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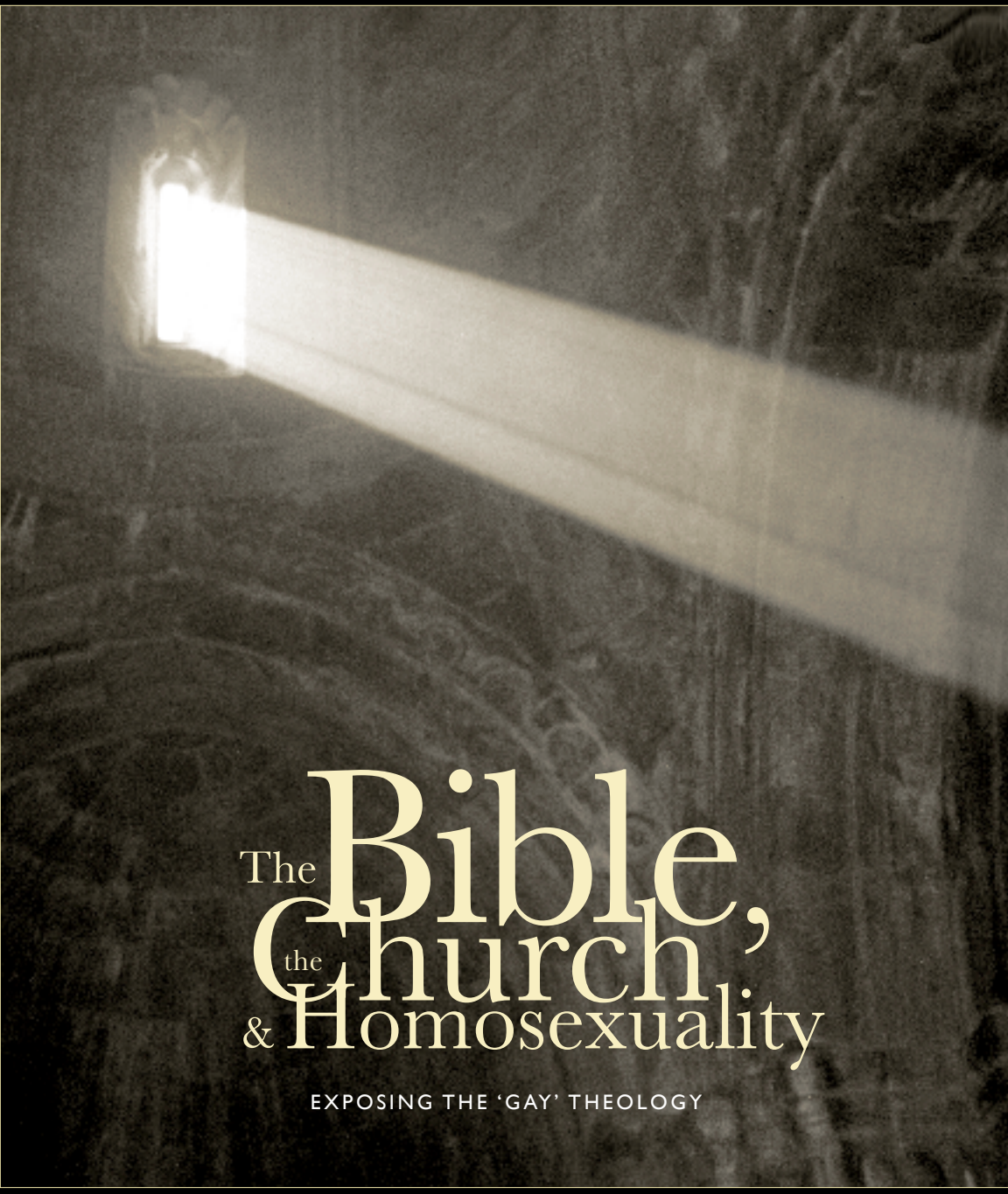

The Bible, the Church, & Homosexuality

EXPOSING THE 'GAY' THEOLOGY

TIMOTHY J. DAILEY

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The Bible, the Church, and Homosexuality: Exposing the 'Gay' Theology
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Introduction

The assault on marriage and the family in the United States has been carried on in a number of fronts: the courts, the world of academia, and the Hollywood entertainment industry. Yet the weakening of the institution of marriage by the push to normalize adultery, divorce, and homosexuality has also proceeded in a cultural sphere where many Americans would least expect it—in the nation's religious institutions. While the Jewish and Catholic traditions have witnessed their share of the struggle, recent debates over homosexuality in the major Protestant communions may represent the most contentious arena in which the struggle over marriage has been waged.

While the Family Research Council exists to engage the world of public policy and uphold marriage in the civil realm of culture, it is aware of the struggles for marriage and the family in religious institutions that claim the allegiance of millions of Americans. Although the Family Research Council does not seek to thrust itself into ecclesiastical or theological controversies, it recognizes that the controversies over homosexuality in the churches reflect deeper struggles in American society. The effort to persuade theologians, clergy, and ecclesiastical governing bodies of the moral legitimacy of homosexual conduct has not been carried out in a vacuum. The forces against marriage know that, if they succeed in this realm, they will have achieved a cultural triumph that is more strategic than any political or legal battle they might win in the civil courts or in Washington, D.C.

At least for now, these efforts to "revise" the historic teaching of the churches have not succeeded. None of the eight largest Christian churches in the United States has given her blessing to homosexuality. Only the United Church of Christ, which defers the issue to regional associations and local congregations, and the Episcopal Church, whose position is ambiguous, appear to be faltering. As outlined in the appendix, most of the major denominations have remained resilient under tremendous pressure; they have explicitly judged homosexual behavior as outside the realm of appropriate Christian conduct. Nevertheless, the battles continue, as those who favor homosexuality seem unwilling to concede any ground, at times defying biblical, theological, and constitutional standards of their respective denominations.

This booklet therefore aims to encourage Americans who want to respond intelligently to the push to sanction homosexuality within their churches. To do that, conservatives need to understand both the strategy and argument of those who seek to revise or redefine historic Christian teaching regarding homosexuality. Called "revisionists," these scholar-activists advance the notion that homosexuality is an issue over which people of good will can differ. Or they claim that there is no "clear answer" to the issue. Then they recommend, under the rubric of "fairness," that churches appoint task forces to study the issue.

Once the "studies" begin, the revisionists claim that biblical passages that proscribe homosexual acts do not actually refer to homosexuality; they at most only condemn an "abusive" form of homosexuality. Or they may concede that Scripture condemns homosexuality, but then argue that the biblical writers are only reflecting "culturally conditioned" moral beliefs of a pre-scientific culture. As these arguments fail to persuade, a final ploy is an appeal to an overarching theological ethic—such as the presence of "love," "commitment," "mutuality,"—that allegedly trumps explicit moral imperatives and justifies homosexual relationships.

As this booklet documents, this line of reasoning is faulty to the core. Rather than being a divine "gift" that needs to be celebrated, homosexuality is unambiguously found wanting by Scripture and tradition. While a minority of voices may say otherwise, they do not represent the broad consensus shared by Christians in Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant communities throughout history. This booklet reinforces that wise and universal judgment. To the degree the following pages help traditionalists maintain their ground, it will be deemed successful.

The present study is arranged with chapters that assess the biblical, historical, and theological arguments used to justify homosexual behavior. Each chapter presents a summary of homosexual arguments, which is followed by counter-arguments presenting the traditional view. Readers who want a more comprehensive treatment should refer to Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000). Dr. Gagnon, an associate professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, answers many questions not addressed by the present study.

Interpreting the Old Testament

GENESIS 19: THE SODOM STORY

Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with [yada'] them."

Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept [yada'] with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."

