

# Kaleidoscope

## Resource Packet

Empowering the Lesbian, Gay,  
Bisexual, Transgender, and Ally  
Brethren and Mennonite College Community

Revised October 2007



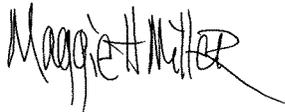
Greetings!

Thank you for taking the time to explore this resource packet. There is a tremendous amount of resources and information on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender interests, so in choosing what to include in this packet, I pulled from past editions created by former Kaleidoscope Coordinators Joel Nofziger and Katie Hochstedler. A gracious thank you to Joel, who served as the original author in 2002. This is a newly revised edition with some more current information to keep you up to date with today's LGBT world.

If you are unfamiliar with BMC, a warm welcome goes out to you. Information is included both about our organization as well as a peek into the Brethren and Mennonite worlds. If you have always wanted more information on what the Bible says (or does not say) about homosexuality, turn to pages 5-26.

We are lucky to have been able to gather essays from a spectrum of individuals, bringing the information to a personal level. This edition features a new focus on gender identity by including an essay on page 37 regarding the subject of transgender life on a Brethren College campus.

If you have ideas for information to be added or changed, please contact our office.



Maggie Miller  
Kaleidoscope Coordinator 2008

Kaleidoscope is a program of



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# Definitions

*Note: These definitions are not meant to be comprehensive; but are meant to be expanded, challenged, and redefined.*

**Ableism:** The exclusion of people with physical and/or developmental impairments from social, economic, and political power. This is supported by the assumption of superiority by those who consider themselves able-bodied.

**Ageism:** Discrimination against a person/group based on actual or perceived age. Most often directed at youth or the elderly.

**Ally:** A non-LGBT person who works in solidarity both with other heterosexual people and with the queer community to aid in the struggle against hate, discrimination, and the heterosexist and patriarchal norms present in our culture. Being an ally means: sharing the power, taking a risk, taking responsibility, opening yourself up to the unknown, realizing that you are part of the solution, leveling the playing field, accepting differences, making allowances, and leading by action. It is important for an ally to join LGBT persons in solidarity, and not play a patronizing role in the journey towards equality.

**Androgyny:** Displaying characteristics of both or neither of the two culturally defined genders.

**Biphobia:** Hatred and/or discrimination against bisexuals. Like *transphobia*, this form of discrimination comes from both the straight and gay communities. Some members of the straight community often collapse bisexuality into homosexuality and refer to bi people as “gay.” Thus, bisexuals often face the same forms of discrimination, difficulty in adopting children, and emotional and physical violence as the lesbian/gay community. Some members of the lesbian/gay community, on the other hand, often feel hostility toward bisexuals for being able to “pass” as straight or for being “confused.”

**Bisexual:** A person who is emotionally, spiritually, physically and/or sexually attracted to those of any sex or gender.

**Black triangle:** Though the *pink triangle* is a widely recognized symbol of queer identity and rights, the pink triangle was originally used in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany to identify gay men (“sexual deviants”) and *not* lesbian women. Lesbian women were given a black triangle, the symbol of asexuals, because Hitler’s regime did not recognize the validity of lesbian sexuality. Today, both men and women wear the pink triangle to show support for the queer community or to identify themselves as queer.

**Coming out:** The process of realizing, understanding, and accepting one’s sexual or gender identity, usually involving the process of telling others. Because it’s a process, coming out is not a one-time occurrence, yet happens each time one presents oneself as nonstraight. Because heterosexuality is part of the dominant culture, straight people do not have to come out.

**Compulsory heterosexuality:** A “man-made institution,” as stated by poet and theorist Adrienne Rich. Compulsory heterosexuality pervades our cultures, telling us women are innately attracted only to men and men are innately attracted only to women. This idea is upheld by the bombardment of heterosexual images in the media, as well as cultural assumptions that all people are heterosexual. It invalidates queer identities and makes many queer people invisible. This is why it is generally unnecessary for someone to come out as being heterosexual.

**Drag:** Wearing the clothing of another gender, often exaggerating stereotypical characteristics of that gender. Often used in reference to Drag Kings and Drag Queens.

**Dyke:** Historically, this term has been an insult used against women perceived to be lesbian or “masculine,” similar to butch, she-male, bulldyke, bulldagger, lezzie, *et cetera*. Some queers have reclaimed the word as a way to identify and empower themselves. Reclaiming words in this way is often a political act and a tool for empowerment. (See also *fag* and *queer*)

**Fag:** Historically, this term has been an insult used against men perceived to be homosexual or “feminine,” similar to sissy, pussy, pansy, punk, fairy, *et cetera*. Some queers have reclaimed the word as a way to identify and empower themselves.

**FTM:** Female to Male. A term used in the queer community that refers to male-identified persons who were categorized as female at birth. (See also *MTF* and *transgender*)

**Gay:** A person who identifies as a man who is emotionally, spiritually, physically and/or sexually attracted primarily to other men. *Gay*, however is often used as an umbrella term for both same-gender loving men and women, and many women identify as gay rather than, or in addition to, lesbian.

**Gender:** Characteristics of masculinity and femininity which are learned or chosen. A person’s assigned sex does not always match their gender identity, and most people display traits of more than one gender. It is important to note that *gender* is different from and not inherently linked to *sexual orientation*.

**Gender bending:** Messing with stereotypical gender roles.

**Gender binary:** The concept that there are only two genders and that they are inherently connected with sex, i.e., female-identified people have vaginas and male-identified people have penises.

**Gender identity:** Describes the gender with which a person identifies (i.e, whether one perceives oneself to be a man, a woman, or describes oneself in some less conventional way), but can also be used to refer to the gender that other people attribute to the individual on the basis of what they know from gender role indications (clothing, hair style, *et cetera*). Gender identity may be affected by a variety of social structures, including the person’s ethnic position, employment status, religion or irreligion, and family.

**Genderqueer:** This is a term for people who identify outside of the traditional two-gender or gender-binary system. As with any other groups that may be aligned with transgender identities, the reasons for identifying as genderqueer vary. This term refers primarily to gender identity rather than sexual orientation.

**Hegemony:** The forces used by a dominant group to oppress another group.

**Heteropatriarchy:** This describes the way in which heterosexuality and *patriarchy* (a structure in which men dominate) work together to shape and mandate oppressions. In a heteropatriarchy, heterosexuality and patriarchy are made to seem like the “natural” order of things. The term is a good way to draw attention to linked oppressions. As Suzanne Pharr states, “Homophobia is a weapon of sexism,” and vice versa.

**Heterosexism:** The belief that heterosexuality is “normal,” or superior to other sexual orientations. It is one of the central ideas behind homo-, bi- and transphobia and is key to maintaining patriarchy. This often takes form as systemic or institutional heterosexism.

**Homophobia:** Hatred and/or discrimination based on perceived or actual sexuality or gender identity. Homophobia manifests itself in a variety of ways, including verbal threats, jokes, physical/emotional violence, and discrimination in adoption, marriage, employment, *et cetera*.

**Internalized homophobia:** A hatred or fear of one’s own existing or potential homosexuality. It is

largely responsible for the staggering numbers of queer teen suicides, depression, and substance abuse. It is also a contributing factor in violence against those perceived to be queer. Internalized *ableism*, *biphobia*, *racism*, *sexism*, and *transphobia*, likewise, are responsible for shame, negative body image, and violence within our communities. Though the word *internalize* sounds negative, it is possible to internalize positive self-images and pride.

**Intersex:** Describes people born with some combination of male and female sex organs. According to the Intersex Society of North America, “Anatomic sex differentiation occurs on a male/female continuum, and there are several dimensions.” It is estimated that anywhere from 1 in 100 to 1 in 2,000 infants is born intersexed, but the most common reaction by the medical establishment is to “fix” these babies immediately through surgical means. Many consider surgeries to often be medically unnecessary and a form of mutilation.

**Kinsey Scale:** The model devised by Alfred Kinsey in 1948 that plotted sexuality on a scale from 0-6, 0 being exclusively heterosexual and 6 exclusively homosexual. According to a 1954 survey using the scale, 70 % of people fall from 1-5, making it the first linear scale to account for bisexuality. The scale has been criticized, though, for being too linear and only accounting for behaviors, not for gender identity.

**Lesbian:** A person who identifies as a woman who is emotionally, spiritually, physically and/or sexually attracted primarily to other women.

**LGBTQ:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer.

**MTF:** Male to Female: A term used in the queer community that refers to female identified persons who were categorized as male at birth.

**Omnisexual (Pansexual):** Broadly defined, someone who is emotionally, spiritually, physically and/or sexually attracted to those of all genders or sexes.

**Perceived Gender:** The gender ascribed to a person by another person or society at large. Generally linked to appearance, *perceived gender* often does not “match” a person’s actual gender identity.

**Pink triangle:** The pink triangle (worn point down) has become a symbol of gay rights and identity. The symbol was appropriated from Nazi Germany where perceived homosexuals were among the first forced into concentration camps and among millions murdered under Hitler’s regime. The pink triangle was used to mark gay men the way the yellow triangle/star was used to denote Jewish men and women. Though it is a widely recognized symbol for gay and lesbian identity, the pink triangle was used to identify only gay *men*. A *black triangle*, the symbol of asexuals, was used to denote lesbian women.

**Queer:** Can be used as an umbrella term for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersexed. Also, someone who self-identifies as part of the LGBTI community and makes a political choice to align themselves outside of heteronorms. Historically, the term has been used as an insult against those perceived to be LGBTI. For this reason its use today is controversial. It was reclaimed in the ‘80s by a group called Queer Nation, and has since been embraced by many who are anti-assimilationist and recognize the sexual and gender diversity of our community.

**Queer Theology:** The exploration of the nature of God and human-kind's relationship with God through the experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (although, as used, the term *Queer* may extend beyond LGBT people). Many churches that have embraced Queer Theology (such as the Metropolitan Community Church) would ascribe a broad meaning to *queer* - including a broad range of those who choose to identify or ally themselves outside the constraints of the prevailing societal norms.

**Queer Theory:** An anti-essentialist theory about sex and gender within the larger field of Queer Studies. It proposes that one's sexual identity and one's gender identity are partly or wholly socially constructed,

and therefore individuals can not be described using broad terms such as *homosexual*, *heterosexual*, *man*, or *woman*. It challenges the common practice of compartmentalizing the description of a person to fit into one particular category.

**Racism:** Racism is racial prejudice in addition to power. Deeply ingrained into our cultures, subconscious, and social institutions, racism often manifests itself in many different ways including the internalization of racial superiority/inferiority.

**Safe Space/Zone:** A safe space is a place where LGBT or questioning individuals feel comfortable and secure in being who they are. In this place, they can talk about their gender identity or sexual orientation without fear of being criticized, judged, or ridiculed. A safe space does not provide advice, but rather a caring environment for the sharing of concerns.

**Sexism:** A system of discrimination against and exploitation of women based on the ideology of male supremacy.

**Sexual orientation:** The orientation within human beings which leads them to be emotionally, spiritually, physically and/or sexually attracted to persons of one gender, another gender, or multiple genders. One's sexual orientation may be homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, omnisexual, asexual, or other, *et cetera*.

**Stonewall:** The year was 1969, and this night of combat between mostly Black and Puerto Rican working class drag queens and New York City cops opened the door to what is commonly known as the "Gay Rights Era." This night was the spark that revived a movement, and the participants went down in history as the revolutionaries responsible for securing the beginnings of gay civil rights. [Before this date queer activism was taking place, but was not widely known.]

**Straight [Non-Gay, Heterosexual]:** Someone who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted primarily to members of another sex/gender.

**Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity is different from the sex and gender role they were assigned at birth. Transgender people can be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and may not identify as queer. *Genderqueer* people may or may not identify with this term.

**Transsexual:** A transsexual is a person whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth, so they may take hormones or get sex reassignment surgery (SRS). Policies differ from state to state regarding the point in one's journey when a transsexual individual can legally change their name and other legal documents. *Transsexual* is often seen as a clinical, even dated term.

**Transphobia:** Hatred and/or discrimination against people who break or blur gender roles and sex characteristics. Transphobia is mandated by a gender regime that says we are either man or woman, masculine or feminine. Like *biphobia*, it is prevalent in both straight and lesbian/gay communities.

