrationist position. Recounting the suicidal feelings he felt as a gay adolescent, Alison tells of how the Catholic faith helped him discover what it means "to be rejoiced in as being gay."<sup>147</sup> Alison discovered not only the love of God, but the profound fact that God actually "likes us."<sup>148</sup> God enjoys us and wants to have fellowship with us.

This affirmation goes beyond the accommodation of the pastoral position. It argues that committed gay and lesbian relationships should be viewed not just as the lesser-of-the-evils, but as a positive good. In addition, celebrationists appreciate the good intentions of the justice position, but they often argue that it is time for gays and lesbians to throw off the mantle of being an oppressed minority. As Andrew Sullivan passionately insists, it is time for gays and lesbians, who have many gifts and contribute much to church and society, to take control of their own destinies.

In doing this, some lesbians have found that their experience differs from that of gay men. Lesbians not only have to overcome the church's prejudice against gay people in general; they must also contend with historic efforts in both church and society to keep women and women's desires under control. As one theologian has observed, every openly lesbian woman has had to affirm her own sexuality as being independent of men.<sup>149</sup> She has also had to say "no," almost by definition, to traditional gender roles. In addition, it is not unusual for a lesbian to discover her sexual identity later in life—sometimes after having established herself as a reproductive female. In other words, lesbian sexuality can be seen as constituting a double threat to the traditional male leadership of the church, and for that reason the power dynamics play themselves out in ways that are unique.

The hallmark of the celebrationist position is the admonition that gay and lesbian people need to put aside the self-loathing that society has taught them to feel. The fact is, for many gay and lesbian people the desire for a partner of the same sex is an enduring feature of their identity. And, as is the case with heterosexual marriage, what most homosexual people desire is not just the sex act, but a deep and lasting relationship with another person. If this is true, then for the church to tell a person with an exclusively same-gender orientation that he or she should abstain or become heterosexual is not only misguided, but is profoundly cruel and a denial of their basic humanity.

Therefore, according to celebrationist thinking, gay and lesbian people must learn not only to accept their sexual orientation, but to embrace and affirm it.

Advocates of this position are well aware that, for some in the church, it is not easy to contemplate “celebrating” the relationships of gay and lesbian people, even if those relationships are exclusive and committed. Yet, we easily celebrate the weddings, anniversaries, and other turning points in the lives of men and women who give themselves to each other in lifelong commitments. So why should it be any different with gay and lesbian couples? When gay and lesbian persons order their sexual lives faithfully through exclusive, committed, monogamous relationships, then the church’s message that gays and lesbians should repent or feel ashamed is out of place. What is needed theologically is a decisive shift in emphasis toward teachings and structures of redemption, toward offering gay and lesbian people the same gospel hope that the church offers to heterosexual people.

## **Creation**

For this position, sexuality should be celebrated as God’s good gift. The long-standing denigration of pleasure in the Christian tradition needs to be reframed. Sexuality is not something to be ashamed of, and neither is one’s sexual orientation. The statement of ethics drafted by the More Light Presbyterians puts it this way:

Sexuality is God’s amazing, life-enhancing gift that includes genital sex but refers more broadly to our capacity and longing for intimate connection and mutually pleasurable, mutually respectful touch. Throughout our lives we humans seek physical, emotional, and spiritual embrace of others. Our desire and energy for bonding is to be used responsibly to communicate love, respect, and tender regard. This power may also be misused to harm, control, or exploit.<sup>150</sup>

A key biblical conviction for celebrationists is God’s declaration that all things have been created “good” (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). This includes the goodness of our embodied, sexual existence. Celebrationists are talking here about an orientation that is expressed consensually between responsible, non-related adults. They are not endorsing pedophilia or incest or other demonstrably harmful or exploitative forms of behavior. The claim here is that same-gender sexual orientation is neither a perversion (Viewpoint One) nor a tragedy (Viewpoints Two and Three), but an integral feature of a person’s identity. If so, then this opens the door to recognizing that the desire to find a loving partner is something deeply and abidingly human.

In thinking about the reality of sexual orientation, most celebrationists are *essentialists*. They believe that people experience sexual orientation as a “given” rather than something they choose. After all, why would someone choose to be gay and thus become the recipient of so much anti-gay scorn? There are persons with same-gender desire in all cultures, suggesting that such desire comes from somewhere other than custom and conditioning. Whether this is the case because of biology or because of a combination of other factors is not clear. But for essentialists, being gay or lesbian is not a simple choice, but a natural fact of life.

But how do celebrationists counter the claim of prohibitionists that same-sex coupling somehow violates “nature”? Celebrationists point out that same-sex coupling is a straightforward fact of natural life. That some animals engage in same-sex sexual activity has been amply documented in scientific literature. Biologist Bruce Bagemihl, in the book *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*, sets forth evidence that some 471 animal species exhibit various forms of same-sex sexuality, including in some cases mating for life.<sup>151</sup> Same-sex mating is evidenced in primate species closely connected to us, such as apes and chimpanzees, as well as in dolphins and other mammals, not to mention myriad species of birds. If same-sex mating patterns are so abundantly manifest in the animal world, celebrationists insist, then arguments from “nature” lose their credibility.

### **Reconciliation in Christ**

Recall that prohibitionists call upon gays and lesbians to repent of same-gender desire, as well as sexual activity. Celebrationists encourage gays and lesbians not to listen to these condemnations. The More Light Presbyterian ethical statement puts it this way:

To speak a word of hope and communicate the good news of the Gospel, [we] boldly promote an ethic of sexual justice that affirms the goodness of sexuality, honors sexual diversity, respect for sexual minorities, and attends to the socio-political as well as personal dimensions of sexual injustice, abuse, and exploitation. In particular, we maintain that sexuality is an indispensable component of our humanity and vital to spiritual integrity and well-being. Each person, regardless of gender, sexual orientation or bodily condition has a moral right to love and be loved, as well as a responsibility to express his or her sexuality in ways genuinely respectful of self and others.<sup>152</sup>

The sin of which gays and lesbians need to repent, in other words, is the powerful self-loathing that society has taught them to feel about themselves. Psychiatrists have called this self-loathing “internalized homophobia,” meaning that the fears and renunciations of society have been inscribed upon the psyches of gays and lesbians themselves.

Hence, for gays and lesbians reconciliation means coming to grips with the true goodness of sexuality and especially the goodness of one’s same-gender orientation. The experience of “coming out” to oneself and to others is a way of saying “yes” to the God-givenness of one’s sexual orientation and the God-givenness of the diversity of creation itself. If categorical prohibition locates sin in the perverse deeds of gays and lesbians, then celebrationists locate it in the way society persecutes, labels, and rejects gay and lesbian people. This rejection is all the worse for being based on what celebrationists are convinced is a misunderstanding of the biblical and scientific evidence.

Some of the earliest examples of the celebrationist position emphasized the character of God as erotic power.<sup>153</sup> On the one hand, there are biblical images of God loving God’s people with an intimate, passionate love. Many Christian saints have incorporated erotic imagery into their

spirituality. On the other hand, Scripture does not reduce or equate God with erotic energy. Indeed, there is quite a polemic in Scripture against such an equation.

Christian celebrationists, though they underscore sexuality as God's good gift, also acknowledge the need to confess when this good gift is abused and to take responsibility for the healing and restoration of relationships. Celebrationists often find common cause with advocates for justice and share with justice advocates a desire to join in movements of equality and fairness for all of God's people. Celebrationists often join feminists in pointing out the patriarchal assumptions that fuel arguments both for women's subordination and prohibition of same-gender relationships.

Regarding fairness for themselves, many gay and lesbian celebrationists have recently sought to move beyond understanding themselves as a persecuted minority. They no longer wish to acquiesce in the definitions society assigns to them, preferring instead to define who they are by their own lights. This latter insight has played an important role in certain gay and lesbian liberationist movements. Some of these have adopted a politics of protest, especially to raise consciousness about HIV/AIDS and similar issues.<sup>154</sup> Whether adopting a politics of protest or of positive engagement with society, almost all the representatives of this viewpoint seek the deliverance of gay and lesbian people from the oppression of a homophobic society, a society that to them is as often patronizing as it is punitive. A case in point is the condescending view that a same-gender orientation is a "tragedy."

As for the ordination question, celebrationists agree with justice advocates that ordination should be open to all gays and lesbians who have gifts for ministry. Regarding committed, same-sex unions, Christian celebrationists argue that this is a positive societal good and not just, as in Viewpoint Three, an accommodation to sin.

### **Redemption in the Spirit**

To be redeemed, for celebrationists, is to enter into the joy of celebrating one's God-given gay or lesbian identity and to be delivered from the unjust condemnation of an anti-gay society. In calling anti-gay condemnations "unjust," some celebrationists have taken pains not to turn the condemnation back upon their accusers. In his book, *Faith Beyond Resentment*, gay Roman Catholic theologian James Alison provides an account of how grace enabled him not to resent the mistreatment he endured at the hands of the church. Many celebrationists are bold to claim that the fidelity gay and lesbian persons show to the church even in the midst of persecution constitutes a transformative witness to the gospel.

Ethical guidance for celebrationists focuses on the nurturing of sexual relationships that are responsible, non-coercive, and non-abusive. Like the pastoral accommodation approach, celebrationists are realistic in acknowledging that, even if gay marriage were an option, some gay and lesbian people would live together as couples outside the bonds of marriage. Celebrationists insist that many couples who live together—gay and straight—have formed these relationships in Christian integrity. Examples put forward include not only committed same-gender couples, but

elderly opposite-gender couples for whom marriage would work an economic hardship. Celebrationists also point out that living within the covenant of marriage does not in itself guarantee that a relationship is just or fair.<sup>155</sup>

The More Light Presbyterians sum up their ethical teaching as follows: “Christian sexual ethics marked by covenantal fidelity shall be the standard for all Presbyterians, irrespective of sexual orientation.” The standard is further elaborated as one of “commitment, fidelity, and integrity”:

An ethic grounded in love of God and neighbor as one’s whole self will value the bodily integrity of every person and honor the variety of ways in which people live sexually whole, morally responsible, and spiritually faithful lives. This ethic focuses on things that matter, including the dignity and worth of every person, the right to accurate knowledge about human sexuality, a single ethical standard for intimate relations, and the recognition that *commitment*, *fidelity*, and *integrity* are fundamental to all relationships of moral substance. (Emphasis added)

### **Summary and reflection**

One of the strengths of the celebrationist viewpoint is that tapping into the core biblical belief that creation is good provides balance to the tendency of some prohibitionists to turn sexuality into something “dirty.” This is just one example of how the “no” uttered by the law can become separated from the “yes” declared by the gospel. The celebrationist position insists that the pendulum must swing back toward God’s overriding, gracious “yes.” Divine judgment is a part of the gospel, to be sure, but God’s judgment is not the same thing as God’s ultimate condemnation. Parents may issue a judgment that their children’s behavior has gone astray; but a good parent does not let judgment and discipline come across as condemnation. Similarly, God’s judgment reveals the deficiencies in who we are, but despite being under the judgment of God, “there is... now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

The celebrationists echo the prohibitionist tendency to focus more upon creation than redemption. Prohibitionists take what they regard as the “fact” of gender complementarity in creation and make that normative for what it means to live a redeemed life. Similarly, celebrationists take what they believe to be a particular “fact” of creation—sexual orientation—and make that normative for a redemptive Christian ethics. In other words, because one cannot help one’s sexual orientation, one must be entitled to celebrate it.

Critics wonder whether, in transgressing traditional gender categories, celebrationists go too far. It is one thing to argue that gay and lesbian relationships can exhibit ethical standards that are the functional equivalent of “fidelity and chastity”; it is quite another thing to reject those standards outright. For instance, not all celebrationists have included monogamy among the ethical norms for sexuality. The More Light Presbyterians statement speaks of “commitment, fidelity, and integrity,” but it draws short of using the words “exclusive,” “permanent,” “monogamous,” or “not promiscuous.” One response often made to this charge is that gays have learned things about loving one another without the external constraint of monogamy. Another response to this charge

is that it is better to craft a single standard for all and better to have one that is honest rather than hypocritical. Many wonder, however, whether it would be appropriate for the church to jettison monogamy as an ideal.

Some worry that the very language of “celebration” tends to romanticize sexuality. This sometimes leads advocates of the other viewpoints to wonder, rightly or wrongly, whether the umbrella set up by celebrationists is too broad. Why should the church modify its standards to conform to those of a culture that operates by a different set of values? If the church were to accommodate, or perhaps even affirm, same-gender relationships, why should it give its blessing to unions that are anything less than exclusive, monogamous, and intended to be for life? If there is to be a single standard for all, then why is the standard not monogamy?

### **Suggested reading**

James Alison, *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay*. London: Longman, Dartman, and Todd, 2001.

Marvin M. Ellison, *Same-sex Marriage? A Christian Ethical Analysis*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2004.

Carter Heyward, *Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality, and Liberation*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1984.

“More Light on Sexual Ethics.” Adopted by More Light Presbyterians Board, 1999.

Michael Vasey, *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995.

## VIEWPOINT SIX: LIBERATION

Liberation theology is a movement that had its literary origins in 1972 with the work of the Peruvian Roman Catholic theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez.<sup>156</sup> Its deeper origins are in the radical Latin American social movements of the 1950s and 1960s, including the creation of ecclesial base communities from which the church was called to engage in the critical transformation of society.<sup>157</sup> This approach to theology is rooted in political engagement, taking up a stance from the social and political margins. It argues that the God of biblical religion judges the proud and exalted in order to carry out what Gutiérrez has called a “preferential option for the poor.” This does not mean that God cares only for the poor. Rather, liberationists argue that Christian faith is best understood through the eyes of the suffering, the outcast, and the oppressed.

Liberation theology shares many of the concerns of the legitimization position (Viewpoint Four) previously considered. Both positions are committed to seeing biblical justice realized. Both understand justice as requiring a special effort to care for persons who have been disenfranchised. Both long for a world in which our differences need not make a difference, nor divide people needlessly. Nevertheless, the two positions are not the same. Liberationists worry that some liberal versions of justice are satisfied with mere “progress,” rather than striving for more fundamental, systemic change. In particular, many liberation theologians have found inspiration in Marxist class analysis and sympathize with its critique of the capitalist economic system.<sup>158</sup> Even though Marxism is no longer as potent a political force (following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990), it would be a mistake to think that the category of economic class has ceased to play a role in contemporary social analysis.<sup>159</sup> Especially regarding issues of marriage and family, there are scholars who argue that the family has been reduced to an engine of consumption, which works to exploit all its members, and especially women.<sup>160</sup>

Given its penchant for social analysis, liberation theology insists that theological work must be contextual, rooted in the real struggles of oppressed peoples. For this reason, liberation theology has taken on a different complexion in each of the Latin American countries from which it originally sprang. In addition, since its beginnings many decades ago, liberation theology has inspired other emancipatory movements throughout the world. These include: feminist, womanist, and Mujerista theologies; black theologies in the United States; anti-apartheid theologies in South Africa; and various Asian liberation theologies, including Minjung theologies in Korea.

It is not surprising, then, that a liberationist movement has been emerging that focuses on the oppression of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons.<sup>161</sup> This gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender (GLBT) liberationist movement is marked by a significant diversity that is not easy to capture in a brief summary. As one might expect, this particular liberationist stance shares certain concerns with celebrationism (Viewpoint Five). Among these is the desire to remove the stigma from GLBT people that has been imposed on them by the non-affirming positions. However, liberationism also differs from celebrationism in significant ways.

First, whereas celebrationists tend to be *essentialists* in their views concerning same-gender sexual desire, liberationists, for the most part, are *social constructionists*. They emphasize that no

matter what the biological basis of sexuality, same-gender sexual orientation is culturally conditioned and has varied widely in different times and places.<sup>162</sup> Greek pederasty (sexual relations between adult male teachers and their male students) differs from female romantic friendship in 19th-century Europe.<sup>163</sup> The occasional, but deep, same-gender friendships of Eleanor Roosevelt or Abraham Lincoln are very different from same-gender acts performed as a rite of passage to adulthood among the tribes of New Guinea.<sup>164</sup> This has led liberationists to emphasize the complexity of gender formation. Whereas celebrationists are more concerned with validating a particular gender identity, liberationists are more concerned with protecting a range of gender difference. If the slogan of celebrationism is “Gay is good,” then one of the slogans of liberationism is “Gay is not all there is.” Liberationists are concerned to move beyond the binary oppositions of “straight/gay,” or “heterosexual/homosexual.” For liberationists, gender is a variable reality that does not fit neatly into oppositional categories.

Second, the liberationist emphasis on culture is combined with recognition of new scientific insights into the complexities of gender formation in gender-varied persons.<sup>165</sup> We know that at least one in a thousand infants are born with physical anatomy that cannot be clearly designated male or female.<sup>166</sup> Often, these infants are arbitrarily assigned a gender by parents or medical professionals. We know, too, that some people are born genetically male, but are anatomically female, or vice versa.<sup>167</sup> A different type of phenomenon, but one that also matters to liberationists, is that of cross-dressers, or transvestites. These are heterosexual men who derive sexual pleasure from wearing women’s clothing. One of the goals of the liberationist perspective is to promote compassion and justice for all individuals who struggle with gender issues.

Third, liberationists usually employ a more complex understanding of power than celebrationists. Celebrationists have tended to accept what is known as the “repressive hypothesis.” This is the idea that religious society operates to repress natural human sexual drives that are essential and normal. The goal of celebrationists is to eliminate these repressive mechanisms to allow people’s true sexuality to emerge and receive affirmation. Liberationists are equally committed to challenging societal control of gender-varied persons. Yet they tend to regard the repressive hypothesis as much too simple. Informed by the work of the French theorist Michel Foucault, liberationists argue that sexuality has not so much been repressed by society as it has been transformed into something constantly being investigated. Foucault argues that in pre-modern society sex did not occupy center stage the way it does today. Instead, the constant attention focused on sex by clergy, physicians, psychiatrists, and police has created an “incitement” to talk or reflect upon sex all the time.<sup>168</sup> Liberationists are less concerned with celebrating sexuality as such and more concerned to point out how society has assigned pariah roles to gays and lesbians in a drama not of their own choosing. Moreover, liberationists contend that the categories of “gay” and “lesbian” do not exhaust the gender identities that actually exist. This is one reason that liberationists have also championed the concerns of bisexual and transgender people. Within the realm of legal scholarship, they have been concerned that the strategy of appealing to the fixed nature of sexual orientation in order to gain legal rights for gay people may have the unwanted side effect of causing society to look upon gender variable persons with pity, rather than respecting the integrity of their life choices.<sup>169</sup>

Because various gay liberationist movements have been so significantly influenced by recent gender theory, it is necessary to give a brief survey of some of the most important texts upon which they rely. First and foremost is the one just alluded to: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3 vols. (1976, 1984). One of Foucault's chief insights is that power operates in complex, invisible, and sometimes contradictory ways. Power is at work in the dominant discourse of a society—as in, for example, ways of conceiving marriage. However, power also operates through subtle and often hidden resistance to the dominant discourse of a society. One reason that same-gender desire looks different in different times and places is that hidden social forces cause it to emerge in unique ways in various contexts. Like everything else, sexuality is a product of power relationships that pervade the religious, educational, medical, and other spheres in which our lives are lived. It is not merely that power regulates the way we think about our bodies; power actually inscribes itself on our bodies and gives them their gendered features in ways that are quite culturally specific. The way a man carries himself, the way a woman walks, or the way we regard one another's bodies are culturally inscribed.