"Get out of our way," they replied. And they said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.—Genesis 19:4–9 (NIV)

Revisionist scholars advance novel interpretations of Genesis 19 to suggest that the sin of Sodom was something other than homosexuality. As early as 1955, the Anglican priest Derrick Sherwin Bailey suggested the theory, used by many homosexual activists today, that the sin of Sodom was inhospitality, not homosexuality. Bailey based his argument on the King James Version, which states in verse 5 that the men of Sodom demanded that Lot bring out his visitors "that we may know them." In *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, Bailey suggested that the opposition to homosexuality in the Christian tradition was based upon a mistranslation of the Hebrew word *yada'*, translated "to know."[1]

According to Bailey, *yada'* does not refer to the desire of the Sodomites to have sexual relations with Lot's angelic visitors, who the inhabitants of the city apparently mistake for men. Rather, the Sodomites merely intended to "get acquainted with" and to "examine the credentials" of Lot's visitors. To support this interpretation, Bailey incorrectly points out that of the 943 occurrences of *yada'* in the Old Testament, in only 10 (there are actually at least 15) is the word used to refer to sexual intercourse. Sodom's sin, concludes Bailey, consisted of the men of the city reacting with violence to Lot's refusal, thus causing a "breach [of] the rules of hospitality."[2]

Other revisionists argue that the offense committed by the men of Sodom was their intention to commit homosexual rape. Peter J. Gomes of Harvard Divinity School states:

> The attempted homosexual rape of the angels at Lot's door, while vivid and distasteful, is hardly the subject of the story or the cause of the punishment. . . . Homosexual rape is never to be condoned; it is indeed, like heterosexual rape, an abomination before God. This instance of attempted homosexual rape, however, does not invalidate all homosexuals or all homosexual activity.[3]

CONTEXT DETERMINES MEANING. While the arguments of Bailey and Gomes may sound impressive, they are seriously flawed. Bailey's statistics are of little use in translating words in a particular context, as context determines meaning. The Sodom story leaves little doubt that the Sodomites were intent upon having sexual relations with Lot's visitors. The word *yada'* is used twice in the passage; in the second occurrence Bailey even concedes *yada'* refers to sexual relations even though it contradicts his own "statistical" theory. When Lot offers his two daughters who have "never slept with [*yada'*] a man," the word has an unambiguous sexual meaning. This constitutes strong contextual evidence that the first occurrence, where the men of Sodom seek to "know" the angels, also has a sexual meaning. This interpretation is so compelling that even revisionist scholar Robin Scroggs concludes that "it seems to me difficult to deny the sexual intent of the Sodomites. I still believe the traditional interpretation to be correct."[4]

In addition to defying the context, the "inhospitality" argument defies logic: If the men of Sodom were only interested in "examining the credentials" of Lot's visitors, Lot would have had no reason to shut the door defensively or to appeal to them not to do "this wicked thing." That their demands were sexual is clear by Lot's offering his two virgin daughters to the men, adding, "and you can do what you like with them."

Other passages confirm the sexual depravity of Sodom. Ezekiel 16:49–50 condemns the men of Sodom, stating that "they . . . did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it" (NRSV). The Hebrew word "abomination" is *to'ebah*, which signifies the gravest moral censure possible in the Hebrew language. Nowhere in the Old Testament is inhospitality listed as an abomination, as is homosexual behavior (see Leviticus 18:22). In addition, the Book of Jude in the New Testament states that Sodom and Gomorrah "gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire" (v. 7, NIV).

Gomes's theory is equally problematic. The initial intent of the Sodomites was not rape, but to have sexual relations with Lot's visitors. In what may have been the debauched ancient equivalent of "let's party!" the men of the city called out to Lot: "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with [*yada'*] them." It was only after the Sodomites were rebuffed that they became violent. The rampant homosexuality of the men of Sodom constituted

a primary reason for the city's judgment, as indicated by the *Lord* to Abraham: "How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin!" (Genesis 18:20). The fact that the men of Sodom were intent upon having homosexual relations with Lot's visitors, even to the point of force, does not reduce their crime to merely the use of force.

JUDGES 19: THE OUTRAGE AT GIBEAH

While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him."

The owner of the house went outside and said to them, "No, my friends, don't be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don't do this disgraceful thing. Look, here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But to this man, don't do such a disgraceful thing.

But the men would not listen to him. So the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go. At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down at the door and lay there until daylight.—Judges 19:22–26 (NIV)

The story of the rape of the Levite's concubine bears stark resemblance to the actions of the townsmen at Sodom. As with the Sodom story, revisionist scholars typically deny any sexual intent on the part of the men of Gibeah. Bailey questions the sexual interpretation of the Hebrew word *nebalah* in the passage, claiming that "the reference to 'folly' (in our translation "disgraceful thing") need be nothing more than a rhetorical addition designed to emphasize the deplorable lack of courtesy shown by the Gibeathites towards the visitor."[5] As support, he cites 1 Samuel 25:25 where *nebalah* is rendered "inhospitable churlishness" in some translations.

As at Sodom, the men of the city demand that the visitor be brought out so that they might "have sex with" (*yada'*) him. The translation *yada'*, "have sex with," removes any ambiguity caused by the circumlocution, "to know them." *Nebalah* also has sexual connotations. In redefining this term, Bailey ignores his own "statistical argument," for the majority of occurrences of *nebalah* in the Hebrew Bible refer to sexual offenses, a fact that Bailey himself admits.[6] The use of this term confirms that the issue is not one of hospitality but rather the desire of the men to have homosexual relations with the Levite. In another parallel to the Sodom story, the story of Gibeah recounts the unchivalrous offering of women to the townsmen in a desperate attempt to prevent the outrage of homosexual relations compounded by violence.

TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION CONFIRMED. That the outrage at Gibeah involved homosexuality can scarcely be denied. Even revisionist scholar Harold I. Haas, notes:

"No one seems to make much of this event for understanding the Sodom story, but it surely suggests a sexual rather than a social customs interpretation of so close a parallel as the Sodom story."[7] Similarly, David L. Bartlett, writing in *Homosexuality and the Christian Faith,* concludes:

> It takes special imaginative power to believe, as Bailey does, that what the men of Gibeah were after was the acquaintance of the visiting men, or that the old man offered his virgin daughter as the other's concubine only to protect his rights of hospitality.[8]

To the contrary, the Gibeah passage confirms the sexual interpretation of the Sodom story in several key aspects. The textual evidence from the two stories indicates that those cities were inhabited by men so sexually depraved that they were prepared sexually to violate not only males, which they evidently preferred, but whomever was made available to them.

LEVITICUS 18 AND 20: THE MOSAIC LAW

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.—Leviticus 18:22 (NRSV)

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.—Leviticus 20:13 (NRSV)

Another exegetical argument put forth by revisionists maintains that Leviticus condemns only homosexual behavior that is associated with idolatry. James Nelson sets forth this notion in *Christianity and Crisis:* "In these passages acts are condemned not because of some intrinsic aberration but because of their association with idolatry (particularly, in the sexual references, to Canaanite idolatry)."[9] No evidence suggests, however, that the Leviticus text limits the condemnation of homosexuality to that occurring only in an idolatrous context. Leviticus addresses homosexual acts in general: A comparison of texts from Deuteronomy and Leviticus indicates that Deuteronomy is concerned with *sacred* sodomy, while Leviticus is concerned with *civil* sodomy. The technical terms for female [*qedeshah*] and male [*qadesh*] cultic prostitution are absent in the Leviticus condemnation. Instead, the text includes an unambiguous and generic description of the homosexual act: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman."

Other passages specifically address ritual homosexuality. Deuteronomy 23:17, for example, specifically addresses ritual homosexual prostitution that was common to Canaanite religion: "None of the daughters of Israel shall be a temple prostitute [*qedeshah*]; none of the sons of Israel shall be a temple prostitute [*qadesh*]." That *qadesh* refers to homosexual and not heterosexual prostitution is indicated by the rendering of the word in the Septuagint. In 1 Kings 22:46, *qadesh* is translated by the

Greek word *endiellagmenos*: "one who has changed his nature." Bailey states that "the *endiellagmen*os may be either one who has altered his nature by becoming a homosexual pervert, or one who has been transformed by apostasy from a worshipper of Yahweh into a servant of idols"[10] Revisionists ignore, however, that the two possibilities are not mutually exclusive, and are, in fact, intrinsically connected, as Israel's adoption of Canaanite idolatry entailed both spiritual and moral apostasy.

By contrast, Leviticus does not limit its condemnation to that of homosexuality in a ritual context; no mitigating circumstances are mentioned that would permit such behavior, such as within the context of a "loving, committed relationship." Bailey himself is forced to conclude: "It is hardly open to doubt that both the laws in Leviticus relate to ordinary homosexual acts between men, and not to ritual or other acts performed in the name of religion."[11]

The revisionist argument leads to a logical impasse: If homosexuality is to be condemned *only* when practiced in an idolatrous context, then the same is true for the other prohibited behaviors listed in the immediate passage. As Michael Ukleja writes: "To hold to such a distinction, one would have to conclude that adultery was not morally wrong (18:20), child sacrifice had no moral implications (18:21), and that nothing is inherently evil with bestiality (18:23)."[12]

DEUTERONOMY 23: CULTIC PROSTITUTION

*None of the daughters of Israel shall be a temple prostitute [*qedeshah*]; none of the sons of Israel shall be a temple prostitute [*qadesh*]. You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are abhorrent to the Lord your God.*
—Deuteronomy 23:17–18 (NRSV)

Despite the rendering of *qadesh* as "Sodomite" in some translations, revisionists deny that the term refers to a male homosexual. They view the *qadesh* as the male counterpart of the female *qedeshah:* As the *qedeshah* solicits intercourse with males, the *qadesh* engages in ritual intercourse with the female devotees of the temple. Thus if *qadesh* does not refer to homosexual practices, it is irrelevant to the discussion. Since either *qadesh* or *qedeshah* occur only eight times in the Hebrew text, a degree of uncertainty remains concerning the meaning of the terms. The ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, however, indicates that *qadesh* engaged in homosexual conduct. The Septuagint uses several words to translate *qadesh*, but of special interest is *endiellagmenos*, used, as already noted, in 1 Kings 22:46. In this passage the Hebrew *qadesh* is translated *endiellagmenos*, "one who has changed his nature."