**Two-Spirit:** The term *Two-Spirit* is a Native American [Canadian] concept present in some, but not all, indigenous cultures across North America and parts of Central and South America. It is a term of reverence, traditionally referring to people who display both masculine and feminine sex or gender characteristics. Named *berdache* by European colonists, those who are Two-Spirited are highly respected, and are often healers and leaders thought to possess a higher spiritual development. For more on this, see Colleen Donovan's interview with Qwo-Li Driskill, "Beginning Revolutions."

Definitions include excerpts from *Revolutionary Voices: A Multicultural Queer Youth Anthology*. ed. by Amy Sonnie

# **Biblical Understandings**

*People approach the biblical narrative in different ways. Some people believe one should take the Bible literally in most senses, and a Christian tradition primarily informs that approach. Others view the Bible as a collection of many different kinds of stories in different literary styles. It entails proverbs, poetry, parables, laws, prophecies, history, biography, drama, short stories, and novels among others. These different literary styles suggest different purposes, but woven throughout as some unifying themes are the stories of interactions between God and people, a human love for God and a morality of being good to one another.*

*In the following pages, Bible scholars Don Blosser and Keith Graber Miller provide some insights as to the relation between same-sex orientation and the Bible. Don Blosser is a Mennonite Bible and Religion professor emeritus of Goshen College. Keith Graber Miller is a Mennonite Bible and Religion professor, also from Goshen College. Graber Miller's writings are excerpted from the Human Sexuality course he co-teaches and Blosser's essay appears in the book: To Continue the Dialogue: Biblical Interpretation and Homosexuality (2001).*

## **Some Beginning Thoughts on Homosexuality and Christian Ethics**

*By Keith Graber Miller*

Christian theologians and churchpersons have been addressing issues of same-sex sexuality since the earliest days of the church, and the conversations have intensified in the last two decades. Many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons are members of Christian congregations. Some remain quiet about their sexual orientation, while others find themselves in congregations that welcome them fully as sisters and brothers in the church.

Either implicitly or explicitly, Christians generally draw on four primary sources in working out their ethics: 1) Scripture; 2) Reason; 3) Tradition; and 4) Experience. I want to say just a bit about how each of these sources informs the discussion of homosexuality, although anything I say here must be taken as very tentative and preliminary.

### **1. Scripture**

The Bible says very little directly about homosexuality, and what it does say is addressed almost entirely to male same-sex relationships. About 50 verses in the Old and New Testaments combined deal with this issue. Female same-sex sexual relating is mentioned only once in the Bible. Among the key passages which have been used to speak about "the biblical view of homosexuality" are the following:

**Genesis 19** -- the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, in which the men of the city come to abuse the guests (or angels) who were visiting Lot. There is a kind of parallel story told in Judges 19, although the setting and characters have changed somewhat and the emphasis is on the abuse of the visitor's concubine. For much of Christian history it has been interpreted that the great sin of Sodom, based on this story, was homosexuality. Some modern interpreters see the main issue as being one of hospitality and inhospitality, a major issue for a culture in which there were no Holiday Inns. There is no reference elsewhere in Hebrew Scriptures to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah as being homosexuality. References in Jeremiah 23:14 and Isaiah 13:19 and Ezekiel 16:49-50 talk about Sodom's sins as pride, thoughtless ease, abuse of the poor,

adultery and lies, and haughtiness." Even if the Sodom passage is about homosexuality, it is a reference to homosexual rape rather than loving homosexual relationships.

**Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13** -- Both prohibit homosexual acts and regard homosexual acts as an abomination. This is the Levitical Code, which is concerned with ritual purity for worship. It also calls an abomination eating leftovers three days after they were made, and disallows having intercourse with menstruating women. In the surrounding culture, there was also the practice of homosexual prostitution, and this may be, in part, a response to that kind of pagan idolatry. A literal reading of the Leviticus 20 passage suggests the death penalty for same-sex intercourse. Thanks be to God, no one has seriously wished to propose this.

**I and II Samuel** -- These passages about David and Jonathan (I Samuel 18:1-3; 20: 17-18, 41; and II Samuel 1:25-26) generally are not included in such lists. Some modern interpreters have asked whether the love that is declared between David and Jonathan is a sexual love. The same Hebrew words that are used here to describe David and Jonathan's relationship are used to describe the relationship between Jacob and his youngest son Benjamin. So perhaps this is a kind of brotherly love rather than sexual love. For David this brotherly love was even more meaningful than sexual love with a woman. So we have here a level of intimacy and romance between two men which in our society might suggest a homosexual relationship. But homosexuality is not explicit in the story, nor in the Hebrew terms used.

**I Corinthians 6:9-11** -- Here there are two words which are sometimes translated jointly as homosexuals. Paul says there are a number of people who won't inherit the kingdom of God -- neither immoral persons, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers. Two Greek words are used here, *malakos* and *arsenokoites*. Scholars don't agree on what the two terms mean. The first term often means "soft," and in moral contexts it carries the sense of looseness or lacking in self-control, but it wasn't a technical term for same-sex sexuality. Throughout much of Christian history it was understood in this context as referring to masturbation. The second term is an expression for sexual intercourse, and some scholars say it was usually used to designate male prostitutes. It does seem to carry some same-sex reference to it. Since the primary form of same-sex sexual practice in Paul's day was pederasty -- an adult male having sex with a young boy, the passage has been taken by some to imply that the *malakos* was the call boy or youth who functioned in a passive sexual role and the *arsenokoites* could be the active adult male. Some assert that the passage speaks to homosexual relationships as they are known today.

**I Timothy 1:10** -- A similar list. In this letter the writer says the law is laid down for a variety of people -- the unholy and profane, murders of fathers and mothers, manslayers, immoral persons, *arsenokoites*, kidnapers, liars, perjurers and then a blanket statement about "whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine." The King James version says, "For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons ...."

**Romans 1:26-27** -- This is the clearest biblical condemnation of same-sex sexual acts, as Paul understood them. It is the only biblical passage that deals with female same-sex sexual relating, and it seems clear about condemning both male and female same-sex sexual practices. One careful and thoughtful analysis of the passage is Richard B. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural," *Journal of Religious Ethics* (Spring 1986): 184-215. Hays says this is the most crucial text for Christian ethics because it is the only New Testament passage that places the condemnation of homosexual behavior in an explicitly theological context. Paul is offering a diagnosis for the disordered human condition: we are in rebellion against the creator. He sees this "unnatural" same-sex behavior as providing a particularly graphic image of the way in

which human fallenness distorts God's created order. Others argue that Paul was not addressing or even aware of loving homosexual relationships, nor aware of the possibility of homosexual orientation (see below); instead, he was condemning same-sex sexual acts performed by those who were naturally heterosexual. The Romans passage concludes, in verse 28, with a list of things that are improper: covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, etc. Paul attacks slanderers, gossips, haters of God, the insolent, the haughty, the boastful, those who are disobedient to their parents, the faithless, heartless and ruthless. Hays refers to this as a "homiletical sting operation." It builds a crescendo of condemnation, declaring God's wrath on all sorts of human unrighteousness, whipping the reader into a frenzy of indignation toward others. Then in Romans 2:1, Paul says, "Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on others you condemn yourself because you, the judge, are doing the very same things." And Paul was certainly right that, from a Christian perspective, whenever homosexual or heterosexual sexuality expresses itself as 1) a surrender to one's own lusts; 2) an ungrateful misappropriation of God's creation; or 3) exploitation of another person, then such sexual activity is morally wrong.

*When looking at these specific biblical passages, it is important to keep several other factors in mind:*

**1. Biblical writers had no real concept of homosexual orientation.** Depending on how one approaches the question of orientation, this may be relevant for several biblical passages. Paul clearly believes that men having sex with other men is "unnatural," a going against the way men were naturally created. There is no sense in the biblical text that a person may be born with or socialized toward a homosexual predisposition, and therefore that homosexual behavior may be what is "natural" for some. The notion of homosexual orientation emerged when the term "homosexual" was coined in 1869 by a Hungarian physician, writing in German, who used it with reference to "male or female individuals" who, "from birth," are erotically oriented toward their own sex. The word "homosexual" appeared in English for the first time in 1912, and for the first time in an English Bible in 1946 (the Revised Standard Version, I Corinthians 6:9).

**2. Both the Old and New Testaments were written in the context of highly patriarchal (male-dominated) societies.** In Leviticus 20:13, the concern is that a man might lie with another man "as with a woman." The concern is that male dignity may be offended: when a man acted sexually like a woman he was committing a degradation -- literally, a loss of grade or status -- not only for himself but for all males. That's likely one of the reasons the Bible seems to care little, one way or the other, about female same-sex sexual relating (only mentioned once, in the Romans 1:26-27 passage). Some suggest this passage from Leviticus says more about misogyny (the hatred of women) than same-sex sexual relating.

**3. The strong links between sexuality and procreation must be looked at in their historical context.** As small, Hebrew tribes in hostile environments struggled for their very survival, it was imperative that they produce as many offspring as possible. One *contemporary*, light-hearted thought-piece circulating asks, "Considering the menace of overpopulation, how could the human race survive if everyone was heterosexual like you?"

**4. Biblical accounts often place male same-sex sexual acts within the context of idolatry and see such acts as undertaken in lust.** Some interpreters ask whether these references are applicable to the tenderness and mutual respect that may characterize healthy homosexual and heterosexual relationships.

**5. Sexual permissiveness of Greco-Roman culture.** Early Greek cultures were sexually permissive and uninhibited. Even their gods, their moral heroes and heroines, flirted and seduced and married many times, having both heterosexual and homosexual encounters. Greek men and women were married to

have children, but many men's primary intellectual, social, emotional and erotic relationships were with other males, usually adolescent boys. They mentored the boys and provided them with their moral and intellectual education, and had sex with them. Having some sense of this permissiveness of Greek culture is important in understanding the motivations of Paul and other early Christian writers who were responding to the Hellenistic (Greek) world in which they were living. The Roman culture was even more permissive than the Greek. Many prominent Romans were bisexual: Julius Caesar was called "every woman's man and every man's woman" by his contemporaries. Paul and others are responding to the sexual permissiveness they find around them, and they are wanting to live differently.

**6. Concerns for gender complementarity.** The assumption has been that men and women are essentially made for each other so that together they become one whole has been prevalent in Jewish and Christian history. Today it is much more difficult to make this case because in recent years it has been demonstrated that the vast majority of traits and roles that were once assumed to be sex-based are in fact learned, rather than inherent. Wholeness is not predicated upon "complementary" relations with a person of the other sex. If traits and roles are not specific to one gender, then where lies the "natural" complementarity?

*It is also important, when using the biblical texts, to not select out proof-texts like the ones above, but to consider the entire Bible.* Some who look at the overall biblical story focus on God's compassion and love for those who find themselves on society's margins, and suggest that concern for those otherwise oppressed is key to the biblical narrative, and to understanding the life of Jesus. Other scholars say that the Bible's overall message clearly intends for male and female sexual relationships to be the only appropriate ones, and precludes any same-sex unions. This view is based on the creation story, the metaphor of the church as "the bride of Christ," discourses on marriage, Song of Songs, and other biblical stories and images.

## **2. Reason**

Reason is often considered a second source for Christian ethical reflection. This category includes a wide range of sources, everything from what just seems "natural" to scientific studies, some of which I mentioned in tonight's lecture. Some Christians have drawn on the theory of natural law to critique same-sex sexual practices, and many people use this theory without knowing it. What natural law theorists often suggest is that it is clear from the way male and female bodies are shaped that a penis and vagina fit together, whereas two penises and two vaginas don't. Therefore, the theory runs, God must have intended for men and women to relate sexually to the other sex.

Our recent scientific studies leave us with ambiguous conclusions about the extent to which homosexuality is a *learned* orientation or *genetic* or *what*. Some Christians have said that if it could be proven that there was a genetic cause for persons to be gay and lesbian, then they would be compelled to accept homosexuality as legitimate in God's eyes because that means gay and lesbian persons were created homosexual. Others disagree.

## **3. Tradition**

Tradition is the third source many Christians draw on. It is clear that the mainstream Christian tradition has been more condemning of homosexuality than the biblical texts are. Throughout most of the Christian centuries, homosexuality has been rejected out of hand.