Indeed, the definition and control of bodies—in medicine, the prison system, religion, and so forth—is a central preoccupation of all of Foucault's work. Although Foucault himself does not mention this, his analysis enables those of us in the church to see things we might not otherwise see. For example, a number of the controversies that have wracked American Christendom since the nineteenth century have one thing in common. From slavery and civil rights, to controversies over the ordination of women, and now the ordination of gays and lesbians—all of these are connected with how society conceives and controls the bodies of marginalized groups.

Of course, a major aspect of bodily existence is sexuality. Foucault gives four examples of how power has operated to regulate sexuality in modernity: conceiving women's bodies as imbued with sexuality; turning children's sexuality into a matter of sex education; placing procreative sex and the middle class family at the center of modern society; and defining atypical sexual expression as a matter for psychiatric or medical intervention. Within this matrix of issues, Foucault observed that, in the 19th century, modern society shifted from approaching homoeroticism as a certain type of behavior to treating it as the domain of a certain type of person—the “homosexual.”

A second major text is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990).<sup>170</sup> The term “epistemology” pertains to how we know what we know. In this case, the issue is what being in the “closet” allows or does not allow one to know about a person. In one sense, the “closet” is the most important, yet frequently the most unacknowledged, aspect of the church's debates over ordination. What is really at issue, say liberationists, in the 1978 Statement and the subsequent enactment of G-6.0106b, is not so much gay or lesbian life per se, but rather how to respond to gays or lesbians who dare to come out of the closet. As every gay person knows all too well, coming out of the closet can bring punitive repercussions, while remaining in the closet can bring its own internal sorts of punishment. Dorothy A. Austin, an Episcopal priest, has written about the anguish associated with being in the closet in the church:

If my whole life is a secret and its secrecy a source of unremitting shame; if what lies at the heart of who I am is a story I cannot utter aloud because I might lose my job, lose the

respect of my colleagues, lose my orders as a Christian priest, lose my family, lose my mental stability, maybe even lose my life for telling the truth, then let me lose this life. Let it die and be buried without 'me,' that 'I' might rise to a more livable life.<sup>171</sup>

Sedgwick points out that even if a gay or lesbian person has come out of the closet in a general sense, every such person still remains in the closet, at least with respect to someone. The issue arises with each new person one meets: a new boss, a new congregation, negotiating life in a new town. Because society assumes that people are naturally heterosexual, the gay or lesbian person is faced with the question of to whom his or her identity will be revealed, and from whom must that identity strategically remain hidden.

Sedgwick's discussion converges upon the following insight: in our culture, gay sexuality is precisely constituted *as* secrecy. What many in society want is for gay and lesbian people to remain hidden; and what inflames the passions of anti-gay sentiment is precisely the act of uncovering that secret, of coming out, of refusing to adhere to the secrecy many in society are keen to impose. It is for this very reason that gay sexuality is spoken of as the "love that dare not speak its name."<sup>172</sup>

Another one of Sedgwick's main objectives is to demonstrate that the ways we talk about being gay or lesbian, and especially the binary categorizations we employ, are internally incoherent. The incoherence she perceives has two dimensions. The first pertains to the process by which a person is designated as being gay or straight, homosexual or heterosexual. This process trades on two conflicting modes of discourse. One form of identification occurs through a "minoritizing" discourse, which treats being gay or lesbian as an essential identity that sets one apart from the majority population. One example of this (mine, not Sedgwick's) is that, in the 1980s, the Centers for Disease Control tried to assure the public that HIV/AIDS was a condition that did not affect the general population.<sup>173</sup> The subtle message was that HIV/AIDS was a problem for "them," not "us." In addition to this minoritizing discourse, Sedgwick also points to a "universalizing" discourse that treats sexual desire as though it existed for everyone along a continuum. Rather than some people being gay and others straight, the universalizing discourse assumes that everyone may experience some measure of same-gender or opposite-gender desire in relative degrees at different times.<sup>174</sup>

The second incoherence Sedgwick identifies regards the way society conceives sexual desire according to gender categories. One vocabulary adopts a separatist approach, says Sedgwick, while the other uses a transitive way of speaking. On the one hand, the separatist vocabulary deals in the classic oppositions of gay/straight or male/female. On the other hand, the transitive vocabulary treats gender identity as more fluid and harder to pin down. We speak of a man getting in touch with his feminine side. If gender identity is fluid, Sedgwick asks, then why should sexual object choice be the defining feature of one's sexuality? In Greco-Roman society, for instance, the gender of one's sexual partner was only one of many ways to categorize sexual conduct. The net result is that we act as though we know what we are talking about when we call someone gay or lesbian, but the sexuality of a given person may not fit our culturally created categories. One result is that people face a "double bind" when it comes to living out society's gender expectations. For

example, a woman may feel she has to adopt stereotypical male traits to succeed in a particular line of work. Yet if she does so, she may experience the backlash of those who wonder whether she is a lesbian.<sup>175</sup>

A third text that has influenced liberationists is Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990).<sup>176</sup> Along similar lines as Foucault and Sedgwick, Butler argues that because gender is socially-constructed, there is no such thing as a uniform identity of "woman" or "man" that persists throughout time, for gender roles vary from culture to culture. When a young boy is told, "This will make a man of you," what "manly" virtues is he being asked to embody? When a woman is influenced to seek harmony in social relationships, what is at stake in such expectations? Since the very idea of a woman is a social construct laced with heterosexual assumptions, one French feminist writer has stated "A Lesbian is not a woman."<sup>177</sup> Her point is that lesbians do not conform to society's expectation for how a woman should behave.

Second, Butler conceives of gender as performative. Gender is not innate, but arises through acting out the "script" written by custom and cultural expectations. Imagine a dinner party at the end of which the women swing into motion to clear the table, make ready dessert, and begin the process of cleaning up, while the men remain seated, continue their conversation, and are content to be waited on by the women. Both the women and the men in this example are doing "what comes naturally," but what they are doing is determined not by biology but by social custom. A person's sense of what is expected of them as male or female is encoded through countless social interchanges and the acting out of roles that are sometimes more implicit than explicit. Butler's third point goes even deeper. Not only is gender socially constructed, she argues, but so also is the experience of sex itself. This is an unusual claim, since many people assume that sex is biological and gender is sociological. However, Butler insists that our sexual desires, and even sexual sensations, are not simply given biologically. At every level they are formed and shaped by culture. Perhaps an example of this is the fact that in ancient Greece, upper class, educated men were conditioned to desire sexual intercourse with their young male students, even though most of these men also had wives and fathered children.

It should be clear from this brief survey that the contemporary liberationist approach has taken on a decidedly academic quality. This may cause one to wonder whether liberationists have strayed from their stated goal of coming to the aid of ordinary people. The response, of course, is that part of what keeps ordinary people enslaved are the assumptions woven deep within our culture—assumptions that can only be uprooted by means of new ways of thinking. Mere reform is not enough for the liberationist; something more radical is needed. It may even require a radical rethinking of some of the presuppositions of liberation theology itself.

A good example of this sort of rethinking comes from Marcella Althaus-Reid, a theologian who stands at the interface of liberation theology as it was originally conceived in Latin America and the newer GLBT liberation theology. Born in Argentina, Althaus-Reid now teaches at the University of Edinburgh. She grew up imbibing the liberation theology of Latin America with its focus on the poor, but she also criticizes that very same theology for the way it privileges masculine and heterosexual modes of thinking. The problem is that the older liberation theology

has invested these male modes of thinking with the aura of theological legitimacy. In the process, this has perpetuated the ongoing marginalization of those who find themselves outside the ideological confines of heterosexuality. Although liberation theology ostensibly aims to oppose the oppression of the economically disenfranchised, Althaus-Reid's critique is that liberation theology has not yet taken its own best insights far enough. By looking at God from the angle of "Queer" sensibilities, she argues, the church may gain a greater purchase on God's profligate engagement with the world.<sup>178</sup>

One of Althaus-Reid's main theological strategies is to achieve a radicalization of the basic Christian doctrine of Incarnation. If God embraces our humanity in Jesus Christ, she reasons, then God must embrace the humanity of *all* human beings, including those whose sexuality falls outside traditional norms. Our God is one whose love for us is not bound by human categories of what is decent or indecent, which means that theology itself must risk becoming "indecent."<sup>179</sup> It must strive for something more revolutionary than a church that is grudgingly inclusive of gays and transgender persons; it longs for a church that embodies Jesus' own solidarity with those whom the world casts off. Rather than reaching out to the outcast, the gospel calls us to become outcast for God's sake.

## **Creation**

A major claim of the liberationists is that the other positions do not adequately appreciate the complexity of human sexuality. Liberationists especially want to problematize the claim that there is a fixed order of creation that dictates a clear-cut definition of what is legitimately male and female. The very existence of gender-varied persons contests the idea that we can neatly divide the world up into categories of male and female, or gay and straight. Biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling has spoken of five genders.<sup>180</sup> In addition to the categories of male (testes plus male genitalia) and female (ovaries plus female genitalia), there are also "herms" (those having one ovary, one testis, and either male or female genitalia, or both) and "ferms" (having ovaries plus male genitalia), and "merms" (having testes plus female genitalia).

Given all this, liberationists are suspicious of the way Christian talk of creation is often used. As one person has put it, "The realities of nature confound the categories created by science." The same could be said for the categories of theology. This is not to say that liberationists abandon the language of theology altogether. To the contrary, some Christian transgender persons claim that their unique experience of living betwixt and between the genders has given them important insights into the complexities of being human. Some consider that their condition has brought with it spiritual gifts.<sup>181</sup> Others want to break free from the tendency of both celebrationists and prohibitionists to focus in an overly narrow way upon sex. It is not uncommon to hear liberationists say that the point of their analysis is to transform our notions of what it means to be men and women.

It will be recalled that celebrationists tend to mirror prohibitionists in regarding sexuality as a part of natural life. They oppose the prohibitionist claim about a fixed order of nature by putting forward a fixed category of their own, namely, sexual orientation. By contrast, liberationists think

about sexuality less as a matter of natural life, and more the result of nurtured life. Accordingly, liberationists insist that we read the biblical accounts of creation with a critical eye. Since gender is a performance in which people are guided by the scripts society imposes upon them, we need to pay attention to the way in which the mechanism of cultural conditioning operates even in Scripture. Many people read the stories of male-on-male rape in Sodom (Genesis 19) or Gibeah (Judges 19) and use them to condemn gay men. Yet in these same biblical stories the men are perfectly willing to allow their women to be raped.<sup>182</sup> To liberationists this suggests the biblical text cannot be accepted without serious cultural criticism. After all, the gender scripts that operate in ancient culture, even biblical culture, contain much that we would not want to attribute to God. Since gender is a social construct that varies from culture to culture, we must refrain from treating the practices and perspectives of biblical times as though they were easily portable into our own.<sup>183</sup>

### **Reconciliation in Christ**

Reconciliation is about coming into right relationship with God and one's fellow human beings. For liberationists, one of the chief ways this happens is by standing in solidarity with the poor, the outcast, and the oppressed. For gender liberationists, this includes solidarity with gender-varied persons.

Earlier, we saw that prohibitionists call upon gays to repent of their desires and their life choices. We saw that advocates of toleration seek to balance this by calling upon straight people to repent of homophobia. For celebrationists, by contrast, the idea of repentance was very different: Gays must put aside the negative stereotypes imposed upon them by society to become reconciled to the goodness of their own sexuality. Liberationists carry the claim made by celebrationists a step further. Not only must gays put aside society's negative stereotypes, but all of us must recognize that our gender categories, especially the binary opposition between gay and straight, homosexual and heterosexual, are social constructs that can operate in oppressive ways. In keeping with this way of thinking, the ethical statement of the More Light Presbyterians says:

The renewal of Christian sexual ethics depends on a break with the notion that there is a singular, ideal sexuality and that those abiding by this standard should police and control others.<sup>184</sup>

Just as the labels "gay" and "straight" do not do justice to transgender persons, similarly, persons who are bisexual or asexual may find it hard to locate themselves within traditional understandings of gender roles. The fact that a person is bisexual does not necessarily mean the person would claim a right or entitlement to have sex with multiple partners, both men and women. Rather, it simply means that for some people gender categories are fluid and need to be worked out in the life of each individual.

### **Redemption in the Spirit**

A vision of redemption provides a roadmap for how life ought to be lived in the power of the Spirit. We saw that the legitimization position advocated for a form of justice in which a person's

difference no longer made a difference in how we treat them. For liberationists, this is a worthy goal at one level, but too limited at another. Liberationists do not want our differences simply to be covered over. We need to strive for a world in which a person's difference does not trigger ill treatment; but neither is that difference ignored. We need to strive for a world in which differences are valued for what they are.

For liberationists, the fact that the vilification and condemnation of gays and lesbians are part of an elaborate social construction of reality requires special scrutiny. That these negative evaluations are constructions means that they can be de-constructed and also re-constructed. One pathway toward re-construction is the adoption of a new usage of the word "queer," a word often used in a derogatory and offensive way of gay people. Today, many gay and lesbian persons have donned the label "queer" as a matter of pride. Some Christian theologians have likened this to the early Christian transformation of the shameful symbol of the cross into a positive and powerful image of the Christian faith, or the appropriation of the word "slave" as a vital metaphor for what it means to be a Christian.

### **Summary and reflection**

The strength of the liberationist position is its passionate concern for those who reside on the margins of society—including not only sexual minorities in general, but also those who may reside on the margins of the gay and lesbian community itself. The crux of the liberationist position is that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons need to be freed from the social expectations of binary gender categories. The net result is a position that levels a critique in two directions. It not only contests the suppression of gay identity by prohibitionists, but it also problematizes the particular, one-dimensional portrait of gay identity put forward by some celebrationists.

To carry on this twofold critique, liberationists have generated intricate criticisms of many of the foundational assumptions of Western culture, but they have also registered objections to the standard appeal to sexual orientation as a justification for gay rights. Since liberationists are not willing to base their theological judgments upon the uncritical givenness of tradition, their position is sometimes hard to pin down. In challenging stark, binary oppositions, they insist that the categories ordinarily used to define gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons are not adequate. But one may ask whether the very paradigm of liberation versus oppression presents a similar binary opposition that would need to be problematized.

The theories invoked by liberationists have provoked a reaction even from some who are otherwise sympathetic with their goals. A common complaint is that some of today's gay liberationists are using jargon that is not easily understood by ordinary people, including the very people liberationists want to aid. Some have objected that claiming gender is socially constructed is really nothing new, and they wonder whether appeal to highly abstract academic categories actually helps people or merely creates an in-house language spoken only by the elite. Critics complain that the postmodern jargon invoked by some liberationists leaves the impression that we are all prisoners of the linguistic world with little opportunity for emancipatory agency.<sup>185</sup>

The liberationist rejoinder is that achieving freedom is more complex than the establishment case for justice allows. For example, one of the goals of the legitimization position is to make a place for gays and lesbians within the established social order. But for some liberationists, the established order itself is the problem.

One of the surprising things about this position is the way prohibitionists appropriate some of its elements. Prohibitionists appeal to the claim that sexual orientation is a social construct in order to support their own argument that sexual orientation does not exist as a fixed category that is impervious to change. Yet this, of course, leads prohibitionists into a contradiction. For when prohibitionists adopt the social constructionist approach to sexual orientation, this leaves them with no good arguments for rejecting constructivism in other spheres. In other words, if all worldviews are social constructs, so is the worldview of the prohibitionists themselves. The social construction argument can also be turned around and used against liberationists themselves. This is especially true of the arguments made by Judith Butler, who claims that gender is more performative than natural. In response, some have argued this is a good reason to discourage people from adopting a transgender identity. If gender is in fact a performance that can be encouraged through social means, then perhaps it should also be discouraged through those same means.

The liberationist movement in its approach to gender has so far been more deconstructive than constructive. It has emphasized “liberation from” more than “liberation for.” As time goes on, it will be interesting to see whether the liberationist position develops a constructive vision of its own that takes root in the Christian church, or whether its main role is one of offering a critique that serves to keep the other viewpoints honest.

### **Suggested reading**

Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.

Richard Cleaver, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, the tenth anniversary edition. New York and London: Routledge, 1990, 1999.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, 1978.

Robert Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*. New York: Harper San Francisco, 1993.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions and Critical Differences*. Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003.

### Comparison of Viewpoints Five and Six

#### Creation

#### Reconciliation

#### Redemption

#### *Welcoming and Affirming Viewpoints*

#### **Celebration**

*Essentialist:* being gay is a fact of “natural” life.

Gays and lesbians need to be reconciled to the goodness of their sexual orientation.

Live into one’s sexual orientation as God’s good gift.

#### **Liberation**

*Social construction:* a fact of nurtured life

Challenge binary gender categories (male/female).

Affirm complexity of gender choices.

### Questions for discussion

1. Review the biblical witness of the welcoming and affirming positions (beginning on p. 56). How does the Bible inform the celebration position? How does the Bible inform the liberation position? How do these biblical interpretations inform your own perspective? Do you agree or disagree with how advocates of a welcoming and affirming position read Scripture?
2. What difference does it make, if at all, in the way you view a gay or lesbian individual if you decide that sexual orientation is an *essential* part of who that person is (i.e., not a choice but part of their inherent makeup)? What is the effect of seeing sexual orientation as *socially constructed*, or at least strongly influenced by culture, and something that each gay or lesbian person must at some level decide to own (or choose) for herself or himself? Should the *essential* versus the *socially constructed* debate be viewed as an either/or, or a both/and? How does the answer to this question affect the way you view the issue?
3. The celebration position tends to focus on rejoicing with individuals and couples when they find a life partner. The liberation position pays more attention to where marriage and sexuality fit within the broader structures of society. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Which approach more closely matches your own?