In addition, the eminent biblical scholar, S. R. Driver, while commenting on cultic prostitution in Deuteronomy 23:17–18, relates *endiellagmenos* to Deuteronomy 22:5, which states: "A woman shall not wear a man's apparel, nor shall a man put

on a woman's garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the *Lord* your God" (NRSV).[13] Here the transsexual implications of the verse are evident, and the use of *to'ebah*, translated here as "abhorrent," indicates the passage is concerned with grave moral transgressions. Deuteronomy 22:5 likely refers to a particular variant of homosexual practice called transvestism, the adoption of the dress and behavior of the opposite sex. Thus Driver connects the homosexual practice of transvestism with the practice of male cultic prostitution—called "abhorrent" in the Hebrew text. Accordingly, the *qadesh* were not only male prostitutes who engaged in homosexual acts with the male devotees of the temple, but they may also have been transvestites as well.

1 SAMUEL 18 AND 2 SAMUEL 1: DAVID AND JONATHAN

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.—1 Samuel 18:1 (NRSV)

But Saul's son Jonathan took great delight in David.—1 Samuel 19:1 (NRSV)

But David also swore, "Your father knows well that you like me . . . and they kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more.—1 Samuel 20:3, 41 (NRSV)

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.—2 Samuel 1:26 (NRSV)

Most revisionists, realizing they are pushing the envelope with this one, remain tentative in their claims regarding the nature of the relationship between David, the future king of Israel, and King Saul's son, Jonathan. Others seriously postulate that David and Jonathan had a consensual homosexual relationship that can serve as a prototype for modern homosexual unions.[14] Paul Thomas Cahill asks:

> Could David and Jonathan have had an erotic relationship conjointly with their intensely stated love for each other that surpassed that of the love of a woman (2 Samuel 1:26)? Only myopic evangelicals and Orthodox Jews insist that there could not have been any eroticism between them, because they would not have violated God's commands.[15]

The revisionist argument regarding David and Jonathan highlights the chronic and mistaken tendency among homosexual apologists to assume that all loving human relationships should be open to sexual expression. This constitutes a perversion of the noble ideal of true friendship, which is twisted and demeaned into base lust. As Anton N. Marco writes, such activists "virtually deny the possibility that true non-sexual intimacy can exist between persons of the same gender, which would almost deny the possibility of the existence of true friendship."[16] To inject a sexual component into any loving human relationships outside of marriage—including

those between parents and children, siblings, as well as friendships—would be both morally wrong and destructive.

David's description of his love for Jonathan as "more wonderful than that of women" speaks of the wonderful blessing that is deep human friendship. David considered the love shared between friends to be even more meaningful than sexual love. Friendship is an essential form of meaningful human affection blessed by God, and which does not in any way denigrate the love between husband and wife. Tragically, those who conflate "love" and "sex" by sexualizing their relationships all too often destroy the possibility of genuine friendship by crossing boundaries never meant to be crossed, which are intended solely for marriage.

NO SEXUAL INNUENDOES. To attempt to inject a sexual component into Jonathan and David's relationship is morally wrong; the Hebrew texts are absent of any sexual meaning. Jonathan says in 1 Samuel 19:1 that he "was very fond of" David. The Hebrew word (*chaphets*) used means "joy of the heart"; it is never used in the Hebrew Bible to denote sexuality. Similarly, the phrase "the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David" (1 Samuel 18:1, NRSV) signified the depth of sincere friendship between David and Jonathan. The same is commanded of believers in the church (Philippians 1:27). The passage 1 Samuel 18:1 does *not* say David and Jonathan became "one flesh," which signifies the unity reserved for a man and a woman within marriage (see Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31).

In addition, the revisionist argument belies ignorance of Middle Eastern culture. The references stating that David and Jonathan "kissed each other" during their tearful parting have nothing to do with romantic or erotic kissing. In the Middle East, both in ancient and modern times, family members and friends greet each other with a kiss on each cheek, a custom with no sexual connotation. This custom, also common throughout Europe and elsewhere, is reflected in the New Testament command: "Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss" (1 Thessalonians 5:26, NRSV). People in these cultures would reject any effort to attribute a sexual motive to this venerated custom.

Interpreting the New Testament

ROMANS 1: UNNATURAL SEXUAL RELATIONS

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.—Romans 1:24–32 (NIV)

While admitting that this passage contains an explicit description of homosexual acts, revisionists nonetheless argue that Paul did not intend to condemn homosexuality per se. Revisionist New Testament scholar Robin Scroggs claims that the writers of the New Testament knew only of one model of homosexuality—that of pederasty: "Thus what the New Testament was against was the image of homosexuality as pederasty and primarily here in its more sordid and dehumanizing dimensions."[1] This argument resembles the "homosexual rape" argument used by revisionists in the Sodom story in that it limits the prohibition of an immoral behavior to the "abusive" excesses of that behavior. According to this argument, the biblical writer intends to oppose both homosexual and heterosexual abuses—without condemning the "legitimate" forms of either. As Scroggs puts it: "If he opposed something specific, then his statements cannot be generalized beyond the limitations of his intentionality without violating the integrity of the Scripture."[2]

In a variation of the "abusive excesses" argument, evangelical sociologist Anthony Campolo attempts to limit the apostle's condemnation to "abusive" homosexual

behavior: "Paul, in Romans 1, condemned one kind of homosexual behavior which is a perversion resulting from an insatiable sexual appetite yielded to the demonic." Campolo goes on to claim: "But there are other causes for homosexual behavior . . . I do not believe that Paul was dealing with them, and thus his condemnations do not apply to them."[3]

UNCONDITIONAL CONDEMNATION. As with the "homosexual rape" argument discussed in chapter 1, Scroggs fails to adequately account for the biblical text. Romans 1 gives no indication that Paul is referring solely to pederasty. To the contrary, he condemns homosexual behavior with no qualifications and exceptions whatsoever. Contrary to Scroggs, Paul is not addressing homosexual acts between men and boys; the text specifically condemns homosexual acts between adults. To support his thesis, Scroggs cites a reference in the writings of the first century Jewish philosopher Philo, where Philo uses "the 'male and male' terminology when he is explicitly referring to pederasty."[4] However, the passage in Philo's *The Contemplative Life* to which Scroggs refers continues with the phrase "differing only in age."[5] Thus, Philo explicitly qualifies his use of "males having sexual relations with males" terminology to clarify that he is referring to pederasty. Paul makes no such clarification to indicate that he intends only to condemn pederasty.

Neither does Paul allow for "loving" homosexual acts. Campolo assumes that, given the proper circumstances, homosexual behavior may be morally commendable and virtuous, despite the complete absence of any scriptural evidence. But as Bishop Bennett J. Sims notes: "The logical effect of the exemption argument is to suggest that, given the proper motivation, there are loving ways to be 'full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity....' (Romans 1:29ff.) This is moral absurdity."[6]

If a commendable expression of homosexuality were possible, Paul would have distinguished between immoral and moral expressions of homosexuality as he did with other ethical issues; the fact that there is no distinction is further evidence that there are no "moral" homosexual acts. Regarding the eating of food offered to idols, Paul carefully explains in 1 Corinthians 8 the proper circumstances to partake of such food and when one should not eat food offered to idols. Paul makes similar distinctions in 1 Corinthians 7:10–17, granting the "Pauline privilege" regarding the dissolution of marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian.

1 CORINTHIANS 6: MALE PROSTITUTES AND SODOMITES

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.—1 Corinthians 6:9–11 (NRSV)

Revisionists claim that neither of the two Greek terms found in the vice list of 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 that are thought to be relevant to the discussion of homosexuality actually refer to homosexuality. The terms are: *malakos*, translated "male prostitutes"; and *arsenokoitai*, translated "homosexual offenders." Boswell argues that *arsenokoitai* means "male sexual agents, i.e., active male prostitutes, who were common throughout the Hellenistic world in the time of Paul."[7] Scroggs, on the other hand, argues that the term refers to the active partner in a pederastic relationship.[8] Both agree that the term cannot be used to justify a general condemnation of homosexuality.