However, some scholars are suggesting that there is a marginal tradition within the Church which has accepted same-sex unions. A now-deceased Yale University professor, John Boswell, says he discovered a centuries-old Christian tradition of celebrating same-sex marriages. These "marriages" were well established by the 6th century and continued through the 13th, Boswell says. Even the Vatican's volumes of officially sanctioned rituals includes this ritual, although it is wholly rejected today, the scholar claims. The practice of same-sex marriages virtually ceased during the 13th century because of a

variety of social pressures, says Boswell, and it is now renounced by most churches. The ritual Boswell discovered in these liturgical documents was called *adelphopoiesis* (from the Greek), translated as “the creation of a brother.” Boswell interpreted that as a ceremony for blessing a homosexual union, but others have argued that it was a spiritual bonding, not a physical one. One might ask why a spiritual bond such as this needed to be written into the liturgy. And why it was dropped from the church’s practices in the late medieval period. In any event, it seems clear that the mainstream Christian tradition has been opposed to same-sex sexual practice since its earliest centuries.

#### **4. Experience**

For some people, this is key in their understanding of homosexuality. For some it comes into tension with the other categories, and for others it confirms what they discover from looking carefully at Scripture, reason and church tradition. The category has to do with the larger experience of Christians with other Christians who find themselves to be homosexual. Often people with firm views of homosexuality, once they discover that their cousin or sibling or best friend or parent is gay, are forced to re-evaluate their perspective. On the other hand, some people know others who are gay or lesbian, and these contacts have confirmed their convictions and responses.

A number of persons who have contributed to shaping our world, and our church, are generally thought to be gay. These include Erasmus, the "prince of the humanists" during the Reformation; Leonard de Vinci; Michelangelo; T.E. Lawrence; Willa Cather; William James; Queen Mary II; Walt Whitman; Tchaikovsky; Frederick the Great; Sir Francis Bacon; and Christopher Marlow. Many scholars now believe King James I of England, who authorized the King James Version of the Bible, also was gay.

#### **Closing Comments**

The 1987 "Purdue" statement of the Mennonite Church (and you should check out the statements of your own denominations) says that "genital intercourse is reserved for a man and a woman united in a marriage covenant," and that this teaching "precludes premarital, extramarital, and homosexual genital activity." Part of the intent of the statement is to say that casual sex is not acceptable. The study from which the statement is drawn, *Human Sexuality in the Christian Life*, says the church is urged "to continue to uphold the traditional sexual ethic which does not allow promiscuity or sexual relationships outside of a covenantal relationship."

The Mennonites' Purdue statement goes on to say that we ought to remain in loving dialogue in the body of Christ. Again, the study from which the Purdue statement is drawn says, "If the church should err, let it be on the side of caring for and loving a group of people who are much persecuted in our society. The church cannot expect to win homosexual persons to Christ nor can it expect to keep homosexual persons as participants in their community if a pattern of victimizing, shunning, and discriminating against them continues."

## **Why Does the Bible Divide Us? A Conversation with Scripture on Same-Gender Attraction**

*By Don Blosser*

The Bible is the basic source of guidance and authority for Christian faith. When there are issues to be resolved, we ask, “What does the Bible say?” We assume that when we read the Bible, we will then know what to do. Why, then, do we have such confusion over what the Bible says?

Traditionally in the church we have depended on pastors and Sunday school teachers to tell us what the Bible means and have accepted their interpretation without carefully checking the text for ourselves. More recently, through radio and television, we have been exposed to many other persuasive interpretations, not to mention a multitude of different translations that do not always agree. Gradually, our attitudes toward the Bible and toward authority have changed. We do not always want to be told what the Bible says. We want to study it and decide for ourselves.

Consequently we do not always agree on what the Bible says. Denominations, area conferences, congregations, and individuals argue about the Bible. Often we quickly accuse each other of not being “biblical.” Then we refuse to work together at finding resolution for our differences, choosing instead to condemn and talk about each other, often in the end separating. Tragically the very Scriptures God gave to unite us tear us apart, causing pain for all involved.

We have intense feelings about the Bible; that is good. But sometimes our intensity causes us to use the Bible in ways that hurt. We have good intentions. We believe we are being faithful to the biblical message, but often we do not recognize how or who we are hurting. This only adds to the pain, because the persons being hurt are in our own congregations, our circle of friends, or even our own families.

### **How Do We Read the Bible?**

In 2 Timothy 3:16 we are told that the Bible is “profitable for teaching, for correction and for training in righteousness.” But how do we decide what should be taught, who needs to be corrected, what behavior is righteous?

Some Christians argue that the Bible must be taken literally as direct words from God. The words of the Bible carry an eternal significance separate from the culture in which they were written. These words are not merely human; they are God’s. The text, as well as the meaning of the text, does not change over time. What the Bible says is what the Bible means.

Other people, equally committed to the Scriptures, ask, “What did the words mean when Paul or Moses used them?” They believe the task of the biblical scholar is to get as close to the mind and culture of Paul as possible. We can best know the intention of God if we understand the situations Moses and Paul were facing as they spoke to this issue. What were the images in Paul’s mind as he wrote to the church at Corinth? Are these the same images that come to our minds as we read the text today? Our use of language is different from Paul’s, and our understandings of science and culture more complex than those of first-century culture. Therefore we must know the context of the biblical message to apply it faithfully in our own culture.

### **Which Direction Does the Bible Point?**

Some see the ancient biblical culture as the normative ideal to which God is calling all cultures. This approach holds that the faithful church should be calling persons back to that first-century culture in which God gave the Scriptures. The ideal is to replicate the biblical culture in today’s societies.<sup>1</sup> Since God is unchanging, they argue, the meaning of God’s Word never changes. They fear that “contextualizing” the Bible tampers with the meaning. It allows everything to become relative and causes people to stray from its truth. According to this approach, then, the mission of the church is to hold to the truth “once for all delivered to the saints.”

Others in the church emphasize that God is not simply “back there.” God is “out there,” ahead of us, calling us to new expressions of the historic biblical faith. The meaning of the Bible is not tied to one culture. For these persons, the model for the faith community is not the ancient culture of the Bible, but

the eternal culture of the heavenly community. Accordingly the mission of the church is to share the message of God's eternal mercy and grace with all humanity in every culture. This requires contextualization.

These people believe that we do not have to duplicate the specific ethical or religious practices of the first century to be faithful to the will of God today. They ask what God's intentions were behind the specific guidelines given in biblical culture. What did God want to accomplish in that setting? Faithfulness then means applying biblical principles to our lives in ways that give faithful contemporary meaning to these eternal truths. Models for this can be found in the Bible itself, since much of Acts and Paul's writing records early Christians' efforts faithfully to apply God's principles in new settings as the gospel began to spread.

Awareness of different ways we approach the Bible may help us understand why we have experienced such deeply felt tensions. We come to the Bible asking different questions. We are standing back to back, looking in opposite directions, even as we each sincerely believe we are facing God. No wonder we do not come out at the same place. Our biblical knowledge would be greatly enhanced if, rather than facing away from each other, we at least met face to face and talked with each other, sharing what we see so everyone might benefit from the combined wisdom.

When we have the courage to talk with those who interpret the text differently, the experience can expand our own understanding of the text and encourage us to be more accepting of others even when we strongly disagree. In the following studies, we look at how various groups read the text in hopes of better understanding our differences and gaining a stronger basis for talking together.

## **Reading the Bible Together: The Old Testament**

### **Genesis 1-2**

The Genesis accounts refer to God's creation of male and female for the purpose of bearing children and perpetuating the human race. (The idea of romantic love develops much later.) Some students of the Bible believe this proves heterosexual relationships are normative because God created humanity as male and female and gave them the charge to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen.1:28). Further, Genesis 2:24 says that a man should leave his parents and become "one flesh" with a woman, thus proving God's intention that sexual intercourse should be an exclusive male-female relationship. Accordingly, all other sexual activity is in violation of the way God created us to be, and any alternate expression must be sinful.

It is easy to understand why this explanation is persuasive. It is a simple, straightforward reading of the English text. However, Hebrew language scholars question whether this explanation reflects either the spirit or the content of what the text actually says. They tell us that Genesis 1:26-28 simply presents the biological identity of Adam and Eve as male and female, not as husband and wife. The purpose of the text is to identify the special status which these male and female creatures have above the rest of creation. They are made in the image and likeness of God. In sharp contrast to other ancient creation accounts that depict humanity as inferior and created to serve the fickle whims of the gods, they are elevated above other creatures and have a dignity and responsibility matching that of the creating God. The text, however, does not address the sexual role or sociological relationship of these two creatures.<sup>2</sup>

God intends for humanity to perpetuate itself ("be fruitful and multiply"), but this sexual function of procreating children is not the defining human element. All the animals are given the same mandate. People who are childless are certainly no less human than those who have families. Neither is heterosexual union the central defining element of humanity. Persons who are celibate are fully human. Indeed, Paul says some very positive things about remaining single in 1 Corinthians 7. Procreation is not a command of God that must be followed to be fully human.

In the sparsely populated Old Testament world, infertility was regarded as a curse and even attributed to divine affliction. Today the current problem is over-population, and it is no longer appropriate to apply that theological assumption.

The passage in Genesis 1–2 reflects an ancient sexual view of humanity. Humans were viewed as simply “male and female,” that is, separate entities with no indication of mutually shared characteristics. Today we recognize that each of us possesses both male and female characteristics. Such characteristics exist on an overlapping continuum in every individual human being.

We have a rapidly expanding knowledge of genetics and the developmental basis of human sexuality. Although one’s environment provides influences on later sexual expression, one’s sexual orientation now appears to have deep biological roots. Patterns of sexual orientation begin to be formed in the developing fetus before birth. This being the case, the faith community is called to accept all persons without regard to their specific genetic structure. The desire to “fix it” because it is seen as an aberration defies God’s creating activity and places us in the position of being judge over God’s activity. Unfortunately, the people of God have a long history of wanting to play judge over persons whom they perceive to be different from the majority of the community.

### **Genesis 19:1-29**

The story of Sodom is a tragic account of an ancient culture at its worst, including abuse of strangers and offering women as a sacrifice to save men. Richard Hays, professor of divinity at Duke University and author of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, states that “this text is irrelevant to the topic of same-gender sexual issues. There is nothing here on which to base any judgment about the morality of same-sex behavior.”<sup>3</sup> But since perception of reality can be as powerful as reality itself, this story must be considered.

Two angels come to the city. Lot, a recent immigrant who is not fully accepted, insists that they stay at his house. That evening every man of the city, young and old, comes to Lot’s house and demands that Lot bring the strangers out “so that we may know [yadah] them.” Lot attempts to protect his guests by making a despicable decision to offer his two virgin daughters as a sexual alternative, but the men refuse and threaten Lot if he does not turn his guests over to them.

The traditional explanation is that Sodom was overrun with sexual immorality. With the arrival of the strangers, the men of Sodom see the opportunity for new sexual partners, so they go to Lot’s house demanding sexual intercourse (yadah) with them. This approach also argues that the men of Sodom refused to accept Lot’s offer of his daughters because they wanted men (not women) as sexual partners, and they saw the two visitors as offering a creative new sexual experience.

This interpretation is based on a narrow (but technically acceptable) reading of yadah, which is translated “to know.” This same word is also used as a euphemism for sexual intercourse, and those who hold this view argue that the sexual meaning is clearly implied in the following sentence where Lot offers his daughters who “have not known” (yadah) a man. Thomas Schmidt, in his book *Straight and Narrow*, argues that this sexual meaning of yadah in verse 8 controls the sexual meaning of yadah in verse 5, thus proving that homosexual fervor was the driving force behind the mob action, and that for such behavior the city was condemned by God.