## VIEWPOINT SEVEN: CONSECRATION

This position makes a biblical and theological case not merely for *affirming* exclusive, committed, same-gender relationships, but also for *consecrating* them, i.e., for extending God's blessing to them within the context of the church. According to this view, something more is needed than merely welcoming gay and lesbian people into the church as individuals. The church should also provide a place for committed gay and lesbian relationships within the rhythm of its life and worship.

### **Illustrative biblical interpretation: Genesis 2:18 and Ephesians 5:25-27**

The key question facing a consecrationist position is whether the church's theology of marriage as the union between a man and a woman rules out extending the church's blessing to same-gender relationships that are exclusive, committed, and intended to be permanent. Much depends upon how one thinks of marriage theologically.

For consecrationists, contrary to the standard arguments, *marriage is not primarily an order of creation, but an order of redemption*. It functions in human experience not as God's final act of creation, but as one of God's first acts to redeem creation. And if marriage is more about redemption than about preserving the fixed order of male and female in the order of creation, then there is every reason to find ways to include gay and lesbian couples within the sphere of this redemption.

The redemptive quality of marriage is clear in the Adam and Eve story in Genesis, in which the first human being is surrounded by the animals God has created, but is still alone and without a suitable companion. In fact, this is the first place in the creation story where God, who has created the world and declared it "good," sees that something in the created world is *not good*:

Then the LORD God said, "It is *not good* that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper ('ezer) as his partner" (Gen. 2:18). (Emphasis added)

The divine resolution to fashion a "partner" for the earth creature shows that creation itself is not complete. It demonstrates that even within the ordering of creation there is still a human longing for a grace that transcends creation. And the good news in this text is that God responds to this human longing. God does not require the human being merely to acquiescence to the fatedness of existence or to remain in isolated loneliness. Suddenly, even though God is the Creator, God is not content with the way things *are* (creation), but God is at work in the life of the human being to make things the way they *ought to be* (redemption).

In short, God's determination to find a companion suitable for the first human entails nothing less than a re-creation of the human being. And this re-creation is necessary even before the story of the "Fall." For in God's decision to intervene and make Eve, Adam does not remain unchanged. A transformation occurs. God causes a deep sleep to fall upon the human being, and the new human being that God fashions is given a special designation. Eve is referred to with a word in

Hebrew (*'ezer*) that the NRSV translates as “partner,” or which perhaps more accurately could be rendered as “redemptive companion.”

From this we see that the first marriage has more to do with redeeming a situation that is “not good” than with shoring up an already secure “order of creation.” Further supporting the idea that marriage is an “order of redemption” is the fact that at other places where *'ezer* is used in the Hebrew Scriptures, it is *God* who emerges as humankind’s “helper.” For example, Presbyterians have often begun their worship services, following Ps. 121:1-2, by proclaiming, “My help (*'ezer*) is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” This indicates that the human companion to whom one is yoked in covenant commitment is, as “redemptive companion” or *'ezer*, an instrument of God’s own redemptive work in humanity’s midst.

Consecrationists can also make the case for marriage as an order of redemption by appealing to Eph. 5:32, where marriage is spoken of as a great “mystery” that pertains to the redemptive relationship between Christ and the church. In many places in the New Testament, Jesus is hailed as bridegroom (Mark 2:19-20, par; Matt. 9:15; 25:1-13; John 3:27-30; Rev. 18:23), and in Ephesians, the church that Jesus redeems is conceived as his bride. In other words, the church, including all the men in the church, are to see themselves as wed to Jesus, their bridegroom.

The pivotal question for consecrationists is not whether we risk violating creation by allowing gays and lesbians to commit themselves to one another in the church. The real question for them is how the church can justify withholding from gays and lesbians this means of grace, which has meant so much to so many.

### **Consecration as means of grace**

The consecrationist position bears a certain similarity to the earlier viewpoint of pastoral accommodation, but with a critical difference. Both approaches attempt to extend acceptance to gay and lesbian couples. Yet most accommodationists, while being pastorally accepting, are not willing to extend the church’s blessing to gay couples—or, at most, would do so only in private. Consecrationists, by contrast, would create a public affirmation in analogy to marriage. Some would even expand the definition of marriage to include gay and lesbian couples.

Consecrationists seek to solve the ordination crisis by redirecting attention to the pastoral issue presented by gay and lesbian couples. Once a context is created within which gay and lesbian persons may live out their commitments with the full blessing of the church, then the ordination of such persons no longer presents a problem.

Consecrationists also hold some things in common with celebrationists. If the celebrationist position emphasizes a “welcoming and affirming” stance, the consecrationist position emphasizes a stance that is simultaneously “welcoming, affirming, and *ordering*.” The emphasis on ordering underscores that this position is not based on stereotypical “liberal” presuppositions. It shares with the non-affirming positions, including prohibitionism, a concern for the moral structuring of human experience, but it also agrees with the insistence of the welcoming and affirming positions

that mere form without substance is empty. The consecrationist position also shares with traditionalists a high view of life within the church as a means of grace.

Because it shares so much with both the non-affirming and affirming positions, the consecrationist approach may have potential to serve as a bridge between them. On the one hand, consecrationists agree with celebrationists that same-gender desire should be affirmed, but consecrationists insist that such desire be monogamously ordered within the covenantal community of the church. Hence, they ask celebrationists to move in a direction from affirmation to order. On the other hand, consecrationists agree with the non-affirming positions about the importance of moral order, but they challenge advocates of these positions to move in the opposite direction, to recognize that the moral ordering of gay relationships gives the church a reason to affirm them. Arguably, the full church should affirm the commitment of the couple being made in the concrete, even if the full church has no agreement about homoeroticism in the abstract. In short, consecrationists ask non-affirming types to move from recognizing order to offering affirmation of relationships; and they ask celebrationists to move from affirmation of gay sexuality to providing an ordering for that form of sexuality.

But by what authority does the church embark upon this bold new step of blessing committed same-gender love? We tend to forget that Jesus gave tremendous authority to the church in governing its affairs. In fact, Jesus said that whatever the church “binds” on earth will be “bound” in heaven, and whatever the church “looses” or “sets aside” on earth will be “set aside” in heaven (Matt. 16:19; 18:18). The word used here for “to loose” or “to set aside” is the same term Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount to speak of his attitude toward the law:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever *breaks* one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Yet we know that Jesus’ way of keeping the law defied convention. When he was accused of breaking the Sabbath, his retort was that human beings were not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made for human beings (Mark 2:27). Thus, Jesus admonishes his disciples to “do” and “teach” the commandments, but to do so with an eye toward the coming of God’s “kingdom” or reign (Matt. 5:19). In fact, in the same passage in which they are told to “bind” and “loose,” they are told they have been given the “keys to the kingdom” (Matt. 16:19). This means the church has a certain amount of sanctified discretion in judging ethical cases. With this in mind, there is every reason to use that discretion to create a sanctified context in which faithful, exclusive, and committed gay and lesbian relationships may receive the church’s blessing.

The most formidable advocate of the consecrationist position is Rowan Williams, who has been a theology professor at both Oxford and Cambridge and is the current Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>186</sup> In approaching human sexuality, the first question for Williams is not, as for the

prohibitionists, “Am I keeping the rules?” Nor is it, as for the celebrationists, “Am I being sincere and non-hurtful?” Rather, the question is, “What does my relationship signify or demonstrate concerning the faithfulness and grace of God?”<sup>187</sup> In an important essay on this subject, “The Body’s Grace,” Williams argues that we need to take a step back and ask ourselves what is the purpose of sexual desire in the first place.<sup>188</sup> What place does it have within God’s economy of salvation? The answer Williams gives is that human sexual desire, especially when rightly ordered, reflects God’s own desire for God’s people. Just as God makes a covenant with God’s people, so also God’s people should order their sexual relationships in committed, covenantal ways.

Thus, for Williams the focus needs to shift from sex acts to relationships. Sex acts may serve to bring a certain release, but living in a conjugal relationship that is exclusive, committed, and long-term can bring joy. For one person’s body to enter into sexual joy, it must be open to becoming the occasion of joy for another. And for this to happen requires more than physical, sexual performance. It requires that the couple be willing to give time to one another in “a commitment without limits.” Only with the gift of time does the gift of sexuality blossom into all that God intends for it.

The arguments Williams makes are based on a resolutely Christological foundation. The gospel is about a Savior who “made his entire life a sign that speaks of God.”<sup>189</sup> Williams follows Karl Barth in declaring Jesus Christ to be the greatest sacrament between God and human beings.<sup>190</sup> The sacramental quality of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ in turn provides human life with a promise. We too, by the grace of the Spirit, can become signs of God. And our committed, conjugal relationships in particular “can speak of mercy, faithfulness, transfiguration, and hope.” Just as God’s love is demonstrated to the world by the giving of Jesus Christ (John 3:16), so also two people committed to one another in Christian love give themselves sacrificially to each other and thereby become a sacramental sign of God’s love in Christ (Eph. 5:21-22).

In this way committed, covenantal relationships not only remind us of God’s deep desire for God’s people, but they become a gift to the wider community. “The life of the Christian community has as its rationale...the task of teaching us to so order our relations that human beings may see themselves as desired, as the occasion of joy.”<sup>191</sup>

Building on the reflections of Rowan Williams, theologian Eugene Rogers argues that the commitment of marriage is a means of grace that nurtures Christians in the ways of the gospel.<sup>192</sup> The purpose of sexual desire, when properly understood and practiced, is to lift us up into that covenantal desire that God has for us in Jesus Christ by the Spirit’s power. When one thinks of it this way, the church not only can, but *should* reach out to honor, support, nurture, and ritually bless gay and lesbian couples whose exclusive commitments are deliberately structured as a means of grace. Gray Temple, a charismatic Episcopal priest in Atlanta, has argued that reaching out in this way to support gay unions flows from the church’s discernment of the Spirit and would constitute a proper exercise of the “keys to the Kingdom.”<sup>193</sup> Rogers goes a step further. Because marriage is a means of grace, and because being excluded from marriage may lead some to leave the church, to deny gays and lesbians the rite of marriage is nothing less than to deny them the gospel itself.

## **Creation**

Creation finds its fulfillment in redemption. All the positions we have considered agree with this in principle. But the consecrationists take this and make it the chief principle on which their perspective turns. If prohibitionism and celebrationism focus principally upon the order of creation, and if the toleration and legitimation positions focus more upon the doctrine of reconciliation, then accommodationists and celebrationists tend to cast their gaze upon redemption. It is only from the standpoint of redemption, they claim, that the truth about creation becomes clear.

Consecrationists do not always take a clear position on the status of homoerotic desire within creation. They may see it a fact of nature and having the potential to partake in the goodness of creation. But they tend not to think of sexuality as good in itself. Rather than thinking of sexuality as “God’s good gift” in and of itself, they are more inclined to speak of people as God’s good gift and to judge sexuality on the basis of the context in which it occurs. Thus, sexuality needs to be rightly ordered to be what God would have it be.

This means, among other things, that one cannot learn about the meaning of sexuality merely from examining nature. Thus, the claim of some prohibitionists that we can understand the purpose of sexuality merely from examining the sex act, strikes consecrationists as a profound theological mistake. It is not just that consecrationists disagree with the non-affirming types here; rather, they are convinced there is nothing distinctively *theological* about such a position. Consecrationists want arguments that are firmly rooted in the character of God’s grace.

This conviction leads consecrationists to reject both the claims of some prohibitionists that gay and lesbian sexuality violates nature and the claims of some celebrationists that gay and lesbian sexuality is good in and of itself. Consecrationists are inclined to say that nothing is good “in and of itself” except God.

The consecrationists, in other words, are worried that both reactionary prohibitionists and liberationist celebrationists take their cue about sexuality from the vitalities of nature and not from the distinctive knowledge that comes from the Triune God. Although Presbyterians have been arguing about sex for almost thirty years, consecrationists want to insist that the argument has yet to be properly framed, for we need to move beyond biblical proof-texting toward advocating a way of life for all people—gay and straight alike—that is genuinely Christian.

## **Reconciliation in Christ**

This same concern holds sway when consecrationists turn to our human need for reconciliation. They disagree with prohibitionists and advocates of mere toleration that homosexual orientation is per se sinful or that it always and invariably is the result of sin. Sin does not reside in sexual orientation per se, but in whether or not one rightly orders one’s life. Failure to reach out and support gay and lesbian couples when they display real integrity in their

relationships is not only a failure in pastoral care—though it is that—but it is a failure of the gospel itself. The gospel does not just accommodate; it brings transformation and wholeness.

For consecrationists, the primary identity we have as Christians is not our sexual identity, but the identity we acquire in baptism. Baptism defines us as belonging to Christ, which means that even though we still struggle under the power of sin, our principal identification is no longer that of “sinner,” but “child of God.” Being baptized means being incorporated into the body of Christ, so that all who are in Christ are of one family. Therefore, to make sharp divisions between “straight” and “gay” is not only wrong, it is to miss the true meaning of the gospel. Because we are brothers and sisters in Christ, we all bear the responsibility for living into our baptism together. This is a responsibility we carry out by ordering our earthly desires so that they may reflect God’s deepest desire for us, which is embodied in the covenant of grace.

This gives us a larger context within which to read the biblical condemnations, and thus a reason to read them narrowly. If the church decides to consecrate unions of gay and lesbian people, it is not just for their sakes, but for all of our sakes. This is so because how we order our lives is not just a private matter, but a matter for the whole Christian community.

Stanley Hauerwas has suggested that, rather than becoming exercised about staking out an abstract “position” on something called “homosexuality,” what Christians really need to do is rely on their traditional teachings against promiscuity and against adultery.<sup>194</sup> Hauerwas suggests that the way forward depends on serious conversations with gay and lesbian people who are in exclusive and committed relationships. It may be that the church will conclude that particular gays and lesbians in committed partnerships are neither promiscuous nor adulterous.

Consecrationists are divided over whether to affirm same-sex covenants as a parallel to traditional marriage or to extend the institution of marriage to cover consecrated same-sex vows as well. Andrew Sullivan, a Roman Catholic layperson and political conservative, argues that religious and political conservatives should favor gay marriage.<sup>195</sup> This is because marriage offers a more stable, readily identifiable institution than so-called “domestic partnerships.” He makes the point that in faithfully caring for their partners who have suffered from and too often died of HIV/AIDS, many gay men have already demonstrated that they know how to love “in sickness and in health.” Marriage would create an identifiable way of integrating gay and lesbian people into the family structure, and it would offer a future, a hope, and a concrete core of moral instruction for young people who happen to be homosexual. In other words, it would be an intelligible way for the church to continue upholding its fidelity and chastity requirements for all its people, both gay and straight.

## **Redemption in the Spirit**

How then does the consecrationist think about redemption? It should be obvious that consecrationists share with celebrationists a concern that gays and lesbians find wholeness and healing for the wounds that society has visited upon them. Yet, rather than celebrating *sexuality* as God’s good gift, consecrationists urge us to celebrate *people* as God’s good gifts. For

consecrationists, the focus should shift from sexuality to relationality. When a baptized Christian joins himself or herself in exclusive, committed love to another person, consecrationists agree with pastoral accommodationists that the substance of the relationship is much more important than the form.

Marriage, then, is not just a license to engage in sex, but an exclusive commitment to another person. Gender complementarity by itself never made a marriage, for marriage is about a relationship that has depth, contour, and mystery. Marriage is not only the “bone of my bone” hailed by Adam, but it is the “Where you go, I will go,” exclaimed by Ruth to Naomi, and it is the “love is strong as death” of the Song of Songs. The church consecrates a relationship between two people—not because the relationship is already a perfect mirror of the created order, but because by consecrating it the community pledges, through the grace of God, to help it grow increasingly toward what God intended.

Rowan Williams, arguing in favor of the church blessing same-sex unions, points out that the purpose of committed, sexual faithfulness—gay or straight—is to create a context where grace can abound, a context in which two people are consecrated unto one another for the sake of their mutual transformation by the ongoing work of the Spirit. The historian John Boswell had pointed to medieval examples in which the church consecrated the monastic love of two monks in ceremonies that bear a striking resemblance to marriage. Critics of Boswell’s book, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, have complained that there is no evidence that these ceremonies contemplated sex acts between the two men. Yet consecrationists respond that this is precisely the point: the church’s consecration of the union between two people in marriage has never been merely about sex, but about sanctification.

### **Summary and reflection**

One of the problems with the consecrationist viewpoint is that some of its advocates seem reluctant to answer the question of where homoerotic sexuality fits as a part of the created order. Is this really something about which we may maintain moral neutrality? Or, like the accommodationists, must we not uphold the normative character of heterosexual marriage, while treating the blessing of same-gender love as an exception to the rule? To some, the fatal flaw of going in a consecrationist direction is that it appears to ignore biblical pronouncements that, from a prohibitionist perspective, seem to be clear. On this score, the current consecrationist literature seems to presuppose the judgments about Scripture made by welcoming, affirming biblical scholars. The consecrationist case would be helped if its advocates would spell out more clearly the full scope of biblical exposition upon which it rests.

Another issue that the consecrationist viewpoint raises is how the church would create a balance between consecrating gay and lesbian relationships, were it to choose to move in this direction, and preserving the consciences of those who would disagree with such a move. It is one thing to allow such blessings as an “accommodation,” but quite another to make them a regular part of the church’s life. If the church begins consecrating same-gender love, then some will no doubt feel compelled to break fellowship. This puts the church in a certain bind: To maintain

fellowship with one part of the body of Christ it is forced to compromise its relationship with another part. For the sake of reaching a broader consensus, is it possible to reframe our way of thinking?

It may be possible that many in the church, especially those who have found the accommodationist argument compelling, will be open to a consecrationist position if it is styled not as consecration of a gay relationship per se, but as consecration of the commitment the couple have made to one another. Perhaps they will be open to ordination of gay and lesbian people if it is framed not as a consecration of a gay lifestyle, but as recognition of the gifts of gay people for ministry. Would such a reframing leave accommodationists and other non-affirming types free to hold “scruples” concerning the character of homoerotic desire itself? Or would such a reframing remain offensive to gays and lesbians themselves? Would they see it as no more than a grudging acceptance?

Other questions abound. To what extent does church history illumine our perspective here? In rejecting the “Donatist heresy,” the church has long allowed that the efficacy of the church’s means of grace do not depend upon the “purity” of the person administering them. Is a similar sort of principle applicable here? Is it possible to acknowledge that no marriage and no ordination are perfect and that the blessing of marriages and the laying on of hands in ordination are always performed in faith, hope, and love—and not based on the merits of the individuals?

Suppose the consecrationist position eventually holds the day in the church. Would it then be necessary for justice and legitimation arguments to arise from the other direction? If G-6.0106b were removed from the *Book of Order*, would justice then demand that the church rigorously protect the freedom of conscience of those who read Scripture more restrictively? All these questions point to the difficult problem of preserving the broad umbrella envisioned by G-6.0108, under which the profound convictions of conscience of all sides can be respected within one confessional fellowship.