THE MEANING OF *ARSENOKOITAI*. The etymology of *arsenokoitai*, however, does not indicate that only one kind of homosexuality—pederasty, for example—is in view. Arsenokoitai refers to all manner of homosexual acts. The *Arndt-Gingrich Greek Lexicon* translates the term as "a male who practices homosexuality, pederast, sodomite," and refers the reader to Romans 1:27, which is a generic description of homosexual acts.[9] Several Greek lexicons follow Arndt-Gingrich in defining *arsenokoitai* as referring generally to homosexuality, ignoring the fine distinctions that are pivotal to the revisionist arguments. No lexicon could be found dissenting from the identification of *arsenokoitai* with homosexuality.[10]

Arsenokoitai is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew *mishkab zakur* ("males lying with males"). Scroggs correctly identifies *arsenokoitai* with the Hebrew *mishkab zakur,* the term used in Leviticus to describe homosexual acts. As in Romans 1, Scroggs incorrectly limits the biblical prohibition to pederasty. That Paul would interpret *arsenokoitai* with the Hebrew *mishkab zakur* is entirely in keeping with his rabbinic background, especially given that both terms have the same literal meaning: "Males lying with males."

The Septuagint uses the two words that compose *arsenokoitai* in its translation of both Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The latter passage, for example, contains the phrase "*meta arsenos koiten gunaikos*" ("to lie with a man as with a woman"). This constitutes important evidence; the Septuagint was widely used by the Jewish people in lands where Greek was spoken. The Apostle Paul, born and educated in Greek Antioch, was referring to the unqualified prohibition of homosexual acts in Leviticus when he used *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6:19.

THE MEANING OF *MALAKOS*. Boswell argues that the term *malakos* "refers to general moral weakness, with no specific connection to homosexuality."[11] Scroggs, in keeping with his insistence that *arsenokoitai* refers to pederasty, argues for a narrow interpretation of the term: "Thus the use of *malakos* would almost certainly conjure up images of the effeminate call-boy, *if* the context otherwise suggested some form of pederasty."[12] On the contrary, in the ancient literature *malakos* appears in the context of homosexuality; Boswell himself admits that the term "is sometimes applied to obviously gay persons."[13] Scroggs also sees that the term refers to homosexual

practice, although once again he attempts to limit the meaning to "the general practice of pederasty."[14]

Greek philosophers did not use *malakos* to refer specifically to pederasty. In his *Problems*, Aristotle uses *malakos* to describe passive homosexual behavior.[15] Archibald Robertson notes that Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, states that "people are called *malakoi* in reference to the same things as they are called *akolastoi*, viz. *peri tas somatikos apolauseis* ('concerning bodily pleasures')."[16] Dionysius of Halicarnassus also connects the term with passive male homosexuality in his *Roman Antiquities*, where he gives as one definition of *malakos* someone who "had been 'effeminate' as a child and had undergone the things associated with women."[17] Boswell obviously prefers the other possible definition given by Dionysius: Someone who is "gentle by nature and unruffled (*malakos*) by anger, as others claim." The point here is that passive homosexual behavior is a legitimate definition of the term *malakos*, which Boswell denies—despite the fact that his own translation of Dionysius is quoted above.

Similarly, the first-century Jewish philosopher Philo uses *malakia* to refer to passive homosexual behavior. Robert A. J. Gagnon, in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, notes that Philo uses *malakia* (a cognate of *malakos*) "to refer to the passive homosexual partners (*hoi paschontes*) who cultivate feminine features." Gagnon further notes that "Philo uses the word *malakotes* ("softness, luxury, decadence") to denote the whole feminizing process of receptive male partners in homosexual intercourse."[18]

Although both *arsenokoitai* and *malakos* generally refer to male homosexuality, their appearance together in 1 Corinthians 6:9 indicates a difference in emphasis. Bartlett suggests that *arsenokoitai* signifies "men who have intercourse with males, specifically 'sodomites' in the narrower sense of one who takes the active role in male homosexual intercourse."[19] With regard to *malakos*, Arndt-Gingrich concludes that the term refers to "men and boys who allow themselves to be misused homosexually."[20] As Hans Lietzmann summarizes: "Ein *malako*s ist das Passivim zum *arsenokoitas* (a *malakos* is the passive sexual partner of an *arsenokoitas*)."[21]

REVISIONISTS CONCEDE TRADITIONAL MEANING. After the revisionist arguments are played out, the revisionists themselves often freely admit the failure of such efforts. John von Rohr, while attempting a "theology of homosexuality," admits "the fact still remains that where the Bible does explicitly refer to this matter it is condemnatory in its judgment."[22] Others openly oppose efforts to reinterpret the biblical texts relating to homosexuality. Thomas Maurer, in discussing Rohr's revisionist efforts, voices his aversion to such attempts: "Even more annoying to me is his attempt to rationalize condemnatory statements in the Bible about homosexuality." For Mauer, the question is instead:

> Why don't we have the courage and the candor to admit that the attitudes and opinions expressed by these ancient writers are thoroughly

> reprehensible and repugnant and were so even in their time, not to mention in this supposedly enlightened day?

Mauer's comments lead naturally to the next line of argument that is explored in chapter 3: the suggestion that the biblical texts that actually do condemn homosexuality in ancient times are simply no longer valid and binding today.

Why the Historically Conditioned Argument Fails

After revisionists attempt to show, unsuccessfully, that the biblical texts thought to condemn homosexuality actually limit their condemnation to specific abuses or do not address the issue at all, they move to a second line of attack. They argue that because of its origins in a pre-scientific age, the biblical teaching regarding homosexuality is thus culturally and historically "conditioned." Those texts may have been valid for an earlier time, they concede, but they are no longer authoritative today.

This approach is typified by the study *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America. The study was censured by the Vatican and eventually by the Society itself for its rejection of the traditional understanding regarding sexual ethics. Although stating "that the Old Testament condemns homosexual practice with the utmost severity," the study warns that "simply citing verses from the Bible outside of their historical context and then blithely applying them to homosexuals today does grave injustice both to Scripture and to people who have already suffered a great deal from the travesty of biblical interpretation." In the same way, it also "conditions" the applicability of New Testament texts:

> St. Paul's moral judgments or statements on sexuality cannot simply be taken out of context and applied to the situations of the present time. They represent the applications of the gospel to the circumstances of the first century Christian community within the necessarily limited vision of that time.[1]

CONFUSING THE MORAL AND CEREMONIAL LAW

The revisionists advance this argument by first forcing an "all or nothing" choice regarding the Old Testament law. They claim that modern people must choose between consistently holding to *all* of the levitical prohibitions or admit that the Old Testament law in its entirety is no longer binding. David Bartlett, for example, expresses the "consistency" argument as follows:

> A highly selective kind of biblical interpretation would be required to hold that these two verses in the Holiness Code are absolutely binding on

> Christians. Much of the Holiness Code, including the rules for sacrifice and the dietary regulations, is ignored by almost all Christians in their ethical reflection.[2]

Similarly, feminist scholars Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott write:

> Consistency and fairness would seem to indicate that if the Israelite Holiness Code is to be invoked against twentieth-century homosexuals, it should likewise be invoked against such common practices as eating rare steak, wearing mixed fabrics, and having marital intercourse during the menstrual period.[3]

This reasoning, however, ignores important distinctions in the levitical code, particularly the difference between the moral and the civil/ceremonial laws. Those distinctions are imposed from without, but are supported by the severity of the punishment for violations of the moral law, contrasted with the comparatively lenient punishment for infractions of the civil or ceremonial law. In fact, the levitical texts on sexual transgressions frame them as an extension of the Seventh Commandment, the prohibition of adultery. As Anthony Phillips states: "Leviticus 20:11 can be isolated as the first stage of the reinterpretation of the crime of adultery to include all unnatural sexual unions."[4] Homosexuality is classed with the most severe moral transgressions, which are considered capital offenses and incur the death penalty (Leviticus 20:13).

Jesus affirmed these very distinctions. He castigated the scribes and Pharisees for adhering strictly to the ceremonial law while neglecting "the weightier matters of the law" (Matthew 23:23, NRSV). He further upheld the enduring relevancy of the Ten Commandments in contrast to the civil and ceremonial laws: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17, NRSV). According to Walter Kaiser, these words of Jesus "should be an eternal answer to all who find it difficult to distinguish between the moral, civil, and ceremonial elements of the law."[5] J. Murray likewise agrees: "The conclusion is inescapable that the precepts of the Decalogue have relevance to the believer as the criteria of that manner of life which love to God and to our neighbor dictates."[6]

SUPREMACY OF THE MORAL LAW**.** The reason for the supremacy of the moral law over the ceremonial is theological. The ceremonial law, including animal sacrifice for the atonement of sins, was fulfilled in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ; it has been done away with. Jesus set aside the dietary laws, declaring that "whatever goes into the man from the outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated." Mark then adds: "Thus He declared all foods clean" (Mark 7:18–19, NRSV). By contrast, the New Testament speaks of no corresponding "fulfillment" or abrogation of the moral law. The Apostle Paul, in

fact, affirms its continued authority. In Romans 3:31, Paul concludes a discourse about the relationship between law and grace by asking: "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law"(NRSV). In a subsequent discussion, he states: "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12, NRSV). Salvation, therefore, is from the *transgression* of the law, not from the moral authority or the *content* of the law itself. While the civil/ceremonial laws have been eliminated, the moral law remains in force, as explained in 1 Corinthians 6:13: "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (NRSV).