Schmidt then links Ezekiel 16:49 “Sodom did abominable things before God” with Leviticus 18:22 “you shall not lie with a man as with a woman for it is an abomination.” He concludes that the abomination of Sodom was the fact that men were having sexual intercourse with other men.<sup>4</sup> He refers also to Philo and Josephus who indicate that Sodom’s sins were sexual in nature.<sup>5</sup>

Other biblical scholars take serious issue with this approach. They agree that yadah sometimes means sexual intercourse but insist that such a translation is rare and does not express the most common meaning of the word. Yadah occurs 1048 times in the Old Testament. Of these occurrences 933 have the meaning “learning to know someone as a person.” In only eleven cases (slightly more than one percent) does it serve as a euphemism for sexual intercourse.<sup>6</sup>

The text contains additional information that suggests the need for a more careful reading of the story. The text is precise in stating that “every last man in the city, both young and old” (v. 4) came to Lot’s house. Does this mean every man in the city was a homosexual looking for sexual satisfaction? That assumption is statistically problematic if not totally impossible. In ancient culture, sexual intercourse was

a private experience. It violates the most basic cultural norms of virtually all societies to argue that several hundred men would gather to satisfy their homosexual passions with these two strangers. It also seems clear that Lot does not think the group has same-gender sexual attraction, for he offers them a heterosexual option (his two daughters) which the men refuse because sexual activity is not their issue.

What, then, would bring every man in the city to Lot's house under these conditions? Two strangers have come to the city and are staying with Lot. Lot is already suspect because he has no history as a member of the community. The men of the city are worried about the security of their homes and families. "Who are these strange men? We want to know them" (v. 5). The story reports mob action by men who were worried about their security. They tried to protect the city by intimidating and terrorizing the visitors. They wanted to be absolutely certain these spies did not perceive them as being weak or vulnerable, so they threatened to brutalize them.

Fear about city security was a common experience in the ancient world. Stories of spies who infiltrated cities and then reported on wealth, military defenses, numbers of men, and city layouts as precursor to military attacks are told throughout the ancient world (see Josh. 2). The men, all of whom are responsible for the common defense of the city, want to know whether the presence of these visitors poses a threat to the safety of their families.

Hays is correct when he says this is not a sexual story, and to read it this way does not address the issue at hand. Martti Nissinen, who has done a careful study of the ancient scene, also agrees that modern interpreters have erred in speculating about the homosexual motives of the Sodomite men. They were not motivated to satisfy sexual lust but to intimidate threatening strangers by showing their supremacy and power over the guests.<sup>7</sup>

There is an even more compelling reason to doubt the sexual interpretation of this story. Jesus referred to Sodom on three occasions (Matt. 10:15; 11:23-24; Luke 17:29, plus parallel readings). In each reference the sin Jesus identifies with Sodom is greed, luxury, and refusal to accept the stranger. According to Ezekiel, the sin of Sodom was "pride, excess of food, and prosperity without showing compassion for the poor and needy" (Ezek. 16:49). Jesus affirmed the Ezekiel tradition to explain the destruction of Sodom.

Jesus certainly would have known current rabbinical explanations regarding Sodom, but he chose not to accept them. For followers of Jesus this is an important lesson. When we make Sodom a story about sexuality and God's condemnation of the city, we ignore the interpretation Jesus gave and use extra-biblical interpretations to support our own agenda.<sup>8</sup> That is a dangerous hermeneutical practice.

## **Judges 19**

The story in Judges 19 has many thematic and linguistic parallels with the Genesis story. A Levite was returning home with his concubine; they needed to stay overnight in the village of Gibeah. They camped in the village square because "no one took them in to spend the night" (19:15). That in itself was a violation of local cultural hospitality. An old man from the city found them in the square and invited them to his house. That night some perverse men of the city surrounded the house demanding that the visitor be turned over to them "that we might know [yadah] him" (19:22). Attempting to protect his guest, the host offered his own virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine as bribery to leave the guest alone. The men gang-raped the concubine throughout the night. The next morning she was found dead on the front steps.

The behavior of the men (both her husband and the men of Gibeah) toward the women was despicable and inexcusable.<sup>9</sup> This is a story of gang rape, whether of a male or a female, to shame and humiliate a stranger who sought their protection. The sole basis for making it a story of same-gender atrocity is the translation of yadah in verse 22 to mean sexual intercourse, and this translation loses credibility when the details of the story are examined.

The men of the city asked that the male visitor be given to them so they might know his identity and purpose. Nissinen suggests that their motivation for brutalization and sexual intimidation was based on a fear of the stranger, and thus was an offense against the honor of the guest. Thus the issue is city

security and male honor, not homosexual satisfaction.<sup>10</sup> The fact that they accepted the concubine and gang-raped her to death supports this understanding. Had they been asking for male sexual partners, the substitution of the concubine would not have been acceptable.

This story condemns the social inhospitality of strangers, and sexual abuse. Neither homosexual lust nor activity is present in this story. That is a creation of later tradition that is read back into the story, and is therefore inappropriate.

### **Leviticus 18 and 20**

The only two forthright statements against male same-gender intercourse appear in the Holiness Code: “You shall not lie with a man as with a woman.” This act is given as one of the sexual offenses for which the death penalty is prescribed. Since it is listed as an abomination, some argue that there is no room for further dialogue about same-gender sexual activity under any circumstances. We should simply label it as sin and obey the command of God. Any attempt at discussion is immediately suspect because discussion is seen as an attempt to destroy the clear and obvious meaning of Scripture in order to promote a sinful agenda.

It is very difficult to talk about a topic when simply talking together is labeled sinful. Honesty requires that we examine the text, validate the context, accept the message, and look for an appropriate, biblically faithful, contemporary application. One core element in interpreting this text for today is the relationship of the Old Testament Levitical laws to Christian ethical behavior. From its beginning, the church has distinguished between Old Testament moral law and ceremonial law. Not all the Levitical guidelines are automatically retained in Christian faith. There are also other Old Testament guidelines that were either deemed obsolete or simply disregarded by the New Testament Church: circumcision (Acts 15), purity laws (Mark 5), unclean food (Acts 10), inclusion of marginalized people (Luke 14), and even Sabbath observance (Matt. 12:1). We must look at the purpose behind the laws, then determine how that purpose can be given faithful expression in our own experience.

Preservation of the nation as a special people of Yahweh was crucial to Israel. Children were valued as vital to the community’s security, which was achieved through providing male children who would defend the country against invading forces. This led to specific and severe punishments for sexual behaviors that interfered with conception. For example, withdrawal of penis during intercourse, masturbation, or other activities that “wasted” semen were condemned because those actions precluded the possibility of reproduction. They were considered a violation of the will of God whose intention was to protect the security of the family by providing children who would care for the parents in their old age.

In the Old Testament, the community was a constant focus of concern in the experience of the individual. Sexual behaviors that could never expand population were condemned because they endangered the tribe’s very survival. Heterosexual intercourse was primarily for the purpose of bearing children who would support family and nation. Thus homosexual activity threatened the security of the community and was forbidden, while heterosexual prostitution, which preserved the possibility of childbearing, was tolerated. Sexual “orientation” was not considered a factor in the regulation of sexual behavior in most ancient cultures. Today, we give far less consideration to the community consequence of individual acts.

The major cultural and demographic changes of our contemporary period raise the question whether literal obedience to these biblical rules still maintains the same principle. Population has now become a matter of opposite concern. The earth is in serious danger of overpopulation. While some Christian traditions still understand the biblical mandate to apply today, most do not condemn couples who choose not to have large families. We do not charge childless couples with living in violation of God’s will.

Further, many scholars think the prohibition in Leviticus 18 and 20 should be understood as a directive to Israelite men to avoid the cult prostitution of Canaanite worship. They point out that Canaanite worship was heavily sexual in nature. Ceremonial prostitutes, both male and female, functioned as priestly agents through whom one participated in divine activity. The spiritual powers of the gods were

tapped through these sexual acts, leading to fertility and abundance in the agricultural realm. This effectively united worship, sex, and prosperity into one act. If this is the meaning of the prohibition, it would also explain the severe consequence of death for such sexual activity; namely, the necessity of keeping the community free from all infiltration of pagan influence. This concern is identified with severe commands to obliterate those religious influences that challenged Israel's faith (see 1 Kings 18:40).

The church is confronted with the difficult task of discerning which of the laws that governed Israel should be transferred to the new faith community of Jesus. Church members do not agree on how these Old Testament stories should be interpreted. These stories involve explicit sexual abuses of the most destructive kind, behaviors that should never be found in the life of a Christian.

What is the relationship of the sexual abuses in the original stories with sexual expression in our modern situation? Is it valid to place these horrific stories of sexual abuse under the umbrella of vague, general terminology, then apply them to a specific contemporary sexual expression that has nothing whatever to do with the abuses of the original stories? How can we recover the centrality of the biblical message about how we treat persons who are oppressed, abused, or simply different from us in one specific way? This was the focal point of Jesus' teachings—love for the neighbor, the oppressed, the alien, and the enemy.

### **Reading the Bible Together: The New Testament**

The New Testament opens a more familiar and often more intense area of discussion. While reading what others have written on this topic, I began to notice that although the study of the Bible should shape our beliefs, not a single writer admitted to having changed her or his beliefs as a result of study. In all cases, the writers held theological or sociological beliefs that guided their study, and the work they did in the biblical text only proved the correctness of the beliefs they had before they began! This is not intended as a criticism of these writers, since we all share in this tendency, but as an observation that the Bible is often used to support what we already believe rather than as a source of instruction.

What are the basic concepts of God that influence how we think about God, about the Scriptures, about life, and about how God relates to us as God's children? If we can keep these questions in focus and acknowledge their influence, they might help us better read the texts together, learning from each other what God is saying to us.

#### **Jesus**

Although Jesus frequently loosed his disciples from the legal taboos of the Holiness Code,<sup>11</sup> there are no recorded words of Jesus on the topic of same-gender orientation. Scholars argue vigorously among themselves about what this means; all claim that the silence of Jesus supports their beliefs. Some say same-gender orientation was such an obvious sin there was no need for Jesus to speak about it because all godly Jewish people knew such sexual activity was explicitly forbidden. Others argue that there were inevitably same-gender-oriented persons in the Jewish community and by his silence, Jesus accepted them. Thus they conclude that Jesus did not see same-gender orientation as a moral issue in the kingdom of God. Their conclusion is that followers of Jesus should not create an issue out of something Jesus has already indicated is not an issue.

Arguing from silence is always dangerous. Thus it would seem most appropriate simply to report that in the Scriptures we have no direct word from Jesus on this topic.

#### **Paul**

Three texts in the New Testament address this subject, all associated with the Apostle Paul: Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; and 1 Timothy 1:10. Since 1 Corinthians was written several years before Romans, we begin with this text. The text in 1 Timothy duplicates both the words and thought used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6, so the discussion of specific words applies to both of the texts. It will not be necessary to repeat that discussion.

## 1 Corinthians 6: Who will inherit the kingdom of God?

Chapter 6 of 1 Corinthians opens with a discussion of differences within the congregation at Corinth and states emphatically that it is improper for Christians to sue one another in the public courts. Rather, we should settle differences within the congregation by talking together. That counsel has somehow been lost as we now talk about rather than with each other.

In verse 9 Paul begins with a theme statement: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” Then he lists ten explicit examples of unrighteous behavior. Four of these are sexual offenses of which two are often assumed to refer to specific same-gender sexual contact. The NIV translates these last two words “male prostitutes” and “homosexuals;” and the NRSV translates “male prostitutes” and “sodomites” (6:9).

This makes it relatively easy to read the text and believe we know exactly what was in Paul’s mind. In truth, however, English translators are uncertain about specific meaning of the original words. The words used are more descriptive of behaviors than of identity. The following chart shows the diversity of translation for the four sexual words in the list. The first two words are relatively simple, but the last two are much less precise, forcing translators to create their own descriptive meanings.

	pornoi	moichoi	malakoi	arsenokoitai
KJV	fornicators	adulterers	effeminate	abusers of themselves
RSV	immoral	adulterers	(----- homosexuals -----)	
NRSV	fornicators	adulterers	male prostitutes	sodomites
Ox. RSV	immoral	adulterers	(----- sexual perverts -----)	
NIV	sexually immoral	adulterers	male prostitutes	homosexual offenders

The chart shows that pornoi “fornication” and moichoi “adultery” have a common, stable meaning, but that malakoi and arsenokoitai are much less precise. The RSV combines two Greek words, using one more general English word homosexual for the translation. A more careful look at these words is essential to determine more precisely what behaviors are being discussed.

