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

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

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

The St Louis Statement on Human Sexuality

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

Editor

I. A THEOLOGY RELATING TO THE HUMAN BODY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and again,

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

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

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

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

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

In all eras the church has been tempted to accommodate its teaching to the culture. The wish for accommodation to culture, however, has always become a death-wish for the people of God. We believe that the church is particularly tempted in our time to grant normative status to changing social conditions in sexual matters, and to the latest conclusions from the social sciences. From its inception, however, the Reformed tradition has held that sin results not only in moral error but also in intellectual error. This means that contemporary conclusions from the social sciences, no matter how 'objective' they appear, and from changing social conditions, no matter how compelling they seem, which countermand the revealed will of God in Scripture, cannot be either true or according to God's will.

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

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

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

In our day this means:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. QUESTIONS RELATING TO A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN ASEXUALITY

A. Why Did God Make Two Sexes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷ Smedes, 29.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸ Ibid., 20, 30.

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

¹⁰ Ibid., 30, 31.

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

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

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

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

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

That statement is clear in its call to the church:

The relationship between man and woman exemplifies in a basic way God’s ordering of the interpersonal life for which he created (humankind).... Reconciled to God, each person has joy in and respect for his (her) own humanity and that of other persons; a man and woman are enabled to marry, to commit themselves to a mutually shared life, and to respond to each other in sensitive and lifelong concern; parents receive the grace to care for children in love and to nurture their individuality. The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by humans when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time.¹³

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

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

¹² *Form of Government*: G-14–0405.

¹³ *The Book of Confessions*, 9.047.

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

¹⁵ *Directory for Worship*, W-f.9001.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IV. ISSUES OF HUMAN SEXUALITY IN NEED OF CONSIDERATION TODAY

A. The Bible and Patriarchalism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. Sexual Abuse and Family Violence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Practical Implications for Ministry

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

²⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

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

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

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

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

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

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

C. Teenagers

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

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

The Situation Among Teenagers Premarital intercourse is common.

²⁶ F. Allen Bettis, unpublished paper.

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

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

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

Consequences

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

D. Sexuality and Older Adults

Myths and Realities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Role of the Church

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

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

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

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

²⁸ Ibid., 227.

²⁹ Ibid., 241.

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

³¹ Crandall, 212.

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

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

Sexuality and Older Single Adults

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

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

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

E. Sexual Misconduct Among Clergy

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

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

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

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

F. The Bible and Homosexuality

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

Naturally the original documents of the Bible do not use this modern term, but it does not follow that the biblical writers were unacquainted with those who indulged in homosexual practices. The occurrence of same-sex activities in the ancient Near-Eastern cultures and, still more, in the Greco-Roman empire was notorious, and both Old Testament and New Testament writers are forthright in condemning such practices. The following is a brief summary of biblical passages that refer to homosexual practices. In order, however, to appreciate fully the import of the scriptural condemnation of homosexual practices, it will be helpful to glance at the total picture of human sexuality as set forth in the Old and New Testaments.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

G. The Church and Homosexuality

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

H. Church Membership and the Ordination of Homosexuals

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

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

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

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

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

There is room in the church for all who give honest affirmation to the vows required for membership in the church. Homosexual persons who sincerely affirm 'Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior,' and 'I intend to be his disciple, to obey his word and to show his love' should not be excluded from membership.³²

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

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

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

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

I. The Church and AIDS

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

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

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

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

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

³³ *Ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

V. CALL TO FREEDOM, HOLINESS, AND JOYFULNESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gender and Homosexuality

Harold Turner

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

Editor

CURRENT SHAPE OF THE QUESTION

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

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