DID ST. PAUL UNDERSTAND 'SEXUAL ORIENTATION'?

A second historical ploy to "neuter" biblical prohibitions against homosexual conduct is to suggest that biblical writers, like St. Paul, were not aware of the modern notion of "sexual orientation"; their writing, therefore, must be reinterpreted. Derrick Bailey entertains a form of this charge by setting forth, as "indispensable for a correct interpretation of the historical evidence," the distinction between what he termed "inversion" and "perversion." Assuming that the Bible "knows nothing of inversion as an inherited trait, or an inherent condition due to psychological or glandular causes," he claims it "consequently regards all homosexual practice as evidence of perversion."

Mirroring the homosexual "orientation" theory, Bailey argues the condition of inversion is "something for which the subject can in no way be held responsible; in itself it is morally neutral." This is because the true homosexual is only acting in accord with his "sexual orientation," and his actions are in accord with his inborn "condition." But, for Bailey, this would not be true for the "pervert," one who "is not a true homosexual, but a heterosexual who engages in homosexual practice." Bailey argues that since the Apostle Paul was familiar only with what Bailey called perversion, he did not intend to condemn those whose "sexual orientation" was genuinely homosexual.[7]

James Nelson, in agreeing with Bailey's construct, states: "In all probability the biblical writers in each instance were speaking of homosexual acts undertaken by those persons whom the author presumed to be heterosexually constituted."[8] Even the ethicist Helmut Thielicke, widely respected among conservative and evangelical Protestants, asserts that the possibility of inherent homosexual sexual orientation "must for purely historical reasons be alien to the New Testament."[9] Thus, for Thielicke, the Apostle Paul did not intend to make moral judgments regarding such individuals.

HOMOSEXUALITY IN ANTIQUITY. Yet these conclusions do not square with the historical record. As John Boswell admits, "The idea that homosexuality represented a

congenital physical characteristic was widespread in the Hellenistic world."[10] Before the New Testament was written, ancient Greek mythology explained "sexual orientation," according to historian K. J. Dover in *Greek Homosexuality*.[11] In the myth of Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*, the original sexes are described as created in pairs consisting of either a man and a woman; a man and a man; and a woman and a woman.[12] The gods removed one half of the pairs, thus causing the age-old desire to reunite with one's "lost" counterpart. Male homosexual attraction was thought to be caused by a man seeking his lost male counterpart; lesbianism was caused by a woman seeking her lost feminine half. Greek philosophy also had a concept of "sexual orientation." In discussing Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Boswell states that Aristotle understood the concept of chronic predisposition towards homosexuality: "Aristotle apparently considered a homosexual disposition perfectly 'natural'."[13]

Ancient Jewish and Christian sources also refer to same-sex attraction. In his writings, the first century Hellenistic-Jewish philosopher Philo describes those who "habituate themselves" to homosexual behavior. In explaining Jewish law regarding marriage, the Jewish historian Josephus (a.d. 35–95) also addresses the phenomenon of those desiring to engage in same-sex behavior: "That law owns no other mixture of sexes but that which nature hath appointed, of a man with his wife, and that this be used only for the procreation of children. But it abhors the mixture of a male with a male; and if any one do that, death is its punishment."[14] The early church father, Clement of Alexandria, may also have referred to same-sex attraction when he spoke of men who "have a natural aversion to a woman; and indeed those who are naturally so constituted do well not to marry."[15] Clement may simply have been referring to those who, for whatever reason, have no interest in marriage. However, the reference to those experiencing "natural aversion to a woman" may also suggest homosexual feelings.

WEAKNESSES OF THE 'ORIENTATION' ARGUMENT. These references suggest that surely the Apostle Paul, who was educated in the Hellenistic world, was aware of such beliefs regarding "sexual orientation." As such, they refute the argument that the Apostle Paul, having no understanding of such attraction, could not have possibly condemned it or that his condemnations of homosexual behavior were limited to those without the orientation.

While Paul surely knew what he was talking about, the revisionists themselves cannot agree on the nature of sexual orientation. While many activists claim that homosexuality is genetic, some blatantly reject the "inversion/perversion" framework of Bailey. In *The Mismeasure of Desire*, homosexual activist Edward Stein makes the case that all attempts to demonstrate a genetic basis for homosexuality have been doomed to failure.[16] Others, who deny that homosexuality is either an inherent trait or a perversion, prefer to define it with a "continuum" theory that places homosexual inclination on a sliding scale, such as Alfred Kinsey's H-Scale. The scale

places sexual proclivity on a scale between zero (exclusively homosexual) and six (exclusively heterosexual), making it difficult to evaluate morally the homosexual acts of someone with a Kinsey rating of, for example, three.

These differences in modern interpretations of homosexuality only raise doubts about using modern science as the Rosetta stone to "interpret" Scripture. The theories are in a constant state of flux, as Lisa Cahill notes: "The findings of the human sciences are sometimes circular, sometimes ambiguous, and often in conflict."[17] Consequently, the revisionists end up in no man's land. As Walter Wink writes,

> "The question ceases to be 'what does Scripture command?' and becomes instead 'What is the word that the Spirit speaks to the churches now, in the light of Scripture, tradition, theology, psychology, genetics, anthropology and biology?'"[18]

That question can never be answered with satisfaction, as the revisionists do not explain how these diverse scientific disciplines are to be correlated into a meaningful guide for ethical decision-making. As David Blamire asks: "Where, from the angle of moral judgment is the line to be drawn between the 'true homosexual' and the rest?"[19] Catholic moral theologian Charles Curran echoes Blamire's concern: "The ethicist cannot merely follow the majority opinion, for history constantly reminds us that majority opinions are not necessarily true."[20]

The Appeal to Theological Themes

Even as their exegetical and historical attempts to neutralize biblical teaching regarding homosexuality are found wanting, the revisionists cling to one last argument to suggest that homosexuality is compatible with the Bible. This third and final level shifts the focus away from the traditional biblical passages. Instead, attempts center on defining and overriding theological motifs that, when applied to the question of homosexuality would permit or sanction such practices.

According to the revisionists, the presence of "love" should be the primary criterion for all sexual relationships. The Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA) study, for example, states that appropriate sexual behavior must be "self-liberating," "other-enriching," "honest," "faithful," "socially responsible," "life-serving," and "joyous."[1] Homosexual relationships, therefore, that exhibit these qualities coupled with love may be judged to be moral. Likewise, homosexual ex-priest John McNeil writes: "A general consideration of human sexuality in the Bible leads to only one certain conclusion: Those sexual relations can be justified morally which are a true expression of human love."[2] In addition, Roger Shinn highlights another revisionist value, that of "mutuality:" "There have been homosexual relationships with more mutual appreciation than some heterosexual marriages. Any legalistic definition of conditions that make sex 'right' is a trap."[3]

Under this line of thinking, revisionists can justify virtually any type of sexual relationship, including those traditionally considered immoral. W. Dwight Oberholtzer speaks of the "honest one-night stand" and the "faithful (non-marital) lover."[4] While such rhetoric may create an illusion of moral substance, in the end, the revisionists' use of such themes is arbitrary, redefining such virtues in such a way that makes a mockery of their original meaning. As the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith states in its repudiation of the CTSA report:

> The authors pretend that these are not purely subjective criteria, though in fact they are: The personal judgments about these factors are so different, determined by personal sentiments such as feelings and customs, that it would be impossible to single out definite criteria of what exactly integrates a particular person or contributes to his or her creative growth in any specific sexual activity.[5]

THE IMPORTANCE OF OBJECTIVE STANDARDS

Contrary to revisionists' arguments, true love always acts in accord with objective standards. William Muehl notes: "One of the most popular errors in the realm of Christian ethics has been the effort to make love an omnipotent spiritual quality which has the power to sanctify anything that is done in its name."[6] A subjective definition of "love" leads only to moral ambiguity, and can never provide a sound basis for ethical evaluation. The New Testament specifically rejects subjective ideas of love, calling those who violate the commandments in the name of "love" liars: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 John 4:7–5:3, NIV). Likewise, the Sacred Congregation maintains that the goal of true love depends upon objective fidelity: "Such a goal cannot be achieved unless the virtue of conjugal chastity is sincerely practiced."[7]

While revisionists assume a radical separation between the law, which they view as fundamentally repressive, and the "liberating power of love," the New Testament knows of no such dichotomy. Rather, the two are repeatedly correlated. Revisionists, therefore, present a false dichotomy. The real difficulty, writes D. J. Atkinson,

> is a misconception of the relationship between love and law in the Bible. The Biblical understanding of the nature of love is always related to the description or expression of God's character in Himself on the one hand, and the character of life appropriate to the people of God, on the other hand.[8]

Jesus himself affirms this interrelationship between love and law: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15, 15:10; Matthew 19:17, NRSV).