Both malakoi and arsenokoites are masculine plural nouns. In first-century culture, they were used to describe men in terms that had pejorative sexist overtones against women which we today find offensive. I am aware of this; nevertheless it is important to report accurately how the words were used in that earlier culture.

Traditional interpretation of this text understands malakos primarily to mean “soft,” as in soft, luxurious feminine clothing, or feminine-like in referring to soft smooth-skinned boys or young men before they had begun to show masculine traits such as whiskers. It was commonly used to refer to men or boys who attempted to look or act like women or who accepted the female role in sexual activity.

Since “effeminacy” carried the general meaning of degeneracy, or weakness of character (i.e., “similar to a woman” and was considered beneath masculine dignity), early English translators used it to translate malakos. A shift occurred in the mid-twentieth century translations when effeminate was no longer politically correct. “Effeminate” disappeared and “male prostitute” or “sodomite” began to be used to translate this word. Malakos developed the meaning of a man who assumed the woman’s role in sexual activity, allowing the easy transition to “homosexual.”<sup>12</sup>

Arsenokoites is made up of two Greek words arsen = male and koites = bed. Thomas Schmidt argues that Paul took the word directly from the Septuagint text of Leviticus 20:9 (meta arsenos koitan gunaikos, “a man should not lie “with a man as with a woman”). He insists that the same sexual meaning is clear and would have been widely understood.<sup>13</sup> Scholars who agree with Schmidt argue that Paul’s use

of these words shows the Christian church adopted the Old Testament teaching on sexuality, thus reaffirming the Holiness Code's condemnation of same-gender sexual activity in Leviticus.

He and other conservative scholars conclude that this text supports the belief that same-gender sexual activity is and always has been a violation of God's intention for humanity. They find compassion and hope for persons who are of homosexual orientation in verse 11, which reads, "This is what some of you used to be, but you are washed, sanctified, justified." They interpret this to mean that by the saving grace of God one can be freed from this sin and be transformed. They point out that the verbs used here are passive, emphasizing that this transformation is accomplished through the power of the Spirit of God. In short, they hold that the New Testament prohibition of same-sex relationships is deeply rooted in the Old Testament materials and is carried through into the New Testament with equal intensity.

### **Romans 1:26-27**

The Romans 1:26-27 text is important because it gives a theological approach to the issue. Both males and females are included in the discussion whereas in the Corinthian discussion it is strictly a male issue. This passage has a three-fold condemnation of Gentile vices, each noting that because of these things "God gave them up" (1:24, 26, 28). Again, Schmidt represents the traditional view. Giving his interpretation a theological slant, he sees a direct connection between idolatry as lying about one's relationship with God, homosexuality as lying about one's relationship with your own body, and murder as lying about one's relationship with the life of another person.<sup>14</sup> Participation in such activity degrades the original image of God and gives clear evidence that such persons are no longer worshiping the true God. Such activities are a sure sign they are no longer godly people.

This approach to the text assumes Paul is describing perverse sexual conduct, not orientation. He is describing heterosexual (both male and female) individuals who have rejected their heterosexual identity to become involved in same-gender sexual behavior. (In modern terms we refer to this as "bisexual" behavior.) Individuals freely "exchanged," "gave up," "committed," and this conduct violated what was considered "natural." The sin was not in giving up heterosexual activity, but participating in same-gender activity. Implicitly this approach assumes that orientation is a voluntarily chosen sentiment; thus celibacy would be an acceptable option.

Paul uses the phrase "against nature" (*para physin*) to describe this kind of behavior. Traditional interpreters argue that "by nature" all individuals are either male or female. This implies that the "natural" order for sexual orientation is to be exclusively male or female. This puts all individuals (including bisexual and homosexual persons) into categories that reflect stereotypical heterosexual orientation. Individuals of same-gender orientation are classified as "not normal" by reason of the Adamic fall. Thus they are in need of healing (salvation) from their sinful condition.<sup>15</sup>

Schmidt, who holds this position, believes Paul made no distinction between same-gender orientation and voluntarily chosen same-gender behavioral patterns (a good point). He argues that Paul simply looked around and saw that the traditional distinction between male and female is the normal condition for humanity.

The unspoken implication is that since Paul, like all the ancient writers, did not recognize a category of involuntary homosexual orientation, the modern phenomenon is theologically and ethically unjustified. From creation, all same-gender sexual expressions are a perversion of the natural creation of God for human beings. The rejection of God's intention for male-female marriage creates an unnatural vacuum into which rebellious humanity inserts these defiant, sinful, same-gender-sexual behaviors.<sup>16</sup> When humanity turns its back on God, what emerges is false worship, false sexuality, and a false respect for human rights that leads to defiance of God and the loss of one's salvation.

In summary this position emphasizes the following:

- The Bible focuses on overt conduct. Since there is no mention in Scripture of "orientation," and no consideration of genetic causes for same-gender orientation, persons with same-gender attraction are assumed to be promiscuous in their sexual expression.

- The Bible contains a uniform condemnation of all same-gender sexual activity throughout. It is an abomination before God, it is unacceptable for Christians, and it should never be treated as an acceptable variation of human experience in the life of the church.
- Christian people can be healed or delivered from homosexuality. They can be set free to remain celibate or to enter into a normal heterosexual marriage relationship.

This position claims to accept the clear, obvious reading of the English Bible, and it projects unambiguous categories for making decisions about what is right and wrong. Given the assumption that such interpreters know what the text says, the only issue is whether we have the courage to be faithful to the text. But is the exegetical case this clear? Are we so sure what the first-century words are saying in our twenty-first-century terms?

### **Let's look at both texts again**

Many other Christian scholars, who also care deeply about a faithful reading of the text, do not agree with the above interpretation of the New Testament. They also wrestle with the meaning of these words, arguing that a careful reading of the Bible provides a different set of conclusions that are actually more faithful to the basic message of Jesus.

What do they find? These scholars agree that *malakos* does have the meaning of “soft,” but they point to evidence that it is used much more broadly than in a sexual context. Historically, *malakos* referred to persons who were cowards, or lazy, or specifically to men who lived a life of ease, decadence, and luxury.

Epictetus, the Stoic philosopher, used the word to describe men who “take life easy rather than endure the rigors of philosophic enquiry.”<sup>17</sup> In classical Greek literature, *malakos* referred to men who “prettied themselves up” by shaving their bodies and using perfume to make themselves sexually more attractive to women, believing that women would prefer this more tender-appearing, sweeter-smelling male over the crude, unwashed, outdoorsman type.

Chrysostom, the fourth century church father, once wrote that the common folk refer to persons who love to study as *malakoi*,<sup>18</sup> much like small children today might call a young boy who would rather read a book than play football “a sissy.” Josephus used *malakos* to describe a person who is “weak in battle,” or “reluctant to commit suicide.”<sup>19</sup> *Malakos* refers to men who exhibit feminine weaknesses that are presumed to be degrading to men, but it includes far more than a female sexual characterization.

Ancient cultures often expressed a distinct reaction against things feminine, implying that any sensible person would rather be dead than be a woman. This is seen in the first-century daily prayer of Jewish orthodox men: “Lord, I thank you that you did not make me a slave, a Gentile, or a woman.” *Malakos* contained an oblique, if not direct, criticism of feminine (or effeminate) characteristics. When modern society no longer permitted identifying effeminacy as a moral category, translators began to associate the term specifically with gay and lesbian persons, and “effeminate” was dropped in favor of the more strident “homosexual.”

Corinth was a thoroughly Greek city that gave free expression to sexual activity considered abusive and repulsive within the Christian community. One practice common in both Greece and Rome was pederasty. There are a disturbing number of references to philosophers and teachers who took young boys as students. In addition to teaching them the traditional subjects of history, math, and culture, they also “taught” them in the intricacies and techniques of sexual intercourse.<sup>20</sup>

These boys were required to be submissive and accepting when older men initiated the sexual activity and enjoyed the self-gratification they received. The relationship was terminated when the young boys matured (began growing beards) and were no longer pleasurable. The older men would then search for another *malakos*, while the young man, now reaching adulthood, would find his own *malakos* and the sexual cycle began all over again.

This practice flourished in Greece and Rome during the intertestamental biblical period, and there

is substantial evidence that it continued through the New Testament period as well. The Greek culture justified it through believing the gods were sexually active in the same way. Greek mythology provides abundant examples of the gods engaging in sexual activity with young human males.<sup>21</sup>

Nissinen points out that Greeks “regarded it impossible for a man to have a deep, all-encompassing love relationship with a woman.” He explains that since women were considered inferior to men, by definition a deep erotic relationship between men was considered superior. Plato, Plutarch, and other philosophers debated among themselves whether the love of a woman is superior or inferior to the love of a young boy, but they did not doubt that homosocial relationships were superior to heterosexual relationships.<sup>22</sup>

While a physically erotic relationship was possible between male and female, spiritual love could happen only between two males because in a male-female experience the partners were not equal. Sexual intercourse within marriage was for the purpose of bearing children, whereas “pure sexual enjoyment” was retained in the extramarital male-with-male relationships.<sup>23</sup> Thus same-sex erotic relationships were not necessarily terminated when a man was married.

Just as it is difficult to know the full extent of sexual prostitution in our own communities, it is difficult to know exactly how widespread the practice of male homosexual sex was in Paul’s day, but there is sufficient evidence to show it was a common practice among the upper classes of Greek culture. Paul generalizes about an abusive sexual activity that people knew existed, and he identified it as a vulgar, dehumanizing practice that should have no place in the church.

The question that remains in dispute is whether this general biblical condemnation encompasses all forms of mutual, caring same-gender sexual relationships. What can be said with confidence is that the church should join with Paul in condemning all forms of sexual abuse, promiscuity, and slavery in our own culture.

Arsenokoites is a rare word in both biblical and cultural literature, but when it is used, the setting provides an important insight into its meaning. Arsenokoites usually appears in lists where sins of like character are clustered together. By noting what sins are linked together, we can learn a great deal about the nature of these sins. In most lists there are sexual sins (adultery, rape, prostitution), sins involving violence (murder, maiming, physical abuse), and economic or justice sins (stealing, destruction of property, etc.).

In these lists, arsenokoites does not appear with the sexual sins, but rather it is clustered with the sins of exploitation and economic justice. Biblical scholars are coming to the view that arsenokoites refers to a very specific form of sexual exploitation and abuse that is not necessarily related to same-gender attraction as commonly experienced today.

One of the clearest uses of this word comes from a Greek text dated about 100 years after Paul. It reads, “Do not accept a gift earned from doing unjust deeds, do not steal, do not betray information, do not arsenokoiten, do not oppress a poor man; pay the person who works for his wages, make provision for widows and orphans” (Sibylline Oracle 2.70-77).

Here arsenokoites appears in the middle of a list of economic sins related to oppression and exploitation. Later in the same writing, another paragraph contains a list of sexual sins: abortion, stealing the virginity of a young woman, promiscuity, adultery.<sup>24</sup> If arsenokoites was intended to condemn same-gender sexual behavior, one would expect it to appear here with sexual sins rather than with the sins of economic exploitation.

This leads to the conclusion that arsenokoites specifically prohibits economic exploitation through sexual activity (prostitution, child abuse, child pornography). It is helpful to note that first-century homoerotic practices most often involved exploitation of slaves and lower class youth by dominant males who held positions of social and economic power.

This same clustering principle is seen in the Acts of John, a second-century writing which condemns the rich men of Ephesus and specifically identifies the “poisoner, robber, swindler, arsenokoites, thief, tyrant, and warmonger” as being sinners. Here again, arsenokoites is listed with the economic and social sins of the day. The Acts of John has a later section that denounces sexual sins, but arsenokoites is not included in that list.<sup>25</sup>

Again, the conclusion reached is that arsenokoites refers to a sinful practice that should be condemned. All forms of sexual oppression and exploitation should be condemned by the Christian community, without specific regard to whether that oppression is homosexual or heterosexual in nature.

### **“Sexual Practice” and “Sexual Orientation”**

We need yet to look at the ancient cultural assumptions about the root causes and nature of homosexuality. Biblical writers apparently had no concept of sexual “orientation”; they saw only sexual practices. Indeed, the word homosexuality first appears in English literature in the 1890s. The ancients believed all sexual practices were the result of conscious decisions made by persons who had freedom of choice. This belief is still held today by many Christians who assume that because the biblical writers thought of sexuality as a free choice made by the person, this must still be our position. They hold that biblical classifications must continue for all time as the authoritative base for our own thinking.