About this one thing we should all be clear: Consecrationists are *not* attempting to do away with the church’s traditional teaching about marriage, fidelity, and chastity, but rather to take that teaching to a deeper level. According to consecrationists, to deny gays and lesbians the church’s blessing and support when they covenant together to live in exclusive faithfulness is to deny them the opportunity to grow in grace. Consecrationists are arguing that, in a real sense, to deny gays and lesbians this means of grace is to deny them their place at the family table—the table at which Jesus is host and at which all of us gather only at the invitation of God’s grace.

### **Suggested Reading**

Marilyn McCord Adams, “Trinitarian Friendship: Same-gender Models of Godly Love in Richard of St. Victor and Aelred of Rievaulx.” *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed., Eugene Rogers. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.

Alan Bray, *The Friend*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Eugene Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999.

Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality*. New York: Random House, 1995.

Gray Temple, *Gay Unions: In the Light of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason*. New York: Church Publishing, 2004.

Rowan Williams, "The Body's Grace," 10th Michael Harding Memorial Address, Institute for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality (1989). Reprinted in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed., Eugene Rogers. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. pp. 309-21.

### Comparison of Viewpoints Five, Six, and Seven

#### Creation

#### Reconciliation

#### Redemption

#### *Welcoming and Affirming Viewpoints*

<b>Celebration</b>	<i>Essentialist:</i> being gay is a fact of “natural” life.	Gays and lesbians need to be reconciled to the goodness of their sexual orientation.	Live into one’s sexual orientation as God’s good gift.
<b>Liberation</b>	<i>Social construction:</i> a fact of nurtured life	Challenge binary gender categories (male/female).	Affirm complexity of gender choices.
<b>Consecration</b>	Sexual orientation not to be condemned, but also ambiguous and needing to be rightly ordered.	Sin does not reside in orientation or behavior per se, but in whether one’s life is rightly ordered. Our relationships are a means of grace.	One’s sexuality is to be consecrated through an exclusive, committed covenant blessed by the church. People, not sexuality, are the objects of our celebration.

#### Questions for discussion

1. What difference does it make whether one’s sexual orientation is a fixed and essential part of one’s identity or a social construct? Is it one or the other, or could it be partly both?
2. Is sex God’s good gift? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever celebrated the marriage of a friend? How do you feel about celebrating the love between two men or two women? What, if any, difference is there between the two cases?
4. What is the difference between “celebration” and “consecration”? How are they related?
5. How does the liberation position challenge your perspective on the Christian life? To what extent do you agree or disagree with this position, and why?
6. Why does the church consecrate relationships between people in love? Is this necessary? What, if anything, does consecration add to the relationship?

## SUMMARY

Theological disputes over same-gender relationships have become so intense that they threaten the peace, unity, and purity of the church. A valuable step toward mutual understanding is recognizing that a variety of Christian viewpoints exist on this issue, all with their own biblical and theological warrants.

For the most part, the disputes in the church have centered upon gay *leadership* without first giving the church the time or the biblical, theological, and practical resources to assimilate gay *identity*. And yet a good case can be made that the identity question is logically prior to the leadership question. It is hard to ask persons to accept as their leader a person whose basic identity is called into question. Therefore, it would be useful for the church to concentrate its energy on asking a different sort of question. Rather than debating “homosexuality” in the abstract, it is more fruitful to ask whether there is any gospel warrant for the church to embrace the exclusive, committed unions of gay and lesbian people and to support the families they have formed.

To assess this question, this study has examined seven viewpoints on same-gender relationships, considering each of them in relationship to God’s gracious work of creation, reconciliation, and redemption. It has also considered some of the biblical arguments used to support each of the seven positions.

### *Non-affirming Viewpoints*

#### **Viewpoint One: Prohibition**

Some Christians believe that all same-gender sexual behavior is sin, and therefore they believe it is wrong to “affirm” such conduct in any way. These beliefs are based upon:

- a. A judgment that Scripture is clear about prohibiting same-gender sexual behavior;
- b. an argument that the church’s theology of marriage requires that Christians limit sexual expression to marriage between a man and a woman;
- c. arguments from “natural law,” according to which sexual relationships between a man and a woman are natural and those between persons of the same gender are against nature;
- d. centuries of Jewish and Christian moral teaching that condemns same-gender sexuality.

Prohibitionist analysis of this issue tends to focus primarily on the order of creation. A particular understanding of the place of same-gender relationships in creation determines what prohibitionists then say about reconciliation and redemption.

Creation:	Prohibitionists view homoerotic acts as a perverse and deliberate choice for which persons must be held accountable. Many prohibitionists are unsure about the legitimacy of the category of “sexual orientation.” Same-gender sexual expression is not a part of
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the goodness of creation, nor is it a gift of God. Such acts violate nature and undermine the “gender complementarity” visible in the created world.

Reconciliation in Christ: To come into right relationship with God, prohibitionists insist that gay and lesbian people must repent of their conduct. Many prohibitionists would also say that repentance of homoerotic desire is necessary, and some would argue there is a duty for gay and lesbian people to seek “reparative therapy.”

Redemption in the Spirit: Living a life of redemption requires that one return to one’s “true,” God-given heterosexual nature or remain celibate.

### **Viewpoint Two: Toleration**

The General Assembly of the UPCUSA in 1978 (and of the PCUS in 1979) adopted a position that welcomed gay and lesbian people into the church, but was non-affirming of their sexual conduct. This position was both innovative and traditional at the same time. It was innovative in accepting the new category of “sexual orientation,” in departing from the prohibitionists’ blanket condemnation of homoeroticism, and in allowing for toleration of gay and lesbian people in the church. It specifically distanced itself from the rhetoric of condemnation and disgust used by some prohibitionist advocates. At the same time, the 1978 Statement was traditional in that it retained the categorical prohibition of homoerotic behavior, only now with the prohibition focused narrowly on candidates for ordination.

Creation: The 1978 Statement insisted that same-gender sexuality should no longer be condemned as a “perversion” of the created order. Rather, it should be viewed compassionately as a “tragic condition,” a burden that the gay or lesbian person must bear. It is “tragic” in the sense that a homosexual orientation is something unfortunate that happens to a person and not of the person’s own doing. Even though one is not responsible for the condition, one is still responsible for what one does with the condition. This posture draws a clear distinction between sexual orientation, on the one hand, and sexual practice, on the other. Orientation is to be acknowledged and accepted, while practice is to be rejected.

Reconciliation in Christ: Whereas the emphasis for prohibitionists is upon creation, the emphasis for the 1978 Statement shifts slightly toward reconciliation. In contrast to the prohibitionist call for gay and lesbian people in particular to repent, the 1978 Statement demanded a “double repentance”: straight people must repent of “homophobia,” which is an irrational animus toward gay people; gay

people, even though they are not responsible for their gay orientation or *identity*, must repent of their gay *behavior*.

Redemption  
in the Spirit:

It is not clear under the 1978 Statement whether there is any such thing as a redeemed sexuality for gay and lesbian people. The teaching appears to be that gays and lesbians should not feel guilty about their sexual orientation, but that they should refuse to act upon it. They should accept their sexual orientation as a tragic burden they are forced to bear, and they should respond to this burden by living a life of Stoic abstinence.

### **Viewpoint Three: Accommodation**

Advocates of this position seek to find ways to accommodate gay and lesbian people while still remaining true to the church's traditional theological teachings on sexuality. Many accommodationists agree, at least in general terms, with the 1978 Statement and G-6.0106b standards, but they focus their attention on how the standards should be interpreted. This position seeks to live within the standards, but to interpret them with pastoral grace and sensitivity. It takes heterosexual marriage to be normative, but it allows for a range of pastoral exceptions.

At their best, of course, all of the positions can be held with compassion and pastoral concern. The distinction is that the accommodation position places the pastoral concern front and center, seeking to "accommodate" but not "affirm" same-gender relationships. As such, this position arises as an internal modification and critique of the "welcoming but not affirming" stance of the tolerationists. This modification tends to focus on gay and lesbian relationships, whereas the legitimization position (see below) focuses more upon the ordination issue.

Often the accommodationist support of gay and lesbian couples is based on a "lesser of the evils" argument, and one of its goals is to avoid the two extremes of condemning gay people on the one hand, and fostering sexual license on the other. Because the biblical writers knew little of what we call "sexual orientation," accommodationists argue, they could not have envisioned the possibility of committed, lifelong, exclusive same-gender unions of the sort we are seeing today. Hence, many accommodationists argue that quiet space needs to be made and support given for gay and lesbian Christians who desire to enter into such committed unions.

Regarding the standards of G-6.0106b, accommodationists note that, while the first sentence calls for "obedience to Scripture," no one fulfills this requirement fully. G-6.0106b also calls for "chastity in singleness," but to call upon single people to "abstain" until they find a life partner is one thing; to ask them to renounce the desire for a life partner altogether is quite another. Since the gift of "celibacy" is a special gift given only to a few and not something that can be demanded of all, the most "chaste" way for a gay or lesbian person to sanctify his or her desire for a life partner may be to form a committed, lifelong partnership.

Creation:	This position tends to agree with the 1978 Statement that a same-gender sexual orientation is a tragic burden to bear. But it seeks to provide a gracious way for that burden to be lived out, namely in an exclusive, committed partnership.
Reconciliation in Christ:	Accommodationists worry that the welcoming, but non-affirming stance of the tolerationists needs to be made more stable by recognizing that repenting of gay desires is not easy for those with a same-gender sexual orientation. Even though committed gay relationships are disobedient in form, they can be obedient in substance.
Redemption in the Spirit:	The church needs to give gay and lesbian people a greater hope than a Stoic denial of desire, a denial which amounts to non-voluntary celibacy. Pastorally speaking, a committed, exclusive, lifelong partnership is morally better than promiscuity, and better than living a life of loneliness. Accommodationists will sometimes extend blessing to gay couples, but only in private. They usually are not in favor of the public blessing of same-gender relationships.

### *Critique of Non-affirming Viewpoints*

#### **Viewpoint Four: Legitimation**

Our God is a God of justice, and the justice and righteousness of God are demonstrated in that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). As Christians we have been baptized into Christ’s death, receiving an identity that is precious to God—and this notwithstanding our race, gender, or sexual orientation. The crux of the legitimation position is that G-6.0106b constitutes a fundamental denial of Christian identity by creating a hierarchical order of first- and second-class citizens. Because in Christ there is no longer “male and female” (Gal. 3:28), the structure of “gender complementarity” should not be used to label and circumscribe a person’s Christian identity, nor should it be used to rule out the possibility of faithful, committed, same-gender unions.

In addition to this theological concern, there are several practical concerns, namely, that:

- a. the church’s current position of being “non-affirming” is by definition to be non-welcoming as well;
- b. the targeted prohibition against ordaining gays and lesbians upsets the long-standing prerogative of local governing bodies to make determinations about fitness for office; and
- c. it is neither right nor wise for the church to impose a single position upon everyone regarding an issue over which reasonable Christians differ; over which votes have been

close; and as to which the minority has a strong, good-faith, biblical and theological case.

Creation:	Legitimation advocates take various positions on the theological status of same-gender desire. Many agree with the 1978 Statement that same-gender desire is a departure from God's highest and best intention for humanity, but they argue that this departure is no different from any other departure from the ideal.
Reconciliation in Christ:	In response to the church's demand that gays and lesbians repent, justice advocates counter that the church should not only repent of its homophobia, as called for by the 1978 Statement; in addition, the church must repent of singling out gay and lesbian people for special scrutiny.
Redemption in the Spirit:	Justice advocates urge the church to aspire to a hope for redemption that is more than the Stoic resignation to fate suggested by the 1978 Statement. By grace, the church needs to hope and strive for a world in which our differences no longer make a difference.

### *Welcoming and Affirming Viewpoints*

#### **Viewpoint Five: Celebration**

A welcoming and affirming posture seeks not only to welcome gays and lesbians into the fellowship of the church, but also to affirm the reality of their sexual identity. It especially urges the church to put aside its ambivalence about gay and lesbian unions, especially those that are committed, exclusive, and lifelong. Advocates argue that such a position is not a contradiction of the gospel or of Christian tradition, but a logical extension of everything the gospel teaches.

More than this, celebrationists argue that God wants gays and lesbians to celebrate the love they have found in committed relationships in the same way married couples do. To those who are reticent to celebrate gay relationships, celebrationists observe that we easily celebrate weddings, anniversaries, and other heterosexual turning points all the time. Why should it be any different for gays and lesbians? The very same welcome and affirmation that God extends to each one of us in Jesus Christ should also be extended to gays and lesbians.

Creation:	A gay or lesbian sexual orientation is not something to be scorned; rather it is something to be accepted as God's good gift. It is neither a perversion, nor a tragedy, but an integral part of who gays and lesbians are. Many celebrationists argue that sexual orientation is a fixed and natural part of life. Still others understand gay and lesbian identity as a blend of nature and culture.
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Reconciliation  
in Christ:

The first reconciliation needed by gays and lesbians is to overcome the internalized homophobia that society has instilled within them. Celebrationists argue that gays and lesbians need to be reconciled to the goodness of their own sexual orientation.

Redemption  
in the Spirit:

For celebrationists, gays and lesbians should enter into the joy of celebrating their sexuality as God's good gift. A particular emphasis of some celebrationists has been to refrain from turning the condemnation heaped on them back upon their accusers. Against the accommodationists, celebrationists argue that gay and lesbian relationships should be viewed not just as the "lesser of the evils," but as a positive good.

### **Viewpoint Six: Liberation**

For several decades, a theology of liberation has been emerging that focuses on delivering the poor and oppressed from their economic bondage. Out of this movement has come a movement that seeks the liberation of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons. Although they share many concerns of celebrationists, the liberationists are not as quick to rest their case on an essentialist view of sexual orientation. Instead, liberationists for the most part are *social constructionists*, emphasizing that whatever may be the biological basis of sexuality, same-gender sexual orientation has varied widely in different times and places because it is culturally conditioned. One difference between celebration and liberation can be framed in terms of identity and difference, with celebrationists being more eager to validate a particular gay and lesbian gender identity, and liberationists being more concerned about protecting a range of gender difference. Liberationists have sought to shine a light on the reality of gender-varied persons, such as those who are born with the genetic makeup of one gender, but the anatomical characteristics of another.

In formulating their position, liberationists have drawn upon the writings of a number of contemporary scholars who have plumbed the complexities of gender formation. These include the power dynamics by which sexual identity is shaped; the politics of a gay person deciding to remain in or out of the closet; the contradictory ways in which we often speak of gender and gender orientation; and the way that gender is embodied through performative acts over time, as people live out the scripts that society prepares for them.

Some liberation theologians argue for God's radical solidarity with gender-varied individuals based on an appeal to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. Jesus said that inasmuch as we have cared for the poor and the outcast, we have cared for him (Matt. 25:40, 45). The same is true, say liberationists, regarding our care for gender-varied persons.

Creation:

Liberationists are suspicious of the appeals to creation made by the non-affirming types. They see gender as highly complex, and thus they do not accept the claim that what it means to be human must

conform to alleged, fixed orders of nature. The fact that nature produces gender-varied persons argues against imposing strict categories of male and female, or even gay and straight, upon all people. In juxtaposition to celebrationists who tend to regard sexual orientation as an unchanging, essential category, liberationists believe that gender in general and sexual orientation in particular are socially constructed—they come more from nurture than nature.

Reconciliation  
in Christ:

If reconciliation is about coming into right relationship with God and one's fellow human beings, then liberationists believe this happens when the church stands in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, including those who have been marginalized because of their gender or gender orientation. Whereas celebrationists believe reconciliation for gays and lesbians requires them to overcome the effects of internalized homophobia, liberationists are more concerned with the broader institutional and societal impact of gender discrimination. In particular, liberationists believe that reconciliation depends on putting aside the idea of a single set of gender roles to which all must conform.

Redemption  
in the Spirit:

Because they are sensitive to the complexity of gender choices, liberationists want to strive for a world in which differences are honored for what they are. The fact that negative evaluations of gender-varied persons are social constructions of reality means these same negative constructions can be de-constructed and re-constructed. It is not uncommon for liberationists to adopt the label "queer" as a matter of pride. Just as the early Christians transformed the shameful symbol of the cross into a positive and powerful image of the Christian faith, and just as they appropriated the word "slave" as a vital metaphor for what it means to be a Christian, so liberationists today want to transform our usage of language to achieve redemptive ends.

### **Viewpoint Seven: Consecration**

Consecrationists make a biblical and theological case not only for affirming exclusive, committed gay and lesbian relationships, but for blessing and ordering them within the context of the church. It is not merely a "welcoming and affirming" stance, but a "welcoming, affirming, and *ordering*" stance. The difference between this and the accommodationist position is that consecrationists wish to extend the church's blessing to gays and lesbians in a public way. Another difference is that consecrationists argue not merely on the basis of pastoral compassion; they also construct arguments rooted in the communal love of the Triune God. Some consecrationists favor the blessing of gay unions as a supplement to marriage (e.g., civil unions), while others would expand the definition of marriage to include gay couples.

One of the key moves made by consecrationists is to argue that marriage is not simply an “order of creation,” but is even more an “order of redemption.” The covenant of marriage, at its best, is a means of grace that contributes to the couple’s journey of becoming more and more what God would have them be. Not only that, but the covenant of marriage symbolizes God’s own covenant with God’s people. The church recognizes and consecrates committed relationships between two people—not because the relationship is already a perfect mirror of the created order, but because by consecrating it the community pledges, through the grace of God, to help it grow increasingly toward what God intended.

There is some potential for “consecrationism” to become a bridge position that would bring together celebrationists, accommodationists, legitimation advocates, and perhaps other non-affirming types. Consecrationists ask non-affirming types to make a theological move from order to affirmation, i.e., from recognizing the ordering of life being adopted by gay and lesbian couples to offering a particular affirmation of the relationships so ordered. By the same token, consecrationists ask celebrationists to move from affirmation to order, i.e., from affirmation of gay relationships generally to providing a more particular order within which those relationships can find a holy purpose.

Creation:	In contrast to celebrationists, consecrationists argue that sexuality is not considered to be good in the abstract, but its goodness depends on the context in which it occurs. A same-gender sexual orientation is not to be condemned but is to be rightly ordered.
Reconciliation in Christ:	In contrast to accommodationists, consecrationists insist the reconciliation that is ours in Christ does not merely accommodate us, but reaches out to embrace and transform us. In addition, we must not view salvation as something pertaining merely to the individual; our relationships with one another are means of grace for the whole community, especially if those relationships are covenantally conceived. In all our relationships, we should do honor to the identity each of us acquires in baptism.
Redemption in the Spirit:	Consecrationists share the celebrationist concern that gays and lesbians find wholeness and healing for the wounds that society has inflicted upon them. Yet, rather than celebrating <i>sexuality</i> as God’s good gift, consecrationists urge us to celebrate <i>people</i> as God’s good gifts, and to regulate our sexual lives accordingly. Therefore, the emphasis should shift from sexuality to relationality. In all things, we should regulate our lives so as to embody God’s purposes and give God the glory.