In the end, the false dichotomy between law and love leads revisionists to confuse compassion with acceptance of homosexuality. In her impassioned plea for the acceptance of homosexual practice, Letha Scanzoni, author of "Putting a Face on Homosexuality," declares: "I wish we could say to (homosexuals), 'Yes, I *do* love you—not *in spite of* being a Christian but *because* I am a Christian. The homosexual *is* my neighbor, and I will love my neighbor as myself.'"[9] For Scanzoni, compassion for homosexuals is inseparable from the acceptance of homosexual behavior. But as John Alexander points out,

> This same argument could be used to justify racial discrimination. We are to love everyone, including racists. We can't love the sinner without accepting the sin. So (it is permissible) . . . for racists to discriminate in education, housing, and employment.[10]

GENESIS 1: THE CREATED ORDER

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the

fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."—Genesis 1:26–28 (NIV)

In contrast to revisionist theology, the Scriptures reveal the divine design for sexuality. As seen in the first three chapters of Genesis, the institution of marriage is established immediately after the creation of woman. Central to marriage are the created purposes for male and female. As noted Old Testament scholar Gerhard Von Rad writes:

> Sexual distinction is also created. The plural in v. 27 ("he created them") is intentionally contrasted with the singular ("him") and prevents one from assuming the creation of an originally androgynous man. By God's will, man was not created alone but designated for the "thou" of the other sex....The idea of man ...finds its full meaning not in the male alone but in man and woman.[11]

This interrelationship is described in Genesis 1:31 as "very good," indicating that the divine intention for human sexuality lies in the mutual interdependence of man and woman. As Raymond Collins observes: "Sexual differentiation belongs to the primal plan of the Creator. Human fullness is to be found in the male and female complementarity."[12]

Many marriages admittedly fall short of this ideal, but homosexual "unions,"—because they are intrinsically flawed—cannot hope to emulate the deep bond that can only occur within the union between a man and a woman. This is attested to by the command of Genesis 1:28 to "be fruitful and increase in number," which is given to "male and female," signifying that sexual reproduction presumes heterosexual union. As Donald J. Keefe writes: "The faith-instinct of the Jewish and the Christian people has found no more profound symbol of the splendor of the good creation than that of feminine beauty, and no more profound symbol of betrayal, the betrayal of the covenant, than marital infidelity."[13] By definition, homosexual acts constitute a "profound symbol of betrayal" of the divine order of creation.

Exploring why the Hebrew Scriptures condemn homosexuality, Hershel J. Matt concludes that psychological revulsion or "simply the abhorrence of the unknown" do not sufficiently explain biblical opposition to homosexuality: "The reasons for the Torah's condemnation must be related rather to the will of the Creator for the human male and female whom He created."[14] The opposition to homosexuality does not arise out of the cultural attitudes of an ancient Near Eastern tribe, but rather originates in the divine will at creation.

JESUS AND HOMOSEXUALITY

In the face of this overwhelming biblical case against homosexuality, revisionists like to point out that Jesus himself never addressed the issue. Homosexual minister Troy Perry, for example, asserts: "As for the question 'What did Jesus say about homosexuality?' the answer is simple. Jesus said nothing. . . . Jesus was more interested in love."[15] The underlying assumption is that if Jesus did not speak to a certain behavior directly, it must not have been important.

The error of such logic can be easily demonstrated. Jesus did not directly condemn incest or bestiality either; can, therefore, such practices be considered acceptable? The totality of the evidence from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament—as well as from Jewish history and religion—demonstrates that the Scriptures unambiguously condemn homosexual acts. This divinely revealed understanding of human sexuality was deeply embedded in the cultural and religious heritage of Jesus' day; any divergent teaching regarding marriage, family, and sexuality would have been regarded as scandalous and abhorrent. Had Jesus sanctioned homosexual behavior, one would have expected him to have explicitly stated so. That he did not leads to no other conclusion than that he was fully in agreement with the Hebrew Scriptures and his Jewish heritage. Jesus, in fact, repeatedly affirmed the continuing relevance and authority of the moral 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." (Matthew 5:17–18, NRSV)

The burden of proof, therefore, falls on those who desire to show otherwise; in this regard, arguments from silence are groundless. Even as Jesus did not directly talk about homosexuality, he clearly affirmed the Genesis teaching on the nature of human sexuality. When asked about divorce, Jesus declared the marriage covenant between man and woman as an unalterable and sacred union:

> "Have you not read that the one whom made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Matthew 19:4–6, NRSV)

THE THEOLOGICAL SYMBOLISM OF MARRIAGE

As much as the revisionists seek in vain to find theological themes that might trump biblical injunctions against homosexuality, they avoid one clear and central

theme altogether: the theological symbolism of marriage itself. As Paul states in Ephesians 5:31–32, "'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will be become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church." (NRSV)

In this memorable passage, quoted often in marriage ceremonies, Paul—following the pattern set by Jesus—appeals to Genesis for the divinely established norm. But he is saying more than simply marriage belongs to the order of creation. Paul is declaring that the sexual act within marriage—defined as the union of a man and a woman—mirrors the covenantal union between Christ and his church. As William May and John Harvey observe, "The symbolic meaning of the sexual union of husband and wife is explicitly related to the meaning of Christ's union with his Church, and surely this has something to tell us of the meaning of our sexuality and of the male-female relationship."[16]

This being the case, acts of marital infidelity by definition destroy the analogy of God's faithfulness, which the marriage bond is intended to reflect. Fornication repudiates the order of creation, which finds its true reflection only in monogamous marriage. In addition, homosexual acts are equally incompatible with the marriage covenant.

In their effort to avoid this judgment, revisionists suggest that "homosexual marriage" might also reflect the covenantal union between God and man. John Noonan refutes this stance, claiming that, "homosexual marriage" fails on every point of the analogy:

> Even more emphatic are the basic paradigms. The God of Israel is a faithful husband, he is never seen as a devoted homosexual lover. The Christ of the New Testament is a bridegroom, the Church is his bride; the couple are never presented as a homosexual pair. Human marriage itself, presented as the sign of Christ's union with the Church, is presented as the union of man and wife.[17]

All these biblical themes present relationships that describe theological truths, each of which depends upon the sexual differentiation of male and female. The rejection of such distinctions would result in the distortion of the corresponding spiritual truth, as Noonan remarks: "In each instance there would have been something incongruous, ludicrous, even unthinkable in the choice of homosexual relations to signify deep, faithful, complementary love."[18]

The Witness of History

In two influential books, the late Yale professor John Boswell attempted to prove that homosexuality was tolerated for much of church history. Homosexual activists consider his work the definitive work on homosexuality and the church, and refer to it as "proof" that only in the late Middle Ages did opposition to homosexuality predominate in the church. In the words of Richard John Neuhaus, Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* "has become a kind of sacred text for those who want to morally legitimate the homosexual lifestyle."[1] An example of this attitude is homosexual psychiatrist Ralph Blair's triumphal warning: "Though some evangelicals may foolishly disregard as irrelevant the careful research Boswell has done with regard to 'tradition,' they cannot be so cavalier when it comes to what he has done with the biblical material."[2]

The openly homosexual Boswell, who died of AIDS in 1994, argued that after the dissolution of the Roman Empire, attitudes were tolerant towards homosexuality in the early Middle Ages. According to Boswell, the civil, ecclesiastical, and clerical pronouncements of the era against homosexual behavior did not reflect the views of the majority of Christians. He further argued that in the tenth century a distinct homosexual subculture emerged that was regarded with indifference by the institutional church. Boswell claimed that while dissenting voices were raised, they did not predominate. Tolerance of homosexuality, according to Boswell, flourished until the early thirteenth century, when theological uniformity came to be viewed as more important than diversity and individual autonomy. This, along with the "natural law" theory propounded by Thomas Aquinas, led to the formal ecclesiastical proscription of homosexuality. Boswell claimed that theological opposition to homosexuality was a reflection of growing public intolerance in the late Middle Ages, an "intolerance" which exists to the present time.