This raises a critical question. Is Christian faith locked into first-century scientific and medical understandings, or does the Spirit of God continue to empower us to learn more and more about how God created us and how we function as human beings? What is the proper role of contextualization, or the transfer of teachings and exhortations from their ancient settings to the present?

Jesus once said, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth (John 16:12-13). On another occasion he said, “The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and in fact, will do greater works than these” (John 14:12). Jesus knew there were many things his followers would learn later that would lead to a positive extension of the work he was doing. It is appropriate to say that our knowledge of the world, of science, and of the human body goes far beyond what Paul and his contemporaries knew. Paul was a highly educated person but wrote within the first-century limitations of knowledge. God, working through Paul, honored these limitations in the inspiration process.

The exact causes of same-gender attraction remain a heated subject among theologians, psychologists, and scientists. As stated above, many Christians believe that sexual identity is freely chosen. Some who share this belief argue that same-sex orientation is the result of traumatic sexual abuse during early childhood, which emerges as an identity issue in later adolescence as the person responds to those unresolved destructive childhood experiences. They believe that while individuals do not freely choose their identity, and often have suppressed the painful events of their past which are having such a profound impact upon their present experiences, their sexual orientation can be changed (corrected or healed) through extensive therapy or spiritual healing.

On the other side of the debate, a growing number of scientists (many of whom have a strong personal Christian faith), think that both genetic structure and developmental interaction play a significant role in determining who we are. Scientific research suggests that the distinctive patterns of human sexual orientation and gender identity are shaped in the very early stages of human development. From their own counseling experience, prominent Christians in the fields of psychology and psychiatry, who are wrestling with the expanding world of formative genetic influence upon human development and personality, believe that for a certain percent of individuals there is little or no chance for profound change in sexual orientation. As yet there is no consensus. But the emerging evidence seems to lend support to this view as scientists identify a complex interaction of genetic patterns and developmental forces which contribute to the formation of human sexual identity.

In many instances the pattern of development seems relatively clear. Some children may have a vague feeling they do not fit in with the general expectations of their own culture. In their late teens or early twenties, these individuals begin developing sufficient internal ego strength to reflect on how they feel and who they are. Depending on their personal situations, they may feel forced to stifle their emerging self-understandings because of subtle or overt family, church, and community rejection. Others carefully begin to reach out, and when they find a safe, accepting friend or environment, they risk stating what they are feeling and discovering about who they are. They are not making a choice about their identity. They are simply finding the personal courage and community security to risk identifying what

they have been feeling for years.

The distinction between male and female must be put on a continuum, rather than being seen as two separate, non-overlapping realities. This means there are individuals who find themselves near the center of this continuum, and given a particular environment, may feel confusing sexual identity signals within themselves. It is important to recognize that everyone's story will likely be different. It is therefore inappropriate to jump to conclusions, to use stereotypical language, or build on false assumptions about someone else's personal experience.

These emerging understandings of causation have profound theological implications. If sexual identity is shaped by a strong genetic contribution, then sexual orientation in itself is not sinful, for it is formed very early in life. What does it imply then when attraction to the same sex is equated with the sinful inclinations to anger or stealing? What does it imply when we refer to same-sex attraction as "abnormal" or "unnatural"?

Here it is essential that we understand how Paul is thinking when, in Romans 1, he talks about going "against nature." The first-century world used "nature" to express a fundamental cultural role, inborn character or instinct of a person, with no concept of genetic or biological meaning which the modern reader assumes. Paul's understanding of the natural male and female gender roles was not based on genetic formation. Modern genetic understandings were simply not part of his worldview. He labeled what he saw in the social order as "natural" (overwhelming majority) or "unnatural" (not meshing with the majority). He apparently assumed that gender attraction was instinctively heterosexual, and thus all other gender attractions were "against nature" (para physin). Accordingly, those who felt a same-gender attraction were actually violating their heterosexual identity given at creation.<sup>26</sup>

Today, we know that for a certain percentage of people (including those in our local congregations) reality is not that simple. We are ministering to people who find their sexual identity all along the continuum. Should we force same-gender-attracted persons to go against their own birth nature? Or have we the right to require them to remain celibate whether or not God has thus called them? Paul criticized those he assumed had a heterosexual attraction for rejecting their instinctive nature and experimenting with same-gender sexual activity. If we follow Paul's reasoning, what should we expect of those whose "nature" is homosexually oriented?

Within our faith communities there are young people who in late adolescence have genuinely committed themselves to following Jesus and have stated their desire to be members of the faith community with us. In most cases, their faith identity preceded any adult awareness of their own intricate sexual identity. Can we deny the integrity of their faith and reject them as brothers and sisters simply because their genetic formation differs from that with which most of us feel comfortable? I am convinced that the Bible would never permit us to reject or dismiss persons simply because of a genetic difference in their early identity formation.

When the Bible identifies specific abusive sexual behaviors we know were present in first-century culture, we should affirm the biblical instruction that these specific behaviors must have no place in the faith community. This is not in question. What is in question is the moral evaluation of the mutual caring expression of homoerotic attraction in those who are homosexually oriented.

And as we have seen, the Greek words, like *malakos* and *arsenokoites* describing illicit first-century behavior do not speak unambiguously to this point. What we can say with certainty is that the call of faith is exactly the same for all persons, namely, to claim Jesus as Lord, to commit themselves to follow Jesus, to live holy lives, to work for justice and peace, to bring healing to a suffering world, to offer hope and salvation to all people.

When we do this, we demonstrate that we truly are the people of God, nurturing faith, expecting wholeness, purity, and maturity in Christ in our personal relationships, loving those people for whom Christ died, and living in the joy of the kingdom of God which has burst in upon us.<sup>27</sup>

## A Word from the Early Church

Our differences in interpreting the Scriptures do not preclude their relevance or authority in our lives. The New Testament church itself struggled with different interpretations and applications of specific biblical texts. Within twenty-five years of its beginning at Pentecost, the church faced a crisis due to differing interpretations of religious experience. What began as a wonderful community of God's people gathered together in unity under the leading of the Holy Spirit, quickly became a community divided by sharp differences over who could be a member of the new people of God, and what kinds of membership regulations would be enforced. These sharp differences led to even sharper words of attack directed at others within the church.

There were a variety of strong voices stating their claims. One group, the Judaizers, argued that circumcision had always been the will of God and was still required for members in the new community. This meant placing some severe restrictions on Gentiles who might wish to become members. The second voice, coming from a more progressive group, argued that with the conversion of Cornelius and the affirmation of the Spirit upon that event (Acts 10:44-48), this requirement under the old covenant no longer applied.

Leaders from both groups met in Jerusalem to discuss this serious matter. Could a person be a committed follower of Jesus without first becoming culturally and religiously Jewish (being circumcised)? The meeting was tense, with both sides arguing that faithfulness dictated acceptance of their point of view. After hearing personal stories from Paul and Peter, and after long intensive debate, James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, reinterpreted the Old Testament Scriptures to acknowledge that the inclusion of Gentiles without special membership requirements had always been the will of God. He demonstrated this by quoting from Amos 9, Jeremiah 12 and Isaiah 45 (see Acts 15:16-18).

These texts had been in the Jewish Bible for centuries and presumably had been read in the synagogues. Yet no one had understood the texts to make this point until the experience of Cornelius forced the church to consider including gentiles. Only then did James recognize something in these texts never seen before. The experience of God's presence among these early Christians called them to re-examine how they had been reading the Scriptures. Only then did they understand the Scriptures to be saying that God had always intended the Gentiles to be included in the people of faith. The Scriptures had not changed, but God changed the hearts of the people reading the Scriptures to see God's will in a new way.

When the Jerusalem conference heard the experience of Gentiles who been saved by the grace of God, and when they heard these Old Testament texts confirming that this was God's will, they took the radical step of obedient faith and declared that they would accept people who previously had been unacceptable. They agreed they would no longer demand the ancient religious tradition of circumcision as a requirement for membership in the people of God. They did not forbid the practice of circumcision, but circumcision no longer controlled entry into the church.

In this situation, the church believed the Spirit of God was leading them in a new direction and was challenging a practice that had always been a central declaration of Jewish faith. What gave them that authority? The Holy Spirit confronted them in the form of persons who had experienced the grace of God. This challenged them to re-examine how they had been reading some specific texts in the Scriptures. As they read the texts in light of this new experience of God's grace, they came to a new understanding. Accordingly, they changed a specific practice. This guided them to include uncircumcised Gentiles into the faith community.

In his concluding remarks, James acknowledged that this had not been an easy decision. He implied that it would be difficult for more traditional groups to accept it. Therefore, he asked for understanding and sensitivity on the part of these newly accepted believers because "in every city there are those who proclaim the law of Moses, and have it read weekly in their synagogues" (Acts 15:21).

We look back at that event and say, "How simple it was, God's leading was so clear!" We wish it could be equally clear for the church today. But for members present in that conference, things were not as simple, pleasant, or harmonious as we may think. However, they did not separate from each other.

They stayed in the process and saw the result as a wonderful indication of God's leading. Most of us (we who are the Gentiles) are now part of the faith community because of their courage to accept persons like us!

### **Observations for Talking Together**

There are a significant number of ways in which the circumcision issue faced by the Jerusalem Council parallels our present situation. Circumcision was both a biblical and a highly sensitive cultural issue. It was the essential Mosaic mark of the covenant which proclaimed the Jewish male different from the Gentile male. It was not simply a ceremonial rite. It was a psychosomatic mark of cultural-religious "orientation." Those who did not have its identifying mark were "unclean."

The leaders at Jerusalem took the Scriptures very seriously. Indeed, the intensity of the different positions at the conference indicates how seriously they took its authority for their life. However, in light of the radical difference Jesus had made in their own understanding of the old covenant regulations and definitions, they accepted the Holy Spirit's work in their midst as an indication that change was called for. Peter's words, "Who was I that I could withstand God?" stated the mandate for accepting a new understanding of the Bible. The community agreed that they had to include people who were being saved by God's grace even though this grace had fallen on individuals they considered unclean and unacceptable.

Because of the extremely delicate nature of the situation, James urged tolerance and respect on both sides of the issue even though some participants did not fully understand or approve of what was happening. The leaders asked those breaking with the old regulations to be sensitive to the consciences of those who still clung to the old biblical interpretation. Even this cautious movement, however, did not keep the whole Jewish and Gentile church together.

Today we agree that the foundation for membership in the believing community is commitment to Jesus as Lord. We believe the Scriptures are God's Word and are authoritative for faith and life. We are committed to a high view of sexual morality as taught in the New Testament. We believe sexual intercourse belongs within life-long covenant relationships, and sexual promiscuity and infidelity are violations of God's intention for all covenant relationships. But we differ over the Bible's evaluation of homosexuality, and whether ancient biblical attitudes and precepts are to be applied literally without adaptation to the present-day understandings of the homosexual phenomenon.

In this situation some among us believe that the work of the Spirit in the lives of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters is indicating a new understanding of Scripture and calling for a new evaluation of homosexuality. No longer should we see our lesbian and gay brothers and sisters as "unclean." Rather, they should be accepted in the church so long as they give testimony to the healing grace of God and abide within the same sexual standards of monogamous fidelity required of heterosexuals.

Others among us insist that the homoerotic attraction itself is a moral perversion and Scripture requires that it must be changed or those of homosexual orientation must remain celibate. Of course the Bible does not state this explicitly, but those holding this position believe it is the only possible implication. This stand of course continues to deserve the same careful respect James called for in relation to the traditional understandings of circumcision.

How can we make it safe to study the Bible together and honestly share how the Scriptures speak to us without fear of being rejected or excluded—no matter what our position, whether in tension with or in harmony with the concerns emphasized in this chapter? Can we learn to share the depths of our own personal beliefs without declaring that our understandings of faith are the only possible correct understandings? Do we really want to say that we can have fellowship only with those who agree with us? If we can approach the Scriptures with a spirit of hope, love, and inclusion rather than judgment and separation, we might better hear our common foundations of faith that enable us to stay united in our diversity.