## CONCLUSION

As a way of summing up the differences that exist among these seven viewpoints, imagine you are playing a card game. Each of the viewpoints we are considering has a slightly different set of rules for people who are gay. Let's imagine that in all versions of the game, when the cards are first dealt, finding a two of clubs in your hand means you have been dealt a same-gender sexual orientation. You have been dealt the gay card. If this happens, what are you going to do?

In the **prohibition** version of the game, you should discard it as soon as possible. For it is a very, very bad card. If, instead of discarding it, you choose to play it, the game for you is over: you lose.

The **toleration** rules are different. As embodied in the church's current policy, if you are dealt the gay card, you have a dilemma. You cannot discard it, because it is now a part of who you are. So the best you can do is to hide it. You don't want anyone to know you have it, especially if you are seeking ordination. As long as you hide it, you will still be allowed to play the game. If you choose to *show* the card, you are permitted to stay in the game, but must remain on the fringes. If you choose to *play* the card, you can still remain in the game, but you are never, never permitted to be one of the game's leaders.

When play is governed by the **accommodation** rules, the result is different still. The accommodation rules say that if any one of us or our neighbors or friends playing the game is dealt the gay card, it creates a situation that affects all the players. It creates a situation in which all the players need to support and help the one who holds the card in deciding *whether* to play it and *how* to play it in a way that is responsible. As with prohibition and toleration, this is still an unfortunate card to have. It will make playing the game for you very difficult.

The **legitimation** position thinks the way we have been playing the game is all wrong. It believes that if you are dealt the gay card, it should be regarded as a card no different from any other. And the other players in the game should not treat you any differently either. Accordingly, advocates of this position will cry foul if other players insist the old rules should still apply. As for ordination, it should not be about what cards we are holding, but about what gifts we have been given as we play all our other cards.

For the **celebration** viewpoint, if you are dealt the gay, you should be glad. In fact, you are encouraged to show it to everyone, for it is a very good card indeed. If you are dealt this card, you need not hide it, and you need not create an alternative game in which to play it. The key is to learn how to play it in the most fulfilling and responsible way within the present game.

The **liberation** position takes legitimation a step further. It insists there is nothing intrinsic in the two of clubs that should be causing all this fuss. That we make such a fuss over it is because of the arbitrary decision at the beginning to treat the two of clubs as bad. There are many such arbitrary and unfair aspects of this game, and liberationists argue that we should remake all the rules from the ground up.

For the **consecration** perspective, this is more than just a game. In ways that are sometimes hidden, the act of playing the game is supposed to be a journey into redemption. When any one is dealt the gay card, the key is to play it in a way that is redemptive both for the player and for the community playing the game. Those playing by these rules should find a way to consecrate the card within the game itself.

In conclusion, for thirty years this issue has roiled the church. It has left many people wounded. Somehow we must find a way to move forward together without further wounding. What should be clear from this study is that the issues at stake are not simple; they are quite complex. My hope is that in working through these seven positions, the church will discover that, though we disagree, we are still speaking the same language, still worshiping the same Lord.

## Same-Gender Relationships in the Church: Seven Theological Viewpoints

	<b>Creation</b>	<b>Reconciliation</b>	<b>Redemption</b>
	<i>Non-affirming Viewpoints</i>		
<b>Prohibition</b>	Same-gender desire and behavior = <i>perversion</i>	Repent of gay <i>identity</i> ; the church prohibits gay desire and behavior	Return to true heterosexual nature
<b>Toleration</b>	Same-gender sexual orientation = <i>a tragic burden</i>	Repent of gay <i>choices</i> ; welcoming of persons, non-affirming of deeds	Stoic acceptance of one's tragic fate through abstinence
<b>Accommodation</b>	Same-gender desire = tragic burden, but open to traces of grace	<i>Focus: gay and lesbian relationships.</i> While these are disobedient in form, they may be obedient in substance, if monogamous.	Exclusive, same-sex partnerships are better than promiscuity, i.e., they are the lesser of the evils.
	<i>Critique of Non-affirming Viewpoints</i>		
<b>Legitimation</b>	Same-gender desire = like all other sinful conditions	<i>Focus: ordination.</i> Repent of singling out gay sins and ignoring other sins.	Create a just world in which difference no longer makes a difference.
	<i>Welcoming and Affirming Viewpoints</i>		
<b>Celebration</b>	<i>Essentialist:</i> being gay is a fact of "natural" life.	Gays and lesbians need to be reconciled to the goodness of their sexual orientation.	Live into one's sexual orientation as God's good gift.
<b>Liberation</b>	<i>Social construction:</i> a fact of nurtured life	Challenge binary gender categories (male/female).	Affirm complexity of gender choices.
<b>Consecration</b>	Sexual orientation not to be condemned, but also ambiguous and needing to be rightly ordered.	Sin does not reside in orientation or behavior per se, but in whether one's life is rightly ordered. Our relationships are a means of grace.	One's sexuality is to be consecrated through an exclusive, committed covenant blessed by the church. People, not sexuality, are the objects of our celebration.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the initial question was framed in terms of self-acknowledgment alone, not self-acknowledgment *and* practice. The self-acknowledgment/practice distinction was introduced later. The request came from the presbyteries of New York and the Palisades. They were part of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, representing the “northern” branch of Presbyterianism, which was reunited with the “southern” Presbyterian Church in the U.S. in 1983. The committee to which the question was assigned changed the terminology from “avowed” to “self-acknowledged” and “self-affirming.” See “The Church and Homosexuality,” by Reverend Byron E. Shafer, p. 16, reprinted in the pamphlet, “The Church and Homosexuality,” The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Office of the General Assembly (1978). As for the politics of focusing on gay self-acknowledgment, or what has come to be known colloquially as “coming out of the closet,” see the discussion of Viewpoint Six: Liberation.

<sup>2</sup> For more reflections in this vein, see Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, “To Ask a Better Question: The Heterosexuality/Homosexuality Debate,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, vol. 51 (1997): 143-58.

<sup>3</sup> Representative academic studies include: John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, with a new afterword (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1982, 1995); Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981); David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Stephen O. Murray, *Homosexualities* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003). For encyclopedic studies, see generally: Wayne Dynes, ed., *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, 2 vols. (Chicago and London: St. James Press, 1990); Bonnie Zimmerman and George T. Haggerty, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Lesbian and Gay Histories and Cultures*, 2 vols. (New York: Garland Books, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion of Viewpoint Two: Toleration.

<sup>5</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders II*, American Psychiatric Association (1973). The American Psychological Association followed suit in 1975. The votes at the time were won by strong majorities, but there was also a solid minority that registered its opposition.

<sup>6</sup> The decision was, in effect, an endorsement of the approach taken much earlier in 1955 by the American Law Institute in its Model Penal Code, 213.2. A similar recommendation was made in England by the Wolfenden Commission in 1957. Sir John Wolfenden, et al., *Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offenses and Prostitution* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1957; *The*

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*Wolfenden Report: Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offenses and Prostitution*, Authorized American Edition, intro. Karl Menninger (New York: Stein and Day, 1963).

<sup>7</sup> The beginning of the modern gay rights movement is usually dated June 27, 1969, which marked the Stonewall riots in New York City. [The literature on Stonewall is too voluminous to cite, but see the following recent work; David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004).] Still, after Stonewall the gay rights movement was more visible, less apologetic, more activist, and at times more militant. The militancy reached its peak with the revelations of the institutional violence associated with ignoring the crisis of HIV/AIDS. [See Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the Aids Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).]

<sup>8</sup> Nor were these isolated cases. In 1984 in Bangor, Maine, three high school students beat a gay man to the point of unconsciousness and threw him in a river. The man drowned, but the students were released into the custody of their parents rather than being more severely punished. In 1988, a judge reduced the sentence of two men convicted of murdering a gay man in Texas and made comments from the bench implying that the character of the deceased did not warrant ruining the lives of the accused. Studies have shown that most gay men and many lesbian women have experienced some form of intimidation. In addition to general abuse, 24% of gay men and 10% of lesbians reported some form of criminal assault on their person during the previous year. See generally: Gary Comstock, *Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> For an accessible account of our scientific knowledge, together with the interface of that knowledge with broader political issues, see: Deborah Rudacille, *The Riddle of Gender: Science, Activism and Transgender Rights* (New York: Pantheon, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> The most straightforward and accessible account for the lay reader of the scientific data is: Francis Mark Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> How does this come to be? Sexual differentiation of embryos does not begin until approximately six weeks into development. Prior to that time each embryo contains the potential to develop the reproductive organs of either male or female. The presence of a specific hormone during a critical period of embryonic development, however, causes the embryo to grow anatomically into a male. The absence of this hormone will lead to a genetic male developing into an anatomical female. Consider the following types of cases: (1) *Androgen insensitivity syndrome*. These persons are genetic males, but who are externally female. The condition results from a defect in the receptor molecule that enables testosterone to do its embryonic business, resulting in a person with female genitalia. The true genetic maleness of such persons is usually not discovered until she (he) is a young adult and fails to menstruate. It is an interesting fact that most of these genetic males are also sexually attracted to other males. (2) *5-alpha-reductase deficiency*. This is an enzyme necessary for

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normal development of the external genitalia. Males who lack this enzyme are genetically males, but their genitalia upon birth appear to be female. Usually these persons are raised as girls, but upon reaching puberty, they all of a sudden seem to turn into males. Interestingly, these persons have a sexual orientation toward women, suggesting that raising a male as female cannot erase the hormonally inscribed male urges. (3) *Congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH)*. Persons with this condition can be genetically female but anatomically male. This occurs through an abnormal enlargement of adrenal glands that causes the production of an excess amount of testosterone. If this syndrome occurs in a genetic male, the result is benign. If it occurs in a genetic female, however, she can develop masculinized genitalia. (4) *Di-ethyl-stil-bestrol*. This was a hormone administered in the 1940s and 1950s to help women with a history of miscarriage. The idea was that it helped to overcome hormonal deficiencies in the placenta. The effects apparently produced by this hormone give a further clue into the etiology of gender dysphoria and same-gender desire. For example, in female children of mothers who took this hormone, there is a reported increase in same-gender fantasy. In one study, 25% considered themselves lesbian or bisexual, which is a result ten times the statistical norm. What is true for anatomy is also true for the sexual differentiation of the brain: hormonal events prior to birth shape our mental makeup, including sexual desire and traits that are commonly associated with male and female. This fact is leading scientists to explore the impact of brain chemistry on sexual desire and orientation. For an accessible discussion of these and other issues, see: Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, pp. 97-158.

<sup>12</sup> For more on this, including the question whether our traditional two-gender framework is adequate, see the discussion of Viewpoint Six: Liberation.

<sup>13</sup> These figures come from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV*, American Psychiatric Association (1994).

<sup>14</sup> The term “homosexual” was originally coined in 1869 by Károly Mária Kertbeny, a German-Hungarian writer. [Manfred Herzer, “Károly Mária Kertbeny (Karl Maria Benkert; 1824-1882)” in *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, 1:659-60.] From the late nineteenth century forward, Western society ceased to think solely about homosexual acts and thought of the homosexual as a type of person, or as Foucault put it, a “species.” Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1. See also David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990). It is noteworthy that the term “homosexual” was originally contrasted with the term “normalsexual.” Ever since then, it has carried the connotation of a pathological or abnormal reality. Even though “homosexual” is the term of choice for an older generation of scholars [see, for example, Wayne R. Dynes, ed., *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, 2 vols.], most today prefer the terms “gay” or “lesbian” [see, for example, Bonnie Zimmerman and George T. Haggerty, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Lesbian and Gay Histories and Cultures*, 2 vols.].

<sup>15</sup> For example, sexual activity between young men and boys in New Guinea is a rite of passage believed to transfer virility from one generation to another and to serve as a preparation for marriage. [See Gilbert H. Herdt, *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of

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California Press, 1984).] This ritualized, same-sex practice is something else entirely from the frequent and hedonistic same-sex practices of the Greeks, practices that were especially common in athletic, military, and academic contexts. [The classic text remains: K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, Updated and with a new Postscript (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).] Different still was the way Native American cultures viewed transgender and same-gender phenomena. Not bound by the construct of two genders, they believed a third gender type combined the spiritual gifts of men and women. These shamanic individuals, whom external observers called the *berdache*, were highly honored by the tribe, and their same-sex marriages were not considered unusual. [Walter L. Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).] Or consider the company of women in contemporary Greece called the *parea*, in which a group of, say, seventy or so women, who are also wives and mothers, secretly engage in same-sex love affairs, though they do not consider themselves to be lesbians. [Elisabeth Kirtsoglou, *For the Love of Women: Identity and Same-sex Relations in a Provincial Greek Town* (London: Routledge, 2004).] See in general: Stephen O. Murray, *Homosexualities*; Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*.

<sup>16</sup> For the most part, I have tried to use the neutral designator, “same-sex relationships,” and have opted to speak of persons who want to own their same-gender desire as “gay” and/or “lesbian.” I will sometimes use the term “gay” to include both gay men and lesbian women. I will also speak from time to time of “gender-varied persons,” which I take to include gay, lesbian, bisexual, *and* transgender persons. To me, “gender-varied” is better than the more technical, “GLBT,” which is a common acronym meaning gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons. It should be noted, of course, that all such terms are contested on all sides of the debate. Some liberationists (see discussion of Viewpoint Six) argue that “gay” is too restrictive. Some prohibitionists (see discussion of Viewpoint One) refuse to use the term “gay” for fear of legitimating its political connotations. They prefer the term “homosexual,” which still carries with it the connotation of the pathological, as explained above. On the term “gay,” see: Scott Speirs, “Gay,” in *Gay Histories and Culture: An Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 of *The Encyclopedia of Gay and Lesbian Histories and Cultures*, pp. 362-363.

<sup>17</sup> The case was *Bowers v. Hardwick* 478 U.S. 186 (1986). *Bowers* was a closely decided, five-to-four decision, which upheld the constitutionality of a sodomy law in Georgia. According to that law, it was then unlawful to have anal or oral sex, no matter whether the act was performed by a gay or straight couple. The particular facts in the *Bowers* case show how sodomy laws, while written to cover gay or straight behavior, have often been used simply to harass gays, especially gay men. The facts were these: A gay man, Michael Hardwick, was seen by a police officer exiting a gay bar in Atlanta, where he worked as a bartender. As he walked out the door, Bowers threw a bottle of beer he was just finishing in a dumpster. The officer, who seems to have taken an interest in pursuing gays, gave Hardwick a citation for drinking in public. Then, because of an administrative error, Bowers was given the wrong date for his court appearance and failed to appear. Eventually, he paid the fine, but not before a warrant was issued for his arrest. The same officer who had given him the ticket decided to serve the warrant, which he chose to do at 3:00 a.m.

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When the officer entered Bowers' apartment, he found him engaging in an act of consensual sex with an adult male. Hardwick was arrested and charged with sodomy. Whereas many gays who were subjected to this sort of charge in the past simply paid the fine, Hardwick decided to challenge the law's legitimacy. Eventually, Georgia would eliminate its sodomy law, but in the meantime, the U. S. Supreme Court upheld the law in a decision in which Justice Powell cast the deciding vote.

<sup>18</sup> Joyce Murdoch and Deb Price, *Courting Justice: Gay Men and Lesbian Women v. the Supreme Court* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> The action of Ed Johnson, pastor of a 600-member church in South Hill, Virginia, was upheld by a five-to-three vote of the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church on October 31, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> "No baptism for gay couples' babies says Quebec cardinal," Ottawa, July 18, 2005, *Catholic World News*, <http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=38474>. Accessed July 19, 2005. The cardinal subsequently modified this to say the prohibition was against both parents signing the baptismal registry. Deborah Gyapong, Canadian Catholic News, Ottawa, "Same-sex marriage may impact Baptism: Two same signatures are not allowed, says Cardinal Ouellet," *Western Catholic Reporter*, August 18, 2005, <http://www.wcr.ab.ca/news/2005/0822/baptism082205.shtml>. Accessed August 18, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), p. 105. Stuart, who is a long-time advocate for gay and lesbian concerns in Great Britain, argues that the impasse is the result of the theological inadequacy of both sides of the debate. Her book seeks to reframe gay and lesbian theologies more directly within the traditional language of the church.

<sup>22</sup> The Second Helvetic Confession, chapter II, *The Book of Confessions*, 5.010 to 5.014.

<sup>23</sup> See generally the essays collected in: Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> An earlier oral presentation of this study, which was reported in the church press, dealt with only six viewpoints. In committing the study to writing, I found that a fuller typology more faithfully captured the actual diversity within the church.

<sup>25</sup> Catherine LaCugna, "The Practical Trinity," *Christian Century* 109 (July 15-22, 1992): 678-82.

<sup>26</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>27</sup> For example, see 1 Thes. 5:8; Rom. 5:10, 8:23, 13:11; Phil. 1:19; Eph. 4:30; Col. 1:22; Heb. 9:28.

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<sup>28</sup> I first began working on this typology for a presentation in Austin, Texas in 1993. Other typologies have been offered, but I am not aware of one that approaches it as this one does through the lens of creation, reconciliation, and redemption. For an illuminating, four-fold, political typology with a constructive fifth position, see: Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995; New York: Vintage, 1996). For a five-fold, ethical typology, see: Patricia Beattie Jung and Ralph F. Smith, *Heterosexism: An Ethical Challenge* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994): pp. 22-30. For a six-fold typology with some affinities with the present study, see: L. R. Holben, *What Christians Think about Homosexuality: Six Representative Viewpoints* (North Richland Hills, TX: Bibal Press, 1999). I have been informed by all three of these authors in refining my approach over the years.

<sup>29</sup> I take the word “homoerotic” to be a neutral designation for same-gender sexual desire and conduct in the broadest sense, whether embodied in the lives of individuals, portrayed in an aesthetic medium, or otherwise given cultural expression in any way. For reasons already explained, I am not using the word “homosexual” with its historic connotations of pathology (see note 16).

<sup>30</sup> They are:

1. Deut. 23:17-18, which may refer to male cult prostitution; and
2. Two parallel accounts of attempted male-on-male gang rape: first, the Gentile men of Sodom (Gen. 18—19), and second, the Jewish men of Gibeah (Judges 19—21).