BOSWELL'S ARGUMENT EXPOSED

After the initial blush of scholarly infatuation with Boswell's novel theory, scholars quickly noted the glaring weaknesses of *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. Neuhaus notes: "The scholarly judgment of his book has ranged from the sharply critical to the dismissive to the devastating."[3] Boswell's central argument,

based on the insistence that "any distinction between 'friendship' and 'love' must be extremely arbitrary," has drawn fire from critics. Writing in *Communio*, Glenn W. Olsen finds Boswell's refusal to distinguish between the bond of friendship and entering into a sexual relationship to be a source of "hopeless confusion," with the result that "the whole task Boswell sets himself is impossible." With regard to Boswell's rejection of the traditional interpretation of the Sodom story, Olsen states: "To reject the most obvious progression of thought as 'purely imaginary' for no stated reason shows the special pleading that mars this book." Olsen then describes Boswell's "thoroughly unsatisfactory discussion" of the New Testament evidence as "a misguided attempt to defend the proposition" that the texts in question do not condemn homosexuality.[4]

Since in his book Boswell summarily disposes of the biblical arguments against homosexuality and contends that the church was indifferent to homosexual behavior, the reader is left to wonder why opposition to homosexuality arose in the church. Even those taken with the book, such as John C. Moore of Hofstra University, who speaks of "the richness of this provocative book," sees this weakness. "[Boswell] has no explanation for the dramatic shift of the thirteenth century," writes Moore, "apart from saying that the origin of the change was more popular than clerical and that the new hostility was not caused by the Christian Bible, which had been there all along."[5]

In *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, Boswell further elaborates his claim that the church has not consistently condemned homosexual behavior.[6] He claims historical precedent for same-sex union ceremonies within the church. At the heart of Boswell's argument, according to Brent Shaw in *The New Republic*, are "a series of documents relating to a singular ritual practiced in the Christian church during antiquity and the high middle ages, principally in the lands of the eastern Mediterranean." The ritual described in these liturgical documents is called *adelphopoiesis* (Greek, translated "the creation of a brother"), which Boswell interpreted as a ceremony for the blessing of a homosexual union.[7] As Shaw demonstrates, however, Boswell's arguments are fraught with misrepresentations and errors:

- Boswell mistranslates the name of the ceremony of symbolic brotherhood. The spiritual union ceremony should not be translated "Office for Same-Sex Union," as Boswell suggests, thus falsely implying that homosexual unions enjoyed a legitimate status in the medieval Church. In Greek the name of the ritual literally means "the creation of a brother."[8]

- The ceremony of symbolic brotherhood did not signify marital union. Shaw notes that, as it does today, marriage in the Middle Ages meant "the formation of a common household, the sharing of everything in a permanent co-residential unit, [and] the formation of a family unit wherein the two partners

were committed, ideally, to each other, with the intent to raise children." Boswell's so-called same-sex unions of this period, however, lack any of these important aspects of marriage. Consequently, "There is no indication in the texts themselves that these [rituals] are marriages in any sense."[9]

- The ceremony of symbolic brotherhood represented spiritual union. A text taken from an eleventh-century Greek manuscript specifically states that the two parties are "joined together not by the bond of nature but by faith and in the mode of the spirit, granting unto them peace and love and oneness of mind." According to Robin Darling Young, associate professor of theology at the Catholic University of America, "The language employed in these texts does not suggest any kind of sexual connection between the two parties united in this particular bond."[10]

- Boswell wrongly presumes that references to "love" indicate physical love. The Greek word *agape* is used in medieval recitations such as "Grant unto them unashamed fidelity and sincere love." Boswell assumes a direct sexual inference in such passages even though in the context *agape* lacks any such connotation. According to Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest, *agape* does not describe erotic love, but specifically refers to "a love called out of a person's heart by an awakened sense of value in an object which causes one to prize it....It is a love of preciousness...a love of esteem...a love of prizing."[11] Shaw notes that while *agape* was occasionally used by late Greek writers to refer to physical love, "such usages are extremely rare." Shaw continues: "But that is hardly the point. What remains indisputable is the significance of the word in ecclesiastical, theological, and liturgical writings—in the specific genres of Boswell's 'same-sex union' documents."[12]

- Boswell claims that it was only during the High Middle Ages that the church prohibited homosexual behavior and began emphasizing the centrality of the biological family to society. This claim is patently false. Boswell ignores the teaching regarding the normative status of the traditional family structure that finds wide attestation among the early church fathers (see below). Furthermore, as Robin Young notes, the "early Byzantine law codes contain extremely harsh punishments for homosexual intercourse."[13]

In short, Boswell's supposed historical precedents for "homosexual marriages" within the church are fictitious. Since its inception, the Christian church has consistently prohibited homosexual behavior as one of many sinful deviations from monogamous marriage—a norm that dates back to the Garden of Eden. Revisionists such as Roger Shinn admit that, contra Boswell, homosexuality has

consistently and unambiguously been condemned throughout Church history: "The Christian tradition over the centuries has affirmed the heterosexual, monogamous, faithful marital union as normative for the divinely given meaning of the intimate sexual relationship."[14]

THE WITNESS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

The prohibition of all extramarital sexual relations—including homosexuality—is found in the earliest non-canonical Christian writings. Both the *Didache* and the *Epistle of Barnabas*, dating from the second century, include homosexuality among a list of sexual sins.[15] One of the first Christian theologians, Clement of Alexandria (died 220), wrote that the Sodomites had "through much luxury fallen into uncleanness, practicing adultery shamelessly, and burning with insane love for boys."[16] St. John Chrysostum (died 407) strongly opposed the practice of homosexuality in his day, which he viewed as contrary to nature:

> Blurring the natural order, men play the part of women, and women play the part of men, contrary to nature. . . . No passage is closed against evil lusts; and their sexuality is a public institution—they are roommates with indulgence.

As a result of their sin, writes Clement, "so did God did [*sic*] bring upon them such a punishment as made the womb of the land forever barren and destitute of all fruits."[17]

St. Basil, a contemporary of Chrysostum, counseled young men to flee "intimate association," reminding such that "the enemy has indeed set many aflame through such means."[18] Basil recommended the same punishment for homosexual offenses as for adultery, which was exclusion from the sacraments for fifteen years. St. Gregory of Nyssa (died 398) also recommended this punishment and viewed homosexuality as unlawful pleasure.[19] The conviction that homosexual acts are objectively wrong is continued by St. Augustine (died 430), who wrote that "those crimes which are against nature must everywhere and always be detested and punished. The crimes of the men of Sodom are of this kind."[20]

OTHER HISTORICAL TESTIMONY

By formulating laws prohibiting homosexuality, the early Western law codes unequivocally affirmed that such behavior was contrary to nature. In the fourth century, the *Theodosian Code* mandated "exquisite punishment" for those who would enter into homosexual marriages, and by 390 the *Code* states that those who practice the "shameful custom of condemning a man's body, acting the part of a woman's"

are to be burned at the stake.[21] The Emperor Justinian strengthened this legal tradition in the sixth century in the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, which became the foundation for Byzantine and later Western law regulating sexual behavior. In the *Institutes* of the *Corpus*, homosexuality is classed with adultery as punishable by death.[22] Justinian also issued two edicts that condemn such practices as "diabolical" and "the most disgraceful lusts."[23] From this time on the prohibition of homosexual behavior became fixed in the Western legal tradition.

In the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas (died 1274) discussed the subject of homosexuality in his *Summa Theologica* under the category of lust. Aquinas concluded: "Therefore, since by the unnatural vices man transgresses that which has been determined by nature with regard to the use of venereal actions, it follows that in this matter this sin is gravest of all."[24] Later, the Protestant Reformers agreed with this judgment concerning homosexuality, as is indicated by Martin Luther's (1483–1546) comment regarding the moral corruption he witnessed: "In Rome I myself saw some cardinals who were esteemed highly as saints because they were content to associate with women."[25] Similarly John Calvin (1509–1564) refers to the sin of homosexuality as "the most serious of all, viz. that unnatural and filthy thing which was far too common in Greece."[26]

Confessional statements of the Reformation, including the Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 87), the Augsburg Confession (2.2), and the Westminster Confession (ch. 24), reaffirm the rejection of homosexual behavior as contrary to the divine will for mankind. Karl Barth, perhaps the greatest Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, refers to homosexuality as a violation of God's created order in his *Church Dogmatics.* In a statement that reflects the common view of all major Christian denominations until the latter half of the twentieth century, Barth concludes: "The decisive word of Christian ethics must consist of a warning against entering upon the whole way of life which can only end in the tragedy of concrete homosexuality."[27]

THE WISDOM OF THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN ETHIC

J. D. Unwin, in his classic study, *Sexual Regulations and Cultural Behavior*, examined the sexual mores of nearly one hundred civilizations spanning a period of several millennia. Unwin began his studies with the self-confessed intent to "dispel the idea" that the limitation of "sexual impulses" is beneficial to society. The evidence, however, forced him to conclude that "expansive energy" (i.e., such things as exploration and commerce increase) is displayed by a society only when sexuality is expressed solely within the boundaries of "absolute monogamy." Unwin found that cultural vitality is directly related to a society's adherence to the biblical principle of heterosexual monogamy. As societies departed from the Judeo-Christian sexual ethic in favor of some form of "modified monogamy" or polygamy, their cultural energy diminished.[28]

Unwin's research confirms that the Judeo-Christian sexual ethic, rooted in biblical revelation as well as in nearly two millennia of church teaching, has been a fundamental source of societal stability. Contrary to the claims of revisionists, opposition to homosexual behavior is not irrational fear, but integral to the Judeo-Christian ethic. On every level—the exegetical, historical, and theological—revisionists have failed to establish their contention that homo-sexuality is compatible with Christian faith. Muehl concludes: "Efforts to redefine homosexual relationships as consistent with the biblical faith constitute an attack upon the very foundations of that faith."[29]

As the revisionist attacks will continue unabated, conservatives in the churches must continue to counter the attempt to make homosexuality morally acceptable. Not to do so would undermine the historic Judeo-Christian understanding regarding sexual morality. As Klaus Bockmuhl states: "The Church of Jesus Christ has to resist the trend that would ironically make it the agent for the abolition of its own ethical norms, an abolition for which neither the Old nor the New Testament offers the slightest justification."[30] The revisionist methodology, with its inadequate account of the biblical witness, its denial of the continuing relevance of the moral law, and its subjective criteria for ethical evaluation, must be strenuously refuted in the name of authentic Christian morality.