Can we acknowledge that we do not always know what we claim to know—that our

understandings of Scripture have been (and still are) influenced by cultural and religious pressures that sometimes do not reflect the spirit of Christ? How can we make it safe to reach out and include others without being attacked verbally, or having our own faith questioned? Can we accept that the grace of God sometimes includes others in ways that we might not easily understand? Can we all accept that God is able to work in ways beyond what we understand from any given position, including our own (which needs to apply even to my comments in this chapter)?

If we can join together in worship and prayer, trusting the Holy Spirit to speak to us, both individually and collectively; if we can allow God's love and grace to flow through us to others, being thankful for what God has done for us, and pledging ourselves to be agents of grace in all human conditions; we can make it safe for anyone to come before God in humility and honesty so that together we might all find grace, healing and salvation.

This article was reprinted by permission from Don Blosser, "*Why Does the Bible Divide Us? A Conversation with Scripture on Same-Gender Attraction*," a chapter in To Continue the Dialogue: Biblical Interpretation and Homosexuality, edited by C. Norman Kraus (Telford, PA: Pandora Press U.S., the original name of Cascadia Publishing House, 2001).

## Notes

1. This is the position of the most conservative Jews in the state of Israel. In their elementary schools, they spend five hours each day studying the ancient wisdom of Torah believing that these words reflect the never changing will of God for their lives today.
2. Choong Leong Seow, "Textual Orientation," in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality*, ed. Robert Brawley (Louisville: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1996), 26-27.
3. Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 381.
4. Thomas Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 86-88.
5. Philo, *Specialibus Legibus* 3.37-39, Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.11.3, as in Schmidt, 89.
6. G. Johannes Botterweck, "Yada" in *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 448-481. Botterweck identifies more than ten different uses of "yadah" in English translation. He provides very careful statistics and explanations for the various uses in the English Bible.
7. Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 49.
8. The book of Jude may be seen to counter this argument, but the author there draws on the extrabiblical Jewish traditions of Philo and Josephus to make his point about the historic sinfulness of Israel.
9. Seow, "Textual Orientation," 21. The modern reader is horrified by the actions of the Levite, as also with Lot in Gen. 19. This behavior is in accord with the Near Eastern hospitality codes of the day where protection of the stranger in one's house took precedence over the love of one's own children.
10. Nissinen, 50-51.
11. The imperative to replace the holiness of the law with compassion is most clearly shown in Matt. 5:38-48 and Luke 6:27-36. These sections echo and modify the Holiness Code at crucial points. See Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1998), 135-155.
12. Dale Martin, "Arsenokoites and Malakos: Meanings and Consequences" in Brawley, *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality*, 124-125.

13. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow*, 95-96.
14. *Ibid.*, 67.
15. William Consiglio, *Homosexual No More* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1991), and Mario Bergner, *Setting Love in Order* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Hameworth Books, 1995), are two examples among a list of psychological/theological writers who promote healing and deliverance from the sin of homosexuality, believing that it is a freely chosen option.
16. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow*, 81.
17. Epictetus: *Scattered Sayings*, 3.6.9, *On Freedom*, 4.1.25, cited in Abraham Malherbe, *The Cynic Epistles*.
18. Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, 66.25.
19. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 7.338, *Jewish Antiquities* 5.246 “some were eager to respond, and all but filled with delight at the thought of a death so noble, but other “softer-hearted” persons were moved with compassion for their wives and families.” “Gaul was charged with “febleness” in his encounter with Abimelech.”
20. Martin, 127.
21. Nissinen, 58.
22. Plato, *Plato’s Symposium*, 192A, Plutarch, *Plutarchs Moralia*, v. IX, *Dialogue on Love* 748-771E.
23. Nissinen, 65-68. Nissinen provides extensive discussion of the practice of pederasty in the culture, suggesting that Paul would have known about the practice and certainly would have opposed it.
24. *Sibylline Oracle 2:70-77* in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1983).
25. E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2 (London: SCM Press), 224.
26. Nissinen, 106-107.
27. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), develops this theme as a central element in the teaching ministry of Jesus in his chapter, “Gender Identity” (167-190). While Volf’s discussion is much broader than our specific topic, his approach to faith and issues of gender is very helpful. See also Borg, 135-155.

### **Web resources regarding biblical understanding and sexuality:**

- Bridges-Across the Divide*. (nd). [www.bridges-across.org/index.htm](http://www.bridges-across.org/index.htm)
- Church of the Brethren. (2004). Annual Conference and General Board Resolutions and Statements (1946-2004). [www.brethren.org/ac/ac\\_statements/](http://www.brethren.org/ac/ac_statements/)
- Johns, L. (2004) Homosexuality and the Bible: A Case Study in the Use of the Bible for Ethics. [www.ambs.edu/LJohns/Homosexuality.htm](http://www.ambs.edu/LJohns/Homosexuality.htm).
- Johns, L. (2004) Statements of Mennonite Conferences, Boards and Committees on Homosexuality (1985-2004). [www.ambs.edu/ljohns/churchdocs.htm](http://www.ambs.edu/ljohns/churchdocs.htm).
- Ontario Consultants for Religious Tolerance. (2005). Homosexuality and Bisexuality: All Sides to the Issue. [www.religioustolerance.org/homosexu.htm#rel](http://www.religioustolerance.org/homosexu.htm#rel)
- Welcome to Dialogue Series*. [www.welcome-committee.org/booklet-index.html](http://www.welcome-committee.org/booklet-index.html)

### **Book resources regarding biblical understanding and sexuality:**

- Frontain, R. (Ed.). (1997). *Reclaiming the Sacred: The Bible in Gay and Lesbian Culture*. Harlington Park Press: Binghamton, NY.
- Hershberger, A. (Ed.). (1999). *Sexuality: God's Gift*. Herald Press: Scottsdale, PA.
- Kraus, C. N. & Kauffman, R. C. (Eds.). (2001). *To Continue the Dialogue: Biblical Interpretation and Homosexuality*. Pandora Press: Telford, PA.
- Kreider, R. S. (Ed.). (1998). *From Wounded Hearts: Faith Stories of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered People and Those Who Love Them*. Chi Rho Press: Gaithersburg, MD.
- Kreider, R. S. (Ed.). (2002). *Together In Love: Faith Stories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, And Transgender Couples*. Strategic Press: Kulpsville, PA.
- Wink, W. (Ed.). (1999). *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN.

# **Sexual Ethics**

*The Brethren Mennonite Council does not intend to establish doctrine, creeds or a code of conduct. In keeping with Anabaptist beliefs, BMC feels discernment in matters of personal ethics is best done from within a community of mutual accountability and respect. BMC calls faith communities to welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons of faith as equals so the work of mutual discernment can begin. In the absence of welcoming faith communities, BMC provides other settings that individuals can meet to do their personal work of discernment. In the following article, Jim Sauder discusses sexual ethics as they relate to him as a gay man. Jim is the former Executive Director of BMC and lives in Minneapolis with his partner of nine years, Paul Hogrefe.*

## **Sexual Ethics on the Margin Shaped by Personal Experience**

*By Jim M Sauder*

As a gay person I've spent many years trying to understand my relationship with dominant culture, especially around the topic of ethics and personal authority. My religious upbringing told me I was a worm, saved by grace, and destined to never live up to the church's expectations. I had to trust outside authorities in my religious tradition to tell me what was right or wrong, to determine if I was good or bad, bound for hell or heaven. I had to use their paradigm, their touchstone, to determine my moral value. My own paradigms were suspect and corrupted.

As a gay man I still had the call of the divine crying out from within me, despite the conflicting religious messages I was receiving. As many people on the margin of a majority culture experience, many of the moral and ethical paradigms didn't work for me as I was created, a gay man who loves other gay men. The process of coming out required me to listen to, respect, and act on my own internal authority as a human being. Neither my religious tradition nor society held any positive understandings of my life as a sexual being. I was not represented.

Without readily available frames of reference you have to trust your own experience. Once you move forward you will often find others who have similar experiences. You will find others who have moved beyond externally imposed frames of reference and who trust their own internal authority. Certainly not everything from dominant secular or religious culture is thrown out, and not everything can be accepted. This process of self-analysis and determination of what will and will not maintain authority in life is critical for the development of a dynamic, authentic spirituality.

BMC can be a place for helping us check our frames of reference. I do not see BMC as a place concerned about defining a moral code, but rather as a place to respect the personal authority that people from the margin bring to their quest for a personal, authentic moral questioning. We need an atmosphere of respect, introspection and conversation that allows people to test, find grace and explore what it means to be sexual beings created in the image of the divine...however they define the divine in their lives. This is how we learn from each other, learn from the past, and live into the future.

In a conversation with a pastor on the issue of sexual ethics, I asked, "What do you discuss at the seminary about sexual ethics when you are outside of class and relaxing with your friends and classmates?" He replied, "We don't have those conversations." As people on the margin, we don't have that privilege. We must have those conversations, because the majority touchstones don't represent our reality or, necessarily, our best interest.

So what is behind the occasional call from people in our denominations for BMC to declare a sexual ethic? Certainly there is no reason to trust that the call seeks to serve our interests. Certainly there is no reason to trust that the call is grounded in the desire to welcome gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (glbt) people into the full life of the church. Often those making the call work actively against the full inclusion of glbt people. Are people moral only if they have a written moral sexual code? Why is it only a sexual code that needs to be examined? The request for a statement of sexual ethics feels like yet

another “if only” statement: if only they would...act like us...look like us...believe like us. The majority culture demands that the minority culture conform to how the majority culture sees life, rather than attempting to understand how the minority culture sees life. Not having to examine their values, their culture, or their ethics is the privilege of the majority.

More often than not, what is being called for is really a strict moral code, one size fits all, that can be used to measure others to see if they come up deserving. But the work of developing an ethic is much more complicated. It requires understanding culpability, choice, nuances, and variations. It acknowledges that the answer for one is not the answer for all. The work of developing an ethic requires knowing motive, intent, and outcome, all which can't be prescribed by a moral code.

The “Golden Rule” works well for a majority culture, but we really should be working towards what some call the “Platinum Rule:” do unto others what they would have done unto them. This requires conversation, and knowing the needs, culture and values of the other, rather than assuming your needs and values are universal.

I believe my own best articulation of my ethical paradigm or touchstone is summarized by asking the question, “Will my action add life to myself, others and the community?” It is not an easy and simple moral code. It requires that I first know what does and does not give me life. It also requires me to know the others in my life and my community. And the question is never answered fully, because what gives me life has changed with time, my relationship, my work and my social location.

BMC has provided many people an important place to explore what really brings life in all its fullness. It has provided me relationships to call upon as I question my understanding of self, others and the community. It has provided the graced, safe places to risk sharing what gives me life and hearing what gives others life. I have marveled at the mystery of how different these things can be for different people. Mining our rich experience together deepens our understanding of what it means to be a loving people. As Carter Heyward puts it in *Our Passion for Justice*:

“It occurs to me that it may be the special privilege of lesbians and gay men to take very seriously, and very actively, what it means to love. As lesbians and gay men, we have had to fall back on the category of lover in order to speak of our most intimate, and often most meaningful, relationships. Deprived of civil and religious trappings of romantic love, we may well be those who are most compelled to plumb the depths of what it really means to love. Our deprivation becomes an opportunity and a vocation: to become conscious of things we have not seen, and to make others conscious of the same things (pages 84-85).”

This is a gift the queer community can bring to the church: examining the long unexamined. But to do this the church needs to welcome glbt people to the table. I seek a church that welcomes us into a mutual conversation, not into an atmosphere of judgment, condemnation and presumed assimilation. The church needs to not make its welcome contingent on our lived experience matching the majority's lived experience. In this ferment around the table we can discover new understandings of what makes us more fully human. What makes us better able to live out our expression of the incarnate? We can have an even deeper appreciation of the other, a deeper understanding of ourselves and a deeper appreciation of the mystery we call creation.

In my exploration of my personal touchstone I've discovered it is not really the answer to the questions I seek, but it is the exploration of the questions, the exploration of the unknown, that has brought new life abundant.

### **Further Resources regarding sexual ethics:**

Clapp, S., Leverton Helbert, K., and Zizak, A. (2003). *Faith Matters: Teenagers, Religion, and Sexuality*. LifeQuest Publications: Fort Wayne, IN.