In this cluster of texts, the biblical passage is clearly condemning a certain form of conduct, but in each case there is something besides the same-sex character of the conduct that makes it bad. If Deut. 23:17-18 refers to male-on-male cult prostitution, it is wrong for the same reason male-on-female cult prostitution would be wrong, namely, that it involves the idolatrous worship of other gods.

The two cases of attempted rape require more reflection. On the one hand, contemporary commentators agree that these rape texts have no direct bearing upon the question before the church today. Rape is wrong simply because it is rape, irrespective of the gender of the victim. Moreover, the biblical witness itself interprets the sin of Sodom as inhospitality and failing to care for the poor and needy (Ezek. 16:49-50; Jer. 23:14; 2 Pet. 2:6-10; Jude 7). On the other hand, these texts do provide an important window into understanding the context within which all the various biblical pronouncements on this subject arose. In the biblical world, acts of same-sex rape were carried out as a form of humiliating the male who was being abused. Such acts were especially common in military contexts. It is difficult to imagine that this practice did not influence the overall Jewish view of same-sex intercourse.

<sup>31</sup> ואת-זכר לא תשכב משכבי אשה תועבה הוא:

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<sup>32</sup> ואיש אשר ישכב את־זכר משכבי אשה תועבה עשו שניהם  
מות יומתו דמיהם במ:

<sup>33</sup> This has been pointed out by Robin Scroggs, *The Bible and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), pp. 106-108. The word appears in no extant text prior to 1 Cor. 6:9, suggesting that it was coined in Paul's day. The text in Greek, transliterated Greek and English, reads as follows:

και ος αν κοι μηθη μετα **αρσενος κοιτην** γυναικος....

*kai hos an koimēthēi meta **arsenos koitēn** gunaikos....*

“and if a man sleeps with a man in the bed in a woman-like way....”

<sup>34</sup> It is necessary for these two arguments—from biblical prohibition and from marriage—to work in tandem, because the biblical prohibitions do not explicitly address the contemporary issue that faces the church today, namely, committed, same-gender partnerships. No less an authority than the British evangelical preacher, John R. W. Stott, has acknowledged that the prohibitions by themselves say nothing about such partnerships. However, Stott argues that the negative prohibitions, together with the positive teaching about marriage, eliminate the possibility of the church endorsing gay or lesbian partnerships. John R. W. Stott, *Homosexual Partnerships? Why same-sex relationships are not a Christian option* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1985).

<sup>35</sup> A more elementary form of the argument claims that same-gender sex is wrong because of a lack of anatomical “fit” between male and female. A typical argument is that of Brian Racer, pastor of the Open Door Bible Church, in Hanover, Maryland, who put this view succinctly: “The male is the piercer, the female is the pierced. That is the way God designed it.” Racer also claims (erroneously) that the Hebrew words for male and female are “actually the words for the male and female genital parts.” Russell Shorto, “What’s Their Real Problem with Gay Marriage (It’s the Gay Part),” *New York Times Magazine*, June 19, 2005, Section 6, p. 39.

<sup>36</sup> This group draws inspiration from the Catholic theologian, Germain Grisez, formerly of Georgetown University, now of Mount St. Mary’s College and Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. [See especially: Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 2, *Living a Christian Life* (Quincy, Illinois: Franciscan Press, 1993).] Although heavily influenced by theological commitments, the arguments of these “new natural lawyers” are cast in a philosophical frame that is designed to influence public policy. Still, the emphasis upon organic fellowship draws implicitly from the well of Roman Catholic sacramental theology. The sex act of marriage is a physical sign of a spiritual grace. The implication drawn from this is that sex between two men or two women does not partake of the intrinsic, sacramental goodness of marital sex. Thus, sex outside of marriage is always wrong. By its very nature it cannot achieve such a reproductive union. Unless one

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engages in sex with an openness to procreation, then one is merely using the body of another for one's own pleasure. Representative texts include: John M. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Gerard V. Bradley and Robert P. George, "Marriage and the Liberal Imagination," 84 *Georgetown Law Journal* 301 (1995); Robert P. George, *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion, and Morality in Crisis*, (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2001). The best critique of this movement is the following: Stephen Macedo, "Homosexuality and the Conservative Mind," 84 *Georgetown Law Journal* 261 (1995).

<sup>37</sup> The definition of Robert George sums this up succinctly:

Marriage is a two-in-one-flesh communion of persons that is consummated and actualized by acts that are reproductive in type, whether or not they are reproductive in effect. . . . the bodily union of spouses in marital acts is the biological matrix of their marriage as a multi-level relationship; that is, a relationship that unites persons at the bodily, emotional, dispositional, and spiritual levels of their being.

<sup>38</sup> A widely quoted, comparative sociological study interviewed 10,000 American couples, of whom ninety were lesbian and ninety were gay male couples: Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz, *American Couples: Money, Work, Sex* (New York: William Morrow, 1983). Among their findings was that only a minority of gay men is monogamous. (Ibid., p. 296). However, it needs to be said that this study is over twenty years old, and the number of gay and lesbian couples was small. In addition, empirical studies such as these do not tell us what sort of behavior would result if society were to *encourage* monogamy among gay men. For example, polls in countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands, where same-gender coupling is encouraged, indicates that the majority of gay people in those places desire a committed relationship. Neither type of empirical study, of course, answers the moral question before the church, which revolves not on what *is*, but on what *ought* to be the case.

<sup>39</sup> In addition to behavioral research into sexual conduct, much of the evidence for this perspective derives from the fields of evolutionary biology and psychology. The idea is that inherited cognitive and emotional structures, which are the result of evolutionary adaptation to further the prospects of survival, governs much of human sexual behavior—albeit with cultural differences from place to place and age to age. See, e.g., David Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of Mind* (New York: Allyn Bacon, 1998); Steve Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, reprint edition (New York: Penguin, 2003). This puts some biblically literalist conservatives in an awkward position: They are relying on theories from evolution to make their case, even though they do not affirm belief in evolution. I wish to acknowledge and thank Professor Russell K. Nieli of Princeton University for conversations and correspondence concerning the way these sorts of arguments are used by social conservatives to make their case against homoerotic conduct.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Sullivan also identifies the prohibitionist type in *Virtually Normal*, pp. 19-55.

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<sup>41</sup> See William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> See note 19 above.

<sup>43</sup> Regarding gay teachers, see: Acanfora v. Board of Education of Montgomery County, 491 F.2d 498 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1973), cert. denied 419 U. S. (1974); Gaylord v. Tacoma School District, 88 Wn. 286, 559 P.2d 1340, cert. denied 434 U. S. 879 (1977); National Gay Task Force v. Board of Education of Oklahoma City, 729 F. 2d 1270, cert. denied 470 U.S. 903 (1985). Regarding gays in the military, see the so-called “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, which is codified at 10 U.S.C. §654. Regarding the Boy Scouts, see Boy Scouts of America v. Dale 530 U. S. 640 (2000).

<sup>44</sup> Lawrence v. Texas, 539 U.S. 558 (2003). An example of how this issue is still a live one is provided by the case of Matthew Limon, a mentally challenged young man residing in the State of Kansas. On February 16, 2000, Matthew Limon, who was one week past his eighteenth birthday, performed a one-time, consensual act of oral sex on another mentally challenged boy who was almost fifteen. Matthew Limon was tried as an adult and sentenced to seventeen years and two months in prison, which means, for this one act of youthful experimentation, Matthew Limon was consigned to prison until he reached the age of thirty six. However, had the sex act occurred between a young boy and a young girl, the State of Kansas provides a different set of rules. In what is popularly known as a “Romeo and Juliet” law, an act of consensual oral sex between members of the opposite sex in Kansas, draws a maximum prison sentence of fifteen months, not seventeen years. The same day that Lawrence v. Texas was decided, the U.S. Supreme Court sent Limon v. Kansas back to the Kansas state court for action consistent with the Lawrence ruling. Despite Lawrence, the Kansas Court of Appeals, on January 30, 2004, refused to hold in favor of Limon. Finally, on October 21, 2005, a unanimous Kansas Supreme Court struck down the law under which Limon had been convicted and ordered his release. Notwithstanding the unequal treatment of same-gender and opposite gender conduct, the verdict in the Limon case was applauded by James Dobson’s “Focus on the Family,” which adopts a strict prohibitionist stance.

<sup>45</sup> For a fine example of this view, see Max E. Stackhouse, *Covenant and Commitments: Faith, Family, and Economic Life*, The Family, Religion, and Culture Series (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997). A more problematic example is provided by: Dennis Praeger, “Homosexuality, the Bible, and Us,” *Public Interest*, Summer, 1993. Available online at: [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0377/is\\_n112/ai\\_14466341](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0377/is_n112/ai_14466341). Praeger’s claim that the Hebrew Bible single-handedly organized sexual life in a way that is without parallel in other civilizations will strike many as hyperbolic and chauvinistic. Since he is a conservative Jew, his slurs against the nature of sexuality in Islam raise serious questions about his objectivity.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, Documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987).

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 43, 2a2ae, questions 153-154.

<sup>48</sup> For example, Barth's exegesis has had a profound influence on Roman Catholic theology. It used to be the Catholic teaching that sexuality was part of humanity's animal nature. Now, sexuality is said to be part of being in the image of God. See John Paul II, *A Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul); Angelo Cardinal Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, trans. Michelle K. Borrás, Ressourcement: Retrieval and Renewal in Catholic Thought, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>49</sup> Yet we know that a child is much more likely to be molested by a heterosexual male than by someone who is gay or lesbian. One also hears some prohibitionists compare gay and lesbian relationships to incest. Do such comparisons match what we know from clinical data? We know that incest, which is almost always a heterosexual offense, does serious emotional and psychological harm to innocent children. We have no such evidence for committed gay and lesbian relationships.

There is plenty of evidence that gay men and lesbian women make good parents and that sexual orientation by itself tells us little about what sort of parent a person will be. Some worry that the children raised by gays or lesbians are at greater "risk" of becoming gay or lesbian themselves. Yet there is no credible evidence that the sexual orientation of a child's caregiver affects the sexual orientation of the child. In one study, over ninety percent of the boys raised by gay men self-identified as heterosexual, which is approximately the number one would expect, based on the 2002 study discussed above. [J. Michael Bailey, David Bobrow, Marilyn Wolfe, and Sarah Mikach, *Developmental Psychology* 31/1 (1995): 124-29.] Moreover, children of gay and lesbian parents do not seem to have any greater struggles regarding gender identity, gender roles, or sexual orientation than do children of heterosexual parents, though there is some evidence indicating that the social stigma imposed on gay families may create for children greater levels of anxiety. In short, numerous studies suggest that children being nurtured by gay or lesbian parents turn out the same as those growing up in more traditional heterosexual households. If anything, they may turn out better. They may have a more open and accepting posture toward those who differ from themselves. [Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz, "(How) Does Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?" *American Sociological Review* 66 (April 2001): 159-83.] In fact, one study suggests that being raised by two mothers is the best case scenario for a child. [e.g., Patricia J. Falk, "Lesbian Mothers: Psychological Assumptions in Family Law," *American Psychologist* 44 (1989): 941-47]. A summary of the research findings concerning gay and lesbian parents is provided by University of Virginia Professor Charlotte J. Patterson, "Lesbian and Gay Parenting," American Psychological Association (2005), [www.apa.org/pi/parent.html](http://www.apa.org/pi/parent.html), accessed October 16, 2005. See her earlier survey: Charlotte J. Patterson, "Adoption of Minor Children by Lesbian and Gay Adults: A Social Science Perspective," *Duke Journal of Law and Policy* 2/1 (1995): 195-205. Much of the literature is discussed and some of it excerpted in: Eskridge and Hunter, *Sexuality, Gender and the Law*, 2d Edition (New York: Foundation Press, 2004), pp. 1182-88.]

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For these reasons, among others, the American Academy of Pediatrics, a physician organization seeking to promote the health and well-being of children, has supported adoption by gays and lesbians, including second-parent adoption. American Pediatric Association Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, “Technical Report: Co-parent or Second-parent Adoption by Same-sex Parents,” *Pediatrics* 109 (February 2002): 341-344. The same is true of the American Psychological Association: see *Lesbian and Gay Parenting: A Resource for Psychologists*, American Psychological Association (1995).

The most often cited article claiming that gay or lesbian parents are bad for children is by Brigham Young Law Professor Lynn Wardle, “The Potential Impact of Homosexual Parenting on Children,” *University of Illinois Law Review* 1997/3 (1997): 833-920. Wardle would have the law erect a rebuttable presumption that having homosexual parents is not in the best interests of the child. Among other problems with Wardle’s argument, he relies uncritically upon discredited findings about gays and lesbians by Paul Cameron [see Paul Cameron and Kirk Cameron, “Homosexual Parents,” *Adolescence* 31 (1996): 757-76]. These findings have been so discredited, in fact, that Cameron has been dismissed from the American Psychological Association and censured by the American Sociological Association. For a critique of Wardle, see Carlos Bell and Janice Farrell Pea, “Warring with Wardle: Social Science, Morality, and Gay and Lesbian Parents,” *University of Illinois Law Review* 1998/2 (1998): 253-339. See also Wardle’s response, in which he argues it is fair to make gays and lesbians prove they will be good parents. [Lynn Wardle, “Fighting with Phantoms: A Reply to Warring with Wardle,” *University of Illinois Law Review* 1998/2: 629-41.] The problem is that Wardle proceeds by way of prejudice, basically assuming that all gays and lesbians are bad parents—an assumption the facts do not bear out and one we do not make about heterosexuals. There is one study, which tracks children over a fifteen-year period, suggesting that girls raised by lesbian women have a greater openness to homoerotic experience than the population at large, but these same girls evidenced no greater likelihood of self-identifying as lesbians themselves. [Fiona Tasker and Susan Golombok, *Growing Up in a Lesbian Family: Effects on Child Development* (New York: Guilford Publications, 1997).]

Among the many treatments of polygamous harm, see: Andrea Moore-Emmett, *God’s Brothel: The Extortion of Sex for Salvation in Contemporary Mormon and Christian Fundamentalist Polygamy and the Stories of 18 Women Who Escaped* (San Francisco: Pince-Nez Press, 2004). For a legal analysis, see: Marci A. Hamilton, *God vs. the Gavel: Religion and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chs. 2 and 3.

<sup>50</sup> For example, see: Bruce Bawer, *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993); Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal*. From a similar vantage point, see Jonathan Rauch, *Gay Marriage: Why It’s Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America*. For a critical analysis of the conservative defense of gay marriage from a liberationist perspective, see Paul Robinson, *Queer Wars: The New Gay Right and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> This is according to the 2000 Census. Some have argued the figure is higher, on the grounds that

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not all same-gender couples self-identify on government documents.

<sup>52</sup> The best single critique of the argument from nature is the widely cited article of Stephen Macedo, “Homosexuality and the Conservative Mind,” and “Reply to Critics,” *Georgetown Law Journal* 84 (December, 1995): 261-300, 329-338.

<sup>53</sup> “Toleration” is the best way to capsulize the position of most mainline churches, including the PC(USA) as set forth in its Definitive Guidance document and codified in G-6.0106b. I owe the apt rubric “welcoming but not affirming” to the late Stanley Grenz, which is another way of summing up the current mainline position. See Stanley Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

<sup>54</sup> The recommendation referenced the provision in the Form of Government in effect in the UPCUSA at the time: Chapter VII, Section 3 (37.03): “...It is indispensable that, besides possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural and acquired, everyone undertaking a particular ministry should have a sense of inner persuasion, be sound in faith, live according to godliness, have the approval of God’s people and the concurring judgment of a lawful judiciary of the Church.”

<sup>55</sup> *Definitive Guidance: The Church’s Statements on Homosexuality*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), pp. 47-48.

<sup>56</sup> For a useful chronology of PC(USA) decisions on sexuality from 1970 to 2004, see Robert Dooling, “An Annotated List of the Actions of the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church Regarding Human Sexuality (from 1970-2004,” <http://pforum.org/annotatedlist.pdf>. Accessed January 1, 2006.

<sup>57</sup> “The Church and Homosexuality: A Preliminary Study,” (1977), a paper recommended for study by the 117th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States; reprinted in: *Definitive Guidance*, pp. 1-40.

<sup>58</sup> “The Church and Homosexuality,” by the Reverend Byron E. Shafer (1978), reproduced in: *The Church and Homosexuality*, The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Office of the General Assembly (1978), pp. 9-56.

<sup>59</sup> “Policy Statement and Recommendations,” reproduced in: *The Church and Homosexuality*, The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Office of the General Assembly (1978), pp. 57-62; adopted UPCUSA GA *Minutes* 1978: 261-266; reprinted as “The Church and Homosexuality,” in *Definitive Guidance: The Church’s Statements on Homosexuality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), pp. 1-40. It should be noted that “definitive guidance” is not a term with any constitutional status in the *Book of Order*, but a phrase that was introduced in Overture 9-76 by the Presbytery of the Palisades.

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<sup>60</sup> “The Church and Homosexuality, A Position Paper,” adopted PCUS GA *Minutes* 1979: 361-365; reprinted in: *Definitive Guidance*, pp. 61-78. A useful version of this paper, with the PC(USA) and PCUS versions side-by-side, is available in: *Selected Theological Statements of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assemblies (1956-1998)*, Office of Theology and Worship, Congregational Ministries Division, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (1998), pp. 46-61.

<sup>61</sup> “The Church and Homosexuality: A Preliminary Study, 1977,” reprinted in: *Definitive Guidance*, p. 27-28.

<sup>62</sup> The majority opinion would have further specified that the General Assembly “chooses not to offer an authoritative and limiting interpretation of what may correctly be deduced from the Constitution and instead remits the question to the presbyteries and congregations for further discussion and for adjudications made by individual Christian consciences considering individual cases and circumstances.” Shafer, “The Church and Homosexuality,” p. 48. The majority (and minority) opinion would have specifically rejected the following option: “[O]ffer an authoritative interpretation of what may correctly be deduced from the Constitution, stating that the Constitution’s underlying biblical and theological presuppositions and informing principles, definitely preclude barring the ordination of a self-affirming, practicing homosexual person on the basis of homosexual behavior per se (although not on the basis of the moral quality of sexual relationship).” The majority rejected this option because it would have bound the conscience of the minority, which opposed the ordination of persons in same-gender relationships on biblical and theological principle. *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>64</sup> For a comparison of the 1978 and 1979 versions, see *Selected Theological Statements of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assemblies (1956-1998)*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>65</sup> The 1979 PCUS document was slightly different. It reiterated a prior policy affirming “the need for the church to stand for just treatment of homosexual persons in our society in regard to their civil liberties, equal rights and protection under the law from social and economic discrimination which is due all citizens.” It also acknowledged the need to balance this with the interests of those citizens who disapprove of homoerotic conduct.