Appendix: Where the Churches Stand on Homosexuality

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

As with any large and multifaceted church, isolated pronouncements by individual priests or church-related organizations are sometimes mistakenly viewed as the official position of the church at large. That position, however, is unmistakable: although the Roman Catholic Church condemns prejudice towards homosexuals, she nonetheless maintains unequivocally that homosexual acts are always intrinsically evil. The official teaching of the church was affirmed in 1975 by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics. The Declaration* states that homosexual actions are "condemned as a serious depravity" and "intrinsically disordered."

In 1998, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued the statement, "Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers." The pastoral statement noted that, while "homosexual orientation" was in itself not considered sinful, it was nonetheless "objectively disordered." The church maintains that through spiritual and psychological counseling, prayer, and the formation of Christian virtue, such individuals can live chaste lives and experience substantial healing from homosexual desires.

Subsequent documents from Pope John Paul II and by the relevant Dicasteries of the Holy See reiterate the essential point that there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family.

BAPTIST CHURCHES

The largest Protestant denomination in the United States, the Southern Baptist Convention, remains resolutely opposed to homosexuality, passing numerous resolutions condemning homosexual behavior. In 1991, the convention passed a resolution saying that homosexuality is "outside the will of God" and that "it is the responsibility and privilege of the church to minister to homosexuals." Responding to efforts to legalize homosexual marriage, in 1998 the convention qualified its definition of "marriage" as "the uniting of one man and one woman."

Among other Baptist denominations, the General Board of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. adopted in 1998 the recommendation of a unity committee that non-celibate homosexuality be deemed "incompatible" with Christian teaching and the "prevailing understanding of American Baptists." The following year, four American Baptist congregations that welcomed into membership non-celibate homosexuals lost an appeal before the General Board and are no longer welcome in the denomination.

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The Book of Discipline regulates the ministry and polity of the United Methodist Church (UMC), America's second-largest Protestant denomination. Regarding homosexuality, it states:

> Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church.

At the 2000 General Conference, revisionists were heartened when the delegates rejected a resolution that would have required the following loyalty oath of any minister assigned to a congregation: "I do not believe that homosexuality is God's perfect will for any person. I will not practice it. I will not promote it. I will not allow its promotion to be encouraged under my authority." However, by a 628 to 337 vote, the delegates passed a resolution reaffirming their belief that homosexual behavior is incompatible with Christian teaching.

In several resolutions at its 2004 General Conference, the UMC strengthened its stance against homosexuality. The delegates reaffirmed that the UMC does not condone homosexual practice and prohibits the practice of homosexuality by members of the clergy. The delegates also endorsed laws that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Contrary proposals, which would have amended the Social Principles—positions the denomination takes on social issues—to say that "faithful Christians disagree on the compatibility of homosexual practice with Christian teaching," were soundly rejected by 95 percent of the delegates.

THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America receives into membership all people who express faith in Christ, regardless of sexual orientation. However, the denomination precludes practicing homosexuals from the ordained ministry. This position was first clarified in 1989, when the church-wide Assembly, the legislative

body of the denomination, declared: "The biblical understanding which this church affirms is that the normative settings for sexual intercourse is marriage....Practicing homosexuals are excluded from the ordained ministry." The position was reaffirmed in 1999, when the Assembly voted 820 to 159 to ban active gays and lesbians from ordination.

Unfortunately, in 2004 a study guide which presents a revisionist perspective on homosexuality was being promoted as a basis for discussion in local ELCA churches. The study guide is expected to inform recommendations for the church to consider.

AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANS

In 1978, the General Assembly of what was then the United Presbyterian Church in the United States adopted as "definitive guidance" a report that welcomed gays and lesbians as members but declared them ineligible to be elected to church office as elder, deacon, or minister. The report stated that homosexuality is "not God's wish for humanity....Even where the homosexual orientation has not been consciously sought or chosen, it is neither a gift from God nor a state nor a condition like race; it is a result of our living in a fallen world." Although the report is considered an authoritative interpretation of church law, it was not uniformly enforced. What eventually became the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continued to "study" the issue.

In 1993, the General Assembly adopted a resolution stating, "Current constitutional law in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is that self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons may not be ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, elders, or deacons." Three years later, regional presbyteries explicitly clarified the matter, ratifying an amendment to the church's constitution requiring "those who are called to office in the church to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness."

In 1997, a majority of presbyteries approved an amendment to the authoritative *Book of Order*. Now known as section G-6.0106b, the amendment reads:

> Those who are called to 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…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.

However, regional presbyteries defeated a proposed constitutional amendment which would have explicitly precluded ministers from blessing same sex-unions and disallowed the use of church property for such ceremonies. Although the failed

measure does not weaken existing standards, observers interpret the defeat as strengthening the pro-homosexual lobby within the denomination, which eagerly seeks to overturn the 1996 measure.

Smaller Presbyterian communions formed out of divisions from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), such as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America, which remain staunch supporters of traditional Christian teaching regarding homosexuality.

THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

In 1979, the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God, the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world, adopted a report on homosexuality. The position paper stated that homosexuality represented the "alarming erosion of national moral standards" and rejected demands for equality by homosexual activists. Homosexual behavior is described as a sin against God and man, and ungodly. When ministering to homosexuals, the report issued the following caution: "Believers must trust the Holy Spirit to guide them in distinguishing between those who honestly want God's salvation and those who may be recruiting sympathizers for homosexuality as an alternate life-style."

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Episcopal Church U.S.A.'s (ECUSA) General Convention passed a resolution in 1979 that stated: "There should be no barrier to the ordination of qualified persons of either heterosexual or homosexual orientation whose behavior the Church considers wholesome." However, the resolution specified chastity as a qualification for ordination: "We believe it is not appropriate for this Church to ordain a practicing homosexual, or any person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage."

Nevertheless, the position of the Episcopal Church remains ambiguous, as each diocese is more or less free to abide by or ignore the 1979 resolution. Further clouding the issue, the General Convention endorsed a policy in 2000 which acknowledged that Episcopal couples "acting in good conscience" who live in lifelong, committed relationships outside marriage should receive "prayerful support, encouragement and pastoral care." Revisionists applauded the measure even though the measure stopped short of specifically mentioning homosexuals.

Countering these trends in the American church is the worldwide Anglican Communion, of which the Episcopal Church U.S.A. is a member. In 1998, the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops endorsed a resolution, by a vote of 526 to 70, upholding "faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union." The resolution, while "rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible

with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively" to homosexuals. The resolution stated that it "cannot advise the legitimizing or blessing of same-sex union, nor the ordination of those involved in same-gender unions."

Delegates at the 2003 General Convention of the ECUSA passed a "compromise" resolution permitting a "local option," which recognized (without granting formal approval) that some priests were performing blessings of homosexual couples in some dioceses in the U.S. Also in 2003, in defiance of Lambeth's clear affirmation of biblical standards regarding homosexuality, the Episcopal Church consecrated a practicing homosexual as bishop.

In response, the Primates of the Global South of the Anglican Communion, representing 18 Provinces and a membership of more than 55 million, met in Nairobi in April 2004. The Anglican Primates called for the ECUSA to revoke their decision to consecrate a homosexual bishop, and issued a statement which boldly and eloquently affirmed the biblical teaching regarding homosexuality:

> We reiterate unreservedly our unequivocal opposition to the unilateral decision of ECUSA to proceed with the consecration of a divorced and practising homosexual priest as Bishop. This deliberate disobedience of the revealed will of God in the Holy Scriptures is a flagrant departure from the consensual and clearly communicated mind and will of the Anglican Communion. By this, ECUSA has willfully torn "the fabric of the communion at its deepest level," and as a consequence openly cut themselves adrift and broken the sacramental fellowship of the Communion.

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Although the leading Christian churches in the United States continue to view homosexual behavior as outside the realm of appropriate Christian conduct, revisionist scholars within their respective communions continue a campaign to re-interpret or ignore biblical teaching regarding homosexuality. Exposing the faulty reasoning behind the gay hermeneutic, *The Bible, The Church, and Homosexuality* demonstrates how homosexuality is unambiguously found wanting by Scripture and tradition.

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