<sup>66</sup> The following points are worth noting in deciding whether a single approach or multiple approaches to Scripture are warranted. The 1978 Statement claims that: (A) Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 speak to “homosexual behavior between consenting males” and Rom. 1:26-27 to such behavior between consenting males and females. Some biblical scholars argue, however, that the type of sexual activity addressed is not “consensual” in the modern connotation of the term. That is, the behavior of one male sexually penetrating another was by definition an act performed by a social superior upon a social inferior, which is not the same thing as sexuality confined within a loving, committed, exclusive relationship between equals. It is also not absolutely clear from the text of Romans whether the female conduct is same-gender, opposite-gender, or both. (B) In approaching

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Leviticus, the Reformed tradition distinguishes between moral and ritual laws. However, this is not a distinction that is recognized in the text of Leviticus itself. (C) 2 Pet. 2:6-10 and Jude 7 imply that a more generalized “homosexual practice” was going on in Gen. 19:1-29 and not merely same-sex rape. This assertion is not accepted by most biblical scholars today. In addition, the document neglects to mention the clearest statement in Scripture, Ezek. 16:49-50, which declares the sin of Sodom was a failure to care for the poor. (D) The term “unnatural” in Rom. 1:26-27 refers to action “contrary to that order of universal human sexual nature that God intended in Genesis 1 and 2.” Yet there is no word for “nature” in Hebrew, and many scholars believe Paul is quoting Stoic philosophy here, a form of philosophy that had no reference to the book of Genesis. (E) 1 Cor. 6:9-10 and 1 Tim. 1:9-10 apply to same-sex sexual conduct of all types rather than to exploitative acts, stating “We may safely assume that some [sexual relationships in the Hellenistic World] were characterized by tenderness, commitment, and altruism.” Some biblical interpreters would prefer to see these passages linked to the exploitative and often violent nature of sex in the Roman Empire, including especially the way in which sexuality and slavery were intimately linked. For more on this issue, see the discussion of biblical passages in the Welcoming and Affirming section.

<sup>67</sup> *Definitive Guidance*, p. 75. I cite the 1979 version here because of its more correct use of grammar.

<sup>68</sup> According to this policy, gay people in the military may not be dismissed so long as they do not reveal their identity; the military itself is not allowed to ask questions of sexual identity. The policy was put forward by the Defense Department on July 19, 1993. It is codified in law at: 10 U.S.C. §654.

<sup>69</sup> See Stanley Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming*.

<sup>70</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, 1964). The section entitled “The Problem of Homosexuality” appears at pp. 269-92.

<sup>71</sup> See the chapter entitled “Homosexuality,” in Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), pp. 379-406.

<sup>72</sup> Hays quotes favorably the judgment of Ernst Käsemann: “moral perversion is the result of God’s wrath, not the reason for it.” *Ibid.*, p. 385.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas W. Gillespie, “The Pastoral Dilemma,” in *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, ed. Choon-Leong Seow (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 113-122.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>77</sup> George Hunsinger's position is presented in a series of five essays, Hunsinger, "There is a Third Way: Theses for Our Crisis in the Church," *Presbyterian Outlook*, Guest Viewpoint, November 26, 2001, <http://www.pres-outlook.com/HTML/hunsinger112501.html>; idem, "Thinking Outside the Box, Part 1: Further Reflections on a Third Way for Our Church," *Presbyterian Outlook*, Guest Viewpoint, March 13, 2002, <http://www.pres-outlook.com/HTML/hun031302a.html>; idem, "Thinking Outside the Box, Part 2: On the 'Plain Sense' of Scripture," *Presbyterian Outlook*, Guest Viewpoint, March 13, 2002, <http://www.pres-outlook.com/HTML/hun031302b.html>; idem, "Thinking Outside the Box, Part 3: On 'Responsible Discretion' Toward Ordination Candidates," *Presbyterian Outlook*, Guest Viewpoint, March 13, 2002, <http://www.pres-outlook.com/HTML/hun031302c.html>; idem, "Thinking Outside the Box, Part 4: The Voice of 'Progressive Traditionalists,'" *Presbyterian Outlook*, Guest Viewpoint, March 13, 2002, <http://www.pres-outlook.com/HTML/hun031302d.html>.

<sup>78</sup> According to Hunsinger (Theses 10 and 11), if the church were not to explicitly uphold "fidelity" it would countenance "infidelity," and if not "chastity," then "unchastity." But surely the church was not advocating infidelity or unchastity before G-6.0106b was enacted. There is more than one way to uphold these standards. Moreover, this either/or mode of reflection regarding the way the current standards are written stands in a certain tension with Hunsinger's overall advocacy of a "third way."

<sup>79</sup> Hunsinger, "There is a Third Way," Thesis 4.

<sup>80</sup> Hunsinger's discussion of the confessions "Part 3" is instructive:

It is interesting to note what is said about it in our *Book of Confessions*. Celibacy is regarded as a "gift" or special charism (C-5.245). If given, it does not come merely by good intentions or by taking a vow, for it is a gift bestowed "from Heaven" (C-5.245). How does one know if the gift has actually been given? The familiar biblical test is supplied: one knows because one can embrace it from the heart, because one is not constantly beset by fantasies that are impure or incontinent, and because one is not "afire with passion" (C-5.245). Otherwise, the gift has not been given. Moreover, it can be "taken away" so that marriage is one's only recourse (C-5.245). No Christian should "entangle" himself or herself in any vow "which is not in his [or her] own power, and for the performance whereof he [or she] hath no promise or ability from God" (C-6.126). "Entangling vows of single life" (like, by the way, "undue delay of marriage") are clearly to be approached with great caution (C-7.249).

<sup>81</sup> Hunsinger, "Thinking Outside the Box, Part III."

<sup>82</sup> Hunsinger, "There is a Third Way," Theses 49-52.

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<sup>83</sup> “It is useful to distinguish morally among what is required, commended, permitted, discouraged and proscribed. These distinctions allow for a series of graded judgments (as opposed to merely either/or categorizations).” Hunsinger, “There is a Third Way,” Thesis 19.

<sup>84</sup> This is my observation, not Hunsinger’s.

<sup>85</sup> For a fuller treatment of the biblical arguments, see the discussion of the “welcoming, affirming” positions.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 402-03.

<sup>87</sup> The argument I am making would still hold true whether or not this formula derives from baptismal practice or was originally written by Paul himself. One linguistic clue to the baptismal origin is given in v. 27: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Another is that Paul’s language shifts from the “we” of vv. 23-25 to the “you” of vv. 26-29, with the “we” resuming in 4:3, suggesting that he has shifted from his own voice to a quotation and back. Still another is that the “male and female” plays no part in the overall argument of Galatians, while Jew/Greek and slave/free certainly do. For a form critical analysis of how this text matches up with other formulas for baptism, see Betz, *Galatians*, pp. 181-185. For the social world surrounding the practice of baptism, see Wayne A. Meeks, *First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 150-57.

<sup>88</sup> As noted evangelical scholar Richard Hays has put it, “[t]o say that this created distinction is no longer in force is to declare that the new creation has come upon us, a new creation in which even gender roles no longer pertain.” [Richard B. Hays, “The Letter to the Galatians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” *New Interpreters’ Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), p. 273.] Or as feminist scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza explains this passage, “Being baptized into Christ means entering the sphere of the resurrected Lord, the life-giving Spirit whose reality and power are manifested in the Christian community.” [Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, p. 214.]

<sup>89</sup> Gal 3:28 – ουκ ενι Ιουδαιος **ουδε** Ελλην ουκ ενι δουλος **ουδε** ελευθερος ουκ ενι αρσεν **και** θηλυ παντες γαρ υμεις εις εστε εν Χριστω ιησου. The rendering “no longer” for all three polarities in the NRSV is preferable to the “neither/nor” of the RSV, because “no longer” captures the dynamic, forward-looking “happening”—the salvation—that is breaking into the world for those who are in Christ.

<sup>90</sup> Previous English translations have not paid attention to this grammatical shift. Thus, the RSV, which was published in 1952 and followed the King James Version, used the construction “neither/nor” for all three declarations. Hence, it translated the first two polarities as: “There is *neither* Jew *nor* Greek, there is *neither* slave *nor* free.” It then went on to *mistranslate* the third polarity: “there is *neither* male *nor* female.” In so doing, the RSV was perpetuating a mistranslation

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that had cropped up unnoticed in English versions of the Bible from the earliest days. The phrase was mistranslated in the Tyndale New Testament of 1534, in the Geneva Bible of 1559, and then again in the King James Version of the Bible 1611. No doubt the three cadences of “neither/nor” sounded good to the bards and poets who were trying to render Scripture into English, but it does not accurately reflect the Greek text. It was only in 1989, when the NRSV finally rendered the passage literally and more accurately, “there is no longer male *and* female,” that the English-speaking church finally got the text right.

<sup>91</sup> LXX: και εποιησεν ο θεος τον ανθρωπον κατ εικονα θεου εποιησεν αυτον αρσεν και θηλυ εποιησεν αυτους

Hebrew: ויברא אלהים את־האדם בצלמו בצלם אלהים ברא אתו זכר ונקבה ברא אתם:

The shift in Gal 3:28 from nouns Jew/Greek, slave/free to the adjectives male (αρσεν) and female (θηλυ) makes it clear that the formula quotes Gen. 1:27. See Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 186. Much has been made of the argument by Wayne Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity,” *Journal of the History of Religions* 13/1 (1973): 165-208 (the argument is capsulized in Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, p. 155). Meeks argues that Gal. 3:28 and early Christian baptismal formulas presuppose the myth of “Adam” as an androgynous creature that was “split” into male and female halves, which are reunited in sexual intercourse. Some contemporary advocates have invoked this myth to argue that only the “one-flesh union” of male and female is legitimated by the Genesis story. One problem with this argument is that it takes a piece of speculation that was popular in the Hellenistic world and retrojects it back on the ancient text of Genesis itself. Moreover, in the light of Gal. 3:28, the argument is really beside the point. The unity of humanity is no longer achieved through a particular form of sexuality but through Christ.

<sup>92</sup> This downplaying of the importance of male and female in creation is by no means an isolated feature of the New Testament witness. Jesus himself tells us that “in the resurrection,” human beings are neither married nor given in marriage (Matt. 22:30). Jesus said this in response to a trap laid for him by his opponents, who asked whose wife a woman would be who, during her lifetime, had been married sequentially to seven brothers. Jesus response to the question is stern: “You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29). In the New Testament context, let us remember, gender roles made women extensions of the property interests of men. This is reflected in Luke when it speaks of the woman having been “taken” (Luke 20:31) by seven brothers in succession. Jesus’ comment fits with what Paul says by way of downplaying the importance of marriage, advising that the unmarried should not seek a marriage partner (1 Cor. 7:8). Similarly, both Jesus and Paul speak in favorable terms of celibacy. (Matt. 19:3-12; 1 Cor. 11:3-15). Jesus had made it clear that the family of God is more important than the biological family (Mark 3:34-35, par; Matt. 10:34-39; Luke 14:26). At the same time, traditional patriarchal marriage seems to be assumed in the New Testament communities (e.g., 1 Cor. chs. 7, 11; Eph.

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5:22-31; Col. 3:18-25).

<sup>93</sup> James Alison, *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> “To those called to exercise special functions in the church—deacons, elders, and Ministers of Word and Sacrament...[t]heir manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world....” *Book of Order*, G-6.0106a.

<sup>95</sup> See *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q. 137. See also the document, “Practices Called ‘Sin’ by Our Confessions,” compiled by Frank B. Baldwin, III, Elder, Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church and Legal Counsel, the Presbytery of Philadelphia. <http://home.earthlink.net/~valewis/sins.html>

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, Q. 142.

<sup>97</sup> *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 112.

<sup>98</sup> Romer v. Evans, 517 U.S. 620 (1996).

<sup>99</sup> Paul Capetz to The Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area, April 7, 2000. The full text of the letter is available on the Web site of The Witherspoon Society.

<sup>100</sup> Personal conversation with the author, May 2001.

<sup>101</sup> Daniel Migliore, “A Response to George Hunsinger,” Guest Viewpoint, *Presbyterian Outlook*, February 7, 2002, <http://www.pres-outlook.com/HTML/mig020702.html>.

<sup>102</sup> Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal*, pp. 176-77.

<sup>103</sup> *Definitive Guidance: The Church’s Statements on Homosexuality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), pp. 47-48.

<sup>104</sup> It is possible that Leviticus finds male-to-male sexual intercourse objectionable merely because it constitutes a departure from the anatomical “fit” between “male and female.” This is nowhere stated explicitly in the text; it is a perspective that interpreters infer from the text, especially by reading it in light of the creation story in Genesis. The most prominent scholarly advocate of this view is Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).

Since Leviticus is part of the priestly tradition in the Bible, it uses the trope “male and female” with some frequency. Yet, interestingly, none of these references has anything to do with sexual intercourse, let alone sexual anatomy. As is the case of the Genesis 1:17, the references have the

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sense of “*both* male and female.” (See Lev. 3:1, 6; 12:7; 15:33; 25:6, 44; 27:5-7.)

Another possibility for the prohibition is that for one male to lie with another male “as with a woman” would have upset the strict understanding of male gender roles of Israelite society. This is the view advanced by Marti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*. In the understanding of the ancient Near Eastern world, such an act would amount to sexual humiliation. Thus, Israelite males are being admonished here not to transgress gender boundaries by sexually humiliating other males. This suggestion has much to commend it, not least that it coheres with the earlier rationale given for the rule against sex with women who are near relatives. That is, these are prohibitions that apply especially to sexual liaisons with persons over whom the male head of the clan has social control. This suggestion is further supported by reflections of the leading commentator on Leviticus, Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, p. 1569. The idea that the rule is there for the protection of an Israelite’s manhood, again, helps to explain why Hebrew Scripture is silent on lesbianism. It also explains why, if a man had his way sexually with another man, it was viewed as gravely as if a man had his way sexually with another man’s wife: in both cases it was an offense to dignity of *the man*.

Yet another possibility is that male-to-male copulation violates the command in Genesis to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:22, 28; 8:17; 9:1, 7). There is some textual warrant for this view, since the people are told that, as a response to their obeying the sexuality rules, God will “make you fruitful and multiply you” (Lev. 26:9). A society in which progeny meant strength and survival might well have found a non-procreative union between two men objectionable. If this is the reason, however, it is not clear why such a view would still bind the people of God today. We certainly do not prohibit marriage between men and women who, for whatever reason, are incapable of procreating. Just as infertile married couples adopt children, so also do gay and lesbian couples. Similarly, in a complex and dynamic society such as ours people and couples have many ways of contributing to society and to the “multiplying” of its blessings, even when they happen to have no children. This is the overall position favored by Jacob Milgrom.

Nevertheless, Milgrom also acknowledges another possibility, which is that sexual liaisons falling outside the control of the male head of the household are not specifically covered in the prohibition. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, pp. 1567, 1569. In other words, it is a prohibition against having sexual relations with a person within the extended family.

A final possibility is that the prohibition here was aimed specifically at distinguishing Israel’s behavior from that of the cultic worship practices of the surrounding Canaanite peoples. This view, too, has significant textual support. Regarding the entire list of banned sexual activities in chapter 18, Israelite men are admonished not to do what the Egyptians or Canaanites do, nor to follow their statutes (Lev. 18:3). In addition, same-sex intercourse was likely associated with Canaanite practices in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). So too, the attempted same-sex intercourse by the Jewish men of Gibeah in Judges 19 suggests that they were succumbing to the ways of the surrounding peoples. [See Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary,

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(Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 123.] This view would also explain why the cultically loaded word “abomination” is used of these offenses. On this view, sexual acts between men would have referred to the pagan cult. Hebrew Scripture may, in fact, specifically have such practices in mind in a number of places: Gen. 38:21-22; Deut.23:17-18; 1 Kings 14:21-24; 15:12-14; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Job 36:14; Hos. 4:14. [See Nissinen, p. 40] This would explain why male-to-male sex acts are grouped in Leviticus with the commandment against sacrificing children to Molech (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5), against worshiping idols (19:4); against sexual relations with (cultic) animals (18:23; 20:15-16); against mediums, witches, and the calling up of spirits (Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27), against prostitutes (19:29; 21:7, 9); and against tattoos (19:28; 21:5). It is possible that the prophet Ezekiel, whose theological perspective is similar to that of Leviticus, condemns a similar set of practices precisely because they had become so widespread in Israel (Ezek. 6:9, 11; 7:20; 8:4-18; 14:6: 16:36, 43, 44-58; 18:12-13; 20:7; 22:2). Archeological evidence certainly makes clear that some of these practices, including child sacrifice, were being carried out during portions of Israel’s history. This is not only a plausible reason for the prohibition, but in terms of textual support, it may be the most plausible reason.

<sup>105</sup> We know these commandments were given to men because of the masculine verb forms that permeate the text, as well as the subject matter of the commandments themselves. Jacob Milgrom believes they were directed even more specifically to the head of the clan, who had authority and was responsible for deciding cases within the jurisdiction of the extended family. (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, p. 1525.) This does not mean that the various commandments in Leviticus had no implications for women. [See Judith Romney Wegner, “Leviticus” in Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 36-44.] For example, Leviticus contains rules for when the natural bodily functions of women (e.g., childbirth, chap. 12; menstruation, 15:19-24) make them ritually unclean. Still, the commandments are addressed to males in the sense that priests and male heads of households presided over these rules.

<sup>106</sup> Slavery was an accepted institution in ancient Israel so long as the slaves were not Israelites (Lev. 25:44-46). Resident aliens who become slaves had a right eventually to be redeemed (Lev. 25:47-52). If an Israelite had to go into slavery for indebtedness, they were to serve as hired laborers and eventually to be set free (Lev. 25:39-40). Slavery in the ancient world often involved availability for sex, and this may be implied in Lev. 19:20.

<sup>107</sup> To call these “incest” rules is anachronistic and misleading. It is true that the prohibitions here apply to sexual relations with near relatives, which is similar to how we think of incest. Yet here the cultural context is different. The focus in Leviticus is on refraining from having sex with a woman who belonged to a *man* who was a near relative. The difference becomes clear when one considers that the list of prohibited partners omits any mention at all of sex between a father and his own daughter. Yet this sort of abuse would be at the top of any contemporary list of relationships defined as “incest.” The point is not that Israel permitted sex between father and daughter; it is that because the focus was upon not offending the rights of another man, there was no need to mention

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such an act.

<sup>108</sup> There may be exceptions to this lack of equality in the Bible. The love extolled in the Song of Songs may point toward such equality, as does Paul's teaching about mutuality in marriage in 1 Cor. 7:2-6.

<sup>109</sup> In addition, the death penalty is meted out for cases of adultery (20:10); for cases of lying with a woman who used to belong either to one's father (20:11) or to one's son (20:12); and for cases of taking as a wife both a woman and her mother (20:14). Men who have sexual intercourse with women in menstruation are to be exiled (20:18). These severe penalties imposed upon wayward individuals are matched by similar communal penalties—pestilence, death, and exile—if the law is broken (26:14-39). It is possible that these instances of the death penalty are post-Exilic theological justifications for the "death" that befell Israel at the hands of the Babylonians.

<sup>110</sup> Saul Olyan, "'And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman': On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1994): 179-206.

<sup>111</sup> Of the many fine commentaries available, see especially: Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth, Interpretation: A Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

<sup>112</sup> The Hebrew is: חסד

<sup>113</sup> The Hebrew is: על־כֵּן יַעֲזֹב־אִישׁ אֶת־אִבּוֹ וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד:

<sup>114</sup> This, of course, in no way undercuts God's original and abiding love for the Jewish people: "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

<sup>115</sup> A frequently-cited quip from Paul's contemporary, Seneca, sums up the routine sexual abuse of slaves this way: "Unchastity [*impudicitia*] is a crime for the freeborn boy, a necessity for a slave, and a duty [*officium*] for the freedman." Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 4, 1:431, quoted in a slightly different rendering in Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, p. 81.

<sup>116</sup> In addition to the texts already cited, some others from the acknowledged letters of Paul in which the imagery of slavery is dominant include: Rom. 1:1; 3:24; 6:6-23; 7:14; 8:12-23; 12:11; 13:4; 14:4, 18; 1 Cor. 3:5; 6:20; 9:19-23; 2 Cor. 2:14; 4:5; Gal. 1:10; 3:13-14; 4:1-5:1; 5:13; Phil. 1:1.

<sup>117</sup> For the Romans, victory and triumph were concomitant with rape and death. The Greek verb

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*thriambeuo* (θριαμβεῦω) in 2 Cor. 2:14 refers to a military victory parade whereby the Romans led defeated generals and other leaders through the streets as conquered slaves. At the conclusion of the processional, some of the victims were put to death as a sacrifice to the gods. Building in part on accounts of Paul's contemporary, Seneca, William Shakespeare included such a parade of triumph in his play, *Titus Andronicus* (1594). For an exegetical treatment, see Scott J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit: An Exegetical Study of II Cor. 2:14-3:3 Within the Context of the Corinthian Correspondence* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986). For general background, see H. S. Versnel, *Triumphus: An Inquiry Into the Origin, Development, and Meaning of the Roman Triumph* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

<sup>118</sup> John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, trans. T. A. Smail (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1964), 33, cited in Scott Hafemann, *The NIV Application Commentary: 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 108.

<sup>119</sup> On this point, see Betz, *Galatians*, pp. 189-90. The groundbreaking philosophical analysis of performative utterances is J. L. Austin, *How to Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). A classic example of a performative utterance is the marriage vow, "I pledge thee my troth." While a "constative" utterance (e.g., "This is a chair") is true before it is uttered, in a performative utterance, the saying makes it so. And yet, in another sense, both the marriage vow and the baptismal utterance must become true and be "lived into" over a span of time.

<sup>120</sup> We know Paul was relying upon Leviticus because (a) in Rom. 1:32 he alludes to the death penalty of Lev. 20:13; and (b) in Rom. 1:27 he refers to "shameless acts" of homoeroticism using the same word (ἀσχημοσύνη) that Leviticus employs thirty-two times in the Septuagint version, albeit to refer to sex acts with near relatives. In Paul's day, the two isolated prohibitions in Leviticus have hardened into a tradition of strong non-acceptance of homoeroticism. However, this was mitigated somewhat in that Hellenistic Jews did not take literally the death penalty prescribed in Leviticus 20:13. Their attitude against homoeroticism arose in direct reaction to the exploitative and often violent character of sexual practices within the Roman Empire.

<sup>121</sup> One does not need to argue, in the manner of Victor Paul Furnish and Robin Scroggs, that Paul was thinking here only of pederasty, i.e., sex with boys. Paul no doubt was speaking more generally, but his frame of reference was the passive/active asymmetry of homoerotic acts in the Roman world. Covenantal relationships between two equals, whether heterosexual or homosexual, were not something envisioned within Paul's culture. For the pederasty argument, see Victor Paul Furnish, *The Moral Theology of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 52-83; Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debates* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

<sup>122</sup> Even though Paul does not mention the Gentiles directly here or even use the word "idolatry," much of what he says he borrows from Jewish texts like the Wisdom of Solomon, including not

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only the slippery slope from idolatry to immorality (Wis. 14:12, 22-27), but the notion that the Gentiles are without excuse since God can be known by them apart from the Torah (Wis 13:8).

<sup>123</sup> 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Cor. 5:5; 15:24, Rom. 4:25; 6:17; 8:32 (see also 1 Cor. 11:23; Gal. 2:20).

<sup>124</sup> A similar charge is made against Gentile women: “Their women exchanged (μετηλλαξαν) natural intercourse (φυσικην χρησην) for unnatural (παρα φυσιν)” (Rom. 1:26). See also 1 Cor. 11:6: “it is disgraceful (αισχρον) for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil.”

<sup>125</sup> Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.201, quoted in Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*, p. 245.

<sup>126</sup> I am indebted for this insight to Eugene Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

<sup>127</sup> Rom. 11:24: For if you have been cut from what is by nature (**κατα φυσιν**) a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature (**παρα φυσιν**), into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural (**κατα φυσιν**) branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.

Greek: ει γαρ συ εκ της **κατα φυσιν** εξεκοπης αγριελαιου και **παρα φυσιν** ενεκεντρισθηεις καλλιελαιον ποσω μαλλον ουτοι οι **κατα φυσιν** εγκεντρισθησονται τη ιδια ελαια

<sup>128</sup> Perhaps the most well known is Jesus’ response to the lawyer who asks which is the greatest commandment. “He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37-39; Mark 12:28). Jesus gives a similar response to one who asks what must be done to inherit eternal life (Matt. 19:19; Luke 10:27). Also relevant is Jesus’ intensification of the law in the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

<sup>129</sup> J. Albert Harrill, “Paul and Slavery,” in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, ed. J. Paul Sampley (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2003), p. 577. For the Greek background, see K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, updated with a new postscript (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>130</sup> See K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, pp. 16, 85, 165.

<sup>131</sup> Herod the Great had built a gymnasium in Palestine, which in the Greco-Roman context was typically a place of homoerotic sexual encounter. David L. Balsch, “Paul, Families, and

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Households,” in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, p. 265.

<sup>132</sup> I have chosen not to discuss some of the more extravagant and speculative exegetical claims. Some have speculated, for instance, that references in John’s Gospel to the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20) could imply a homoerotic relationship. See Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *The Man Whom Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives From the New Testament* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003). I am not persuaded that this is anything more than speculation.

<sup>133</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), pp. 145ff. Jeffrey Siker, “Homosexuals, The Bible, and Gentile Inclusion,” *Theology Today* 51 (July, 1994): 219-34; reprinted in Jeffrey Siker, ed., *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 178-94.

<sup>134</sup> There is massive literature on this subject. Some useful surveys of Europe include: David Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli, eds., *The History of the European Family*, 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001-2003); Jack Goody, *The European Family: A Historical Anthropological Essay, The Making of Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Andre Burguiere, et al., eds., *A History of the Family*, trans. Sarah Hanbury Tenison, 2 vols. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1996). For the transformation of family life in America, see Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Hendrik Hartzog, *Man and Wife in America: A History*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>135</sup> See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: The Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>136</sup> Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation With Commentary* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2004), p. 19. The Hebrew is as follows:

ויברא אלהים את־האדם בצלמו  
בצלם אלהים ברא אתו  
זכר ונקבה ברא אתם:

<sup>137</sup> This is also underscored by the grammar: the calling to be the image of God is not just the role of the first human creature—“him” (אתו)—but of all human creatures—“them” (אתם).

<sup>138</sup> Many people make this argument. One example may be found in: Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), pp.107-109.

<sup>139</sup> A definitive 1990 study showed that over 75% of men, and almost 70% of women had

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experienced oral sex in their lifetimes. For over 25%, oral sex was their most recent sexual event. The younger the person, the higher the percentages. Thus, for example, 85% of men and almost 80% of women in the 25 to 29 year-old bracket in 1990 had experienced oral sex. The information may be found in: Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Mitchell, and Stuart Michaels, *The Social Organization of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). The study emanated from the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. A companion volume written for a lay audience is also available: Robert T. Michael, John H. Gagnon, Edward O. Laumann, and Gina Kolata, *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1994). In a more recent 2002 study, the figures were significantly higher. In the age group of 25 to 44 year olds, 90% of men had experienced oral sex with a woman and 88% of woman had experienced oral sex with a man.

<sup>140</sup> This has been argued by many—most recently by Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*.

<sup>141</sup> Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, pp. 318-19.

<sup>142</sup> The groundbreaking work is that of Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981).

<sup>143</sup> Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*, Studies in the History of Sexuality (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). In Florence, which had experienced a resurgence of interest in classical antiquity, the sexual encounters mimicked the pederasty of the Greco-Roman world. That is, they were casual encounters, sometimes for money, in which adult males assumed a dominant sexual role with adolescent boys who were passive. There is also evidence of more long-term relationships, but these were rare.

<sup>144</sup> John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>145</sup> Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>146</sup> The judicial case that prompted the Vermont legislature to enact civil unions was: Baker v. State, 170 Vt. 194, 744 A.2d 864 (1999). For an account of the political story in Vermont, see David Moats, *Civil Wars: A Battle for Gay Marriage* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2004).

<sup>147</sup> James Alison, *Faith Beyond Resentment*, xii.

<sup>148</sup> James Alison, *On Being Liked* (New York: Crossroad, 2003).

<sup>149</sup> Carter Heyward, *Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality, and Liberation* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1984), p. 39.

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<sup>150</sup> “More Light on Sexual Ethics.” Adopted by More Light Presbyterians Board, 1999.  
<http://www.mlp.org/resources/MLonSexEth.html>

<sup>151</sup> Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999).

<sup>152</sup> “More Light on Sexual Ethics.”

<sup>153</sup> E.g., Carter Heyward, *Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality, and Liberation*.

<sup>154</sup> Robert Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1993).

<sup>155</sup> One controversial proposal was put before the General Assembly in 1991 by a 17-member Committee on Human Sexuality for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The paper was entitled “Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice.” It advocated an approach to sexual ethics centered in what it called “justice-love.” Although the assembly did not adopt the paper, some in the church still find that it represents their viewpoint. See Marvin M. Ellison, ed. *Body and Soul: Rethinking Sexuality as Justice-Love* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003).

<sup>156</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, Fifteenth Anniversary Edition (New York: Orbis Press, 1988).

<sup>157</sup> A significant event in the emergence of liberation theology was the 1968 Medellín Conference in Colombia, which followed on the heels of Vatican II. For an introduction to the figures and themes of liberation theology, see: Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, Revised Twentieth Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum, 1993); Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (New York: Orbis, 1987); Philip Berryman, *Liberation Theology* (1987); P. E. Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy or Revolution?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Robert McAfee Brown, *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993); Christopher Rowland, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>158</sup> For example: Jim Conway, *Marx and Jesus: Liberation Theology in Latin America* (New York: Carlton Press, 1973). For a critique of liberation theology on this score, see: Alistair Kee, *Marx and the Failure of Liberation Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990).

<sup>159</sup> For example: Erik Olin Wright, ed., *Approaches to Class Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>160</sup> For a succinct statement of this position, supported by comparative analysis, see: Christine

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Delphy and Diana Leonard, *Familiar Exploitation: A New Analysis of Marriage in Contemporary Western Societies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992). A major issue is the “invisible” work performed by women. This book appears in a series entitled, “Feminist Perspectives” edited by Michelle Stanworth. The other works in this series argue from a similar point of view.

<sup>161</sup> Some have dated the emergence of this movement with the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969. However, the movement had antecedents that date from the mid-twentieth century. One might just as easily date its emergence with the McCarthy era, in which more persons with a gay or lesbian orientation were removed from government than were Communists. For a magisterial survey of the secular emergence of the gay liberation movement, see George Chauncey, *Why Marriage: The History Shaping Today’s Debate Over Gay Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 2004). For an excellent portrait of the emergence of gay identity in the twentieth century, see John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence: Men’s Lives and Gay Identities: A Twentieth-Century History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998).

<sup>162</sup> See, for example: David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988); David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Celia Kitzinger, *The Social Construction of Lesbianism* (New York: Sage Books, 1987).

<sup>163</sup> Cf. what is discussed in K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, with that in Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*.

<sup>164</sup> Although Eleanor Roosevelt developed close friendships with women, including lesbian activists, and Abraham Lincoln had intimate male friendships throughout his life (some of them incredibly intense), it is not credible to call these relationships “gay” or “lesbian.” However, that is precisely the point: there may be a range of intimate same-gender relationships that do not fit into our neat, binary categories and as to which genital sex is not the primary focus of the relationship. See Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt* (New York: Penguin, 1993); C. A. Tripp, *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Free Press, 2005). From these comments it should be clear that I do not mean to endorse all of Tripp’s extrapolative judgments about Lincoln’s sexuality. For a contrary view, see Andrew Sullivan, “Log Cabin Republican: How Gay was Lincoln?” *The New Republic*, January 10, 2005.

<sup>165</sup> See: Deborah Rudacille, *The Riddle of Gender: Science, Activism and Transgender Rights* (New York: Pantheon, 2005).

<sup>166</sup> Some accounts place the number much higher, perhaps as high as four percent. Sharon E. Preves, *Intersex and Identity: The Contested Self* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 2-3.

<sup>167</sup> For a succinct introduction to this issue, see Francis Mark Mondimore, *A Natural History of*

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*Homosexuality*, pp. 179-92.

<sup>168</sup> Michel Foucault, "Introduction," *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1990). Michel Foucault, "Afterword: The Subject and the Power," in *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). One theoretical question is whether fascination with sex produced the modern science of sexuality, or whether the science of sexuality made possible our current preoccupation with sex. See Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. xii.

<sup>169</sup> This is argued masterfully by Edward Stein in *The Mismeasure of Desire: The Science, Theory, and Ethics of Sexual Orientation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>170</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Among her other major works is: *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

<sup>171</sup> Dorothy A. Austin, "The Cloistered Closet," in M. Garber and R. L. Walkowitz, eds., *One Nation Under God? Religion and American Culture*, (Routledge, 1999), pp. 69.

<sup>172</sup> The remark was that of Lord Alfred Douglas in "Two Loves," *The Chameleon* 1 (1894): 28, cited in Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 74.

<sup>173</sup> "We must conquer AIDS before it affects the heterosexual population...." Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, p. 554.

<sup>174</sup> This point is made in the 1978 "Definitive Guidance" document as follows: "Most human beings experience occasional homosexual attraction, although not always consciously." *Definitive Guidance*, p. 48.

<sup>175</sup> For more on this example within the legal context, see William N. Eskridge, Jr. and Nan D. Hunter, *Sexuality, Gender and the Law* (Westbury, New York: The Foundation Press, 1997), pp. 300-305.

<sup>176</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, The Tenth Anniversary Edition (New York: Routledge, 1999). See also: Sarah Salih, *The Judith Butler Reader* (New York: Blackwell, 2004).

<sup>177</sup> Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 32.

<sup>178</sup> Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>179</sup> Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

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<sup>180</sup> Anne Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are Not Enough,” *The Sciences* 33/2 (1993): 20-25; Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

<sup>181</sup> Justin Tanis, *Transgendered: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2003).

<sup>182</sup> Similarly, even the Patriarch Abraham could give his wife Sarah to another man in order to protect his own life (Gen. 20:2).

<sup>183</sup> For example, we forget when we read, “A man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his woman and the two shall become one flesh,” that this is not talking about the companionate marriage between two equals we know in contemporary America. For one thing, except for the rare portrayal of the Solomonic wedding tent (Song of Songs 3:11), there are no words in biblical Hebrew for our ceremonially laden English words “to marry” or “marriage.” Nor are there separate words for “husband” and “wife.” Rather, a Hebrew man simply “takes” (*laqah*; לָקַח) a female to be his “woman” (*ishshah*; אִשָּׁה) (e.g. Deut. 23:13), and this “taking” connotes absolute male initiative, dominance, and possession. We also forget that the “one flesh” union of Gen. 2:24 did not prevent a man from having such a union with more than one woman, i.e., the ancient Israelites practiced polygamy. Or we forget, when we read the sexual prohibitions in Leviticus, that they were directed toward men whose sexual partners included not only wives, but also concubines and slaves. In short, the variety of sexual relationships in the Bible makes it difficult to sustain the idea of a single sexual norm as an “order of creation.”

<sup>184</sup> “More Light on Sexual Ethics.” Adopted by More Light Presbyterians Board, 1999. <http://www.mlp.org/resources/MLonSexEth.html>; accessed December 28, 2005.

<sup>185</sup> A classic example is the sharply critical review of the work of Judith Butler put forward by feminist philosopher Martha Nussbaum in her essay: “The Professor of Parody,” *The New Republic*, February 22, 1999. Nussbaum objects that Butler’s impenetrable and self-referential jargon makes a pretense to sophistication but is in fact sophistry. Nussbaum pulls no punches: “Hungry women are not fed by this, battered women are not sheltered by it, raped women do not find justice in it, gays and lesbians do not achieve legal protections through it.”

<sup>186</sup> The publications of Rowan Williams are too numerous to list here, but they may be obtained from the following Web site: <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/about/pubs.html>.

<sup>187</sup> Rowan Williams, “Is There a Christian Sexual Ethic?” in Rowan Williams, *A Ray of Darkness: Sermons and Reflections* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1995), p. 143.

<sup>188</sup> Rowan Williams, “The Body’s Grace” (1989), reprinted in: Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., ed., *Theology*

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*and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 309-21. Available online:  
[http://www.iconservatives.org.uk/bodys\\_grace.htm](http://www.iconservatives.org.uk/bodys_grace.htm).

<sup>189</sup> Rowan Williams, “Is There a Christian Sexual Ethic?” p. 140.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>191</sup> Rowan Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” in *Theology and Sexuality*, ed., Eugene Rogers, p. 312.

<sup>192</sup> Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., “Sanctification, Homosexuality, and God’s Triune Life,” in *Theology and Sexuality*, pp. 217-248.

<sup>193</sup> Gray Temple, *Gay Unions: In the Light of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason* (New York: Church Publishing, 2004).

<sup>194</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, “On Gay Friendship: A Thought Experiment in Catholic Moral Theology,” in *Theology and Sexuality*, ed. Eugene Rogers, pp. 289-308.

<sup>195</sup> Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1996).