The GLBT Round Table of the American Library Association. (2001). Religion and Spirituality: A Checklist of Resources for Gay Men, Lesbians, and Bisexuals.  
[calvin.usc.edu/trimmer/religion.html](http://calvin.usc.edu/trimmer/religion.html).

Hershberger, A. (Ed.). (1999). *Sexuality: God's Gift*. Herald Press: Scottsdale, PA.

Johns, L. (1985) Human Sexuality in the Christian Life.  
<http://www.ambs.edu/LJohns/HSCCL/hsccl0.htm>

Krabill, W. S. (1989). Sexuality. *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*.  
[www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/s493me.html](http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/s493me.html).

The Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing. [www.religiousthought.org/](http://www.religiousthought.org/).

Sexual Ethics: Good Words Offered About Good Sex. (2003). *Dialogue*, 25 (2).

# Reparative Therapy

*Reparative therapy is a process by which some gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals attempt to change their sexual orientation. Many professional human service organizations oppose these therapies including The National Association of Social Work, American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics and American Counseling Association among others. Despite criticisms of reparative therapy, many other organizations still espouse it as a viable option. However, individuals who follow this path sometimes find their way to a broader self-discovery*

*In the spring of 2000, a handful of Goshen College students attended a workshop at a local Mennonite church that discussed “sexual brokenness” (“homosexuality”). In frustration, one of the students wrote about how disturbing he found the experience in a public forum. In response, a local pastor voiced his favorable opinion of the experience. The final response of the exchange from another student is given here as well as a reflection on it two years later.*

## An Ex-gay Story...

I don't have any statistics or scientific studies to cite. I have no rigorous psychological argument as to why the ex-gay movement does or does not end up harming a lot of people. All I have are my experiences, my life – my story. Respect my experiences and celebrate the joy and freedom that I have found, even if you can't agree with my conclusion as to exactly what God wants out of my sexuality.

After an incredibly soul-wrenching and intense discussion with my parents last year (in which I told them for the second time that I thought I was gay, that this time I was really serious and that this was who I truly was) I came to a point where I couldn't go on trying to figure out answers for myself. All my life I had been taught and believed that God works in human lives and that he can give us hope and guidance even where we can't see any solutions. I knew that I had to turn to God and let Him provide answers for me.

So I did – I poured myself out to God and had a very incredible re-awakening spiritually. My daily Bible reading started being full of incredible life, and prayer felt like direct communication with God. Even though the rest of my life didn't make sense, I knew that God was working in me and that he had a plan for my life.

I soon came to a point where I stopped being afraid of the future. Through praying and reading books and stories of both homosexual people and ex-gay people, I was struck deeply that I had nothing to fear. I wasn't afraid that I might be gay and that gay was okay. I wasn't afraid that God might want to change me to be straight. I simply knew and trusted God that he *did* have *the* answer for my life's problems, and that he would reveal this answer to me.

Soon after coming to this point I read an ex-gay book that resonated with a lot of what was inside me. It was one of the few ex-gay stories I have read that I identified with. Most life stories of ex-gay people include incredible neglect and abuse, sexual and emotional, as children. I had none of that. My parents are wonderful people who have loved and supported me warmly through all periods of my life. I had never been sexually abused or assaulted. This book told the story of a man who rejected God when he decided to follow his homosexual feelings. He was led by a series of experiences out of an incredibly dark place in life (in which he thought he had AIDS) to great personal healing and feeling that God wanted him to reject the homosexual part of himself and change to heterosexual. I was impressed and intrigued by

the description in this book of how God led this man out of homosexuality and the explanations for why homosexuality exists in the first place. I thought that this book was a sign from God that he wanted me to become ex-gay, get married, and fulfill my dream of becoming a father.

I read that book during this past spring. Coming home and talking about these things with my

parents and going to a couple counseling sessions and being very excited about the prospect of God changing me to straight brought me to a point where I was trusting and believing that this was what God was doing. Needless to say, my parents were thrilled that this was what I believed. They respected me very much and respected how I was going about discerning God's will, and were excited that I thought God was working in me. I had gone from two possible answers from God – “God wants me to be gay” or “God wants me to be ex-gay” to only one answer – “God wants me to be ex-gay, and my sexual orientation is indeed already changing.”

That's where I was for the rest of last year and for this past summer. Summer was a great time for me. I was with my family and feeling very re-connected with who I was and where I came from. Some books that I read got me very re-excited about prayer and my prayer life and Bible reading flourished all summer. I started a Bible study group with some of my friends from high school. I told my best friend from high school about how I had been gay, but God was changing me.

Coming back to school this year, I explained to my friends (the ones who had walked with me in my struggles last year) about the answer that God had shown me and how I really was pretty much completely straight by now. I walked around campus marveling at how pretty the girls were – I would walk by a pretty girl and she would smile at me and I would feel lovely inside and think “wow! a pretty girl just smiled at me! I love being straight.” I was a “changed life.” Yet something wasn't right. Several of my friends came to me and told me they were a little worried about me, that I didn't seem to be as outgoing or happy as last year. I had no clue what they were talking about – I was sure that I was feeling better than I ever had! On my “straight days” I was very joyful that I could finally accept at least a part of my sexuality as good and perfect and holy. But wow... on the “gay days.” I was very rough on myself. Very rough. At the beginning of my ex-gay journey I realized that changing would be a gradual process and that I couldn't be hard on myself when I had gay feelings. So I forgave myself and tried not to focus on the really hot guy that I had a crush on all summer. Coming back to Goshen (there are a lot more beautiful people on this campus than in my hometown!) I tried to brush away and not worry about feelings that would surface – often very violently and unexpectedly – for certain guys. But it started to wear on me.

I was very happy that I could now look at women and appreciate the differences between men and women and be excited about the thought of one day marrying a woman. I was very happy that I had taken time to ponder the idea of masculinity and my view of myself and how masculinity fit into my life. I was very happy that I thought I could finally reclaim my health and well-being after years of turmoil and tiredness.

“Oh God, if I am so happy, why do I feel so deeply unhappy? Why do I find myself closed off from other people, unable to talk or relate to them? Why do I feel my faith in Jesus as a barrier between me and others rather than a bridge?”

I had trouble focusing or thinking in class. I spent my free time listening to music or just reading – I didn't have the energy or drive to do anything more constructive. I felt uncoordinated and unhappy about my body while playing sports. I couldn't talk to others about my faith in ways that I had before – somehow I felt threatened or closed off rather than loving and understanding of other people for their unique stages of spiritual growth.

Recently it exploded. It all just exploded. I couldn't handle it anymore. One day was a particularly confusing and painful “gay day.” That night I felt my structure and my sanity start to slip away – I reached deep within myself and pulled up my defenses, rallied my troops for one last stand. My mind and thoughts snapped back into place and I breathed a sigh of relief – yes, God was changing me, I just had to trust in Him and get through this tough time. The next day was worse, worse, and worse. I decided to end myself, to end my attempts at trying to construct anything out of my life. That night I walked away from campus, just walking and not caring that I was leaving my claim to any sort of identity or sense of self behind. I walked in the pounding rain and knew that my clothes would get soaked all the

way through – I wanted that, I *had* to have that. I knew that I had to do *something*. What could I do? Thoughts raced through me head – walk into the Indiana countryside and never stop until the police and my parents found me? Flunk out of school? (This was coming from someone who would wake up at 7:00 to finish homework rather than turn it in late!) Throw myself in the Elkhart River? (Very glad I didn't choose that option.) Run a knife across my wrists every day to draw blood until people started noticing the scars on my wrists and I got help?

I ended up finding a secluded place and “let it all out.” Crying. Sobbing. Gagging. Screaming to God that I was finished. Me – someone who had never given up ever on anything in my whole life, no matter how tired or defeated I felt, who always kept plugging on and doing my duty – I was finally giving up. Giving in. I realized that I had no way of understanding my life anymore. I had no neat packaged “options” that God could choose between. “A or B, God? It up to you!” I was beyond that. I felt a sense of chaos closing in – what was I? I felt like a series of unrelated, meaningless experiences with nothing to tie them together at all. God was the force, the storm that raged around me screaming and shaking me until I couldn't do anything but let the storm enter into me.

The writer George MacDonald once described the Wrath of God as the furious storm shaking a locked house to its foundations until its resident out of terror opens the door to escape – only to discover that what seemed to be the Wrath of God is shown to be the perfect, holy, and true Love of God. The Love of God just doesn't like being closed out of a heart. It will rage forever until it is given entrance.

Walking home from the storm I knew that I was in the Abyss. Nothing I could do would help me – there is no way for humans to pull themselves out of the Abyss. Only Jesus can enter into the Abyss.

And he did. He came down, softly, gently, into the depths of my despair. He was laughing and singing and he lifted me with open arms. I am gay. I am gay. For the first time in my life, I could say these words and tingle with the beauty of them. My past, all that has gone into making me who I am – suddenly it all snapped into focus and created a beautiful picture. Memories of my childhood and adolescence that I hadn't allowed myself to remember for years suddenly resurfaced – all the crushes on guys, all the beauty and thrill that went into appreciating another boy, the memory of myself as a ten-year-old curling up and listening to the musical *Oliver* for hours on end just because something in Oliver's voice touched me deeply and powerfully on the inside. It's not even sad that I ever really wondered about whether I was gay – it's just funny! I am SO gay! And God loves me! He did and He does! The very idea still sends thrills down my spine – God can love me and accept me for exactly who I am. He doesn't require me to jump through any hoops or perform outrageous acrobatics of the soul. He created me, and he will use every part of myself that I offer to Him in order to further His kingdom on this earth. Even the gay part of me – yes, I believe, *especially* the gay part of me.

The line of thought exemplified by Pastor Arbuckle's paper would claim that there are only two voices on homosexuality in the church: that of the “official” position of the church and that of the “pro-homosexual lobby” whispering into the “ears of the Mennonite Church leadership.” I am neither. I am a homosexual person. I am a Mennonite. I am not some infiltrator into the Mennonite church. I *am* the Mennonite church. I am the voice of Mennonite children, Mennonite aunts and uncles, Mennonite parents, Mennonite friends, Mennonite pastors, Mennonite youth, Mennonite old people. God's kingdom will come on earth – it *must* come – nothing can hold it back. Gay and lesbian people are part of that kingdom, and denying them their place is keeping the church out of much of its rightful power to be the kingdom of God.

We desperately turn to the ex-gay movement for answers because we feel that this is the only possible option that God can have in the lives of his gay and lesbian children. I don't have any animosity toward the ex-gay movement as I have encountered it. Through this movement I have come to peace with my sexuality – although not exactly as they intended. People *are* helped out of broken lives and helped to learn how to make healthier decisions. Some desperate and sad people's lives *are* changed for the better in the ex-gay movement. But the ex- gay movement is not the answer to homosexuality. I believe that we already have the answer within the church – we just have to start listening to the voices that are already in our midst. I eagerly await the day – some day soon, maybe – when gay children will grow up celebrating and being at peace with their sexuality. My experiences have made me a strong person and given me the

beautiful gift of feeling love for all people without the need to judge them, but I don't really wish my trauma on anyone else.

To those who are turned off by God and the church, take a few words from a gay man – you may have to let go of the church for a while, but God will never *ever* ever forsake you in any step or any stage of your life. His plans and his ways are more joy-filled and much more fun than anything we can come up with for ourselves.

Thanks for listening to my story. Sorry I have to remain anonymous for now – I need to feel at peace with my parents' view of me before I am ready to come out completely.

*Anonymous*  
*October 10, 2000*

### **An Ex-Gay Story: Reflections Two Years Later**

*By Luke L Miller*

When I wrote "An Ex-Gay Story," I knew that I had come to an important turning point in my life. The elation and excitement and new life I felt in the weeks following that night in the storm subsided after a while, and I began to face a long and dark period of life. Deep in my mind had been programmed all sorts of bad messages about gay people and gay lives, and I found these thoughts and messages cycling through my mind endlessly, day after day, as I struggled to come to terms with a new sense of who I was and where my life was headed. I came through this period with the help of many wonderful, loving friends, people who had loved me and supported me through all my phases of questioning and exploration, and were ready to help me learn to love myself anew.

I can see my stage of looking to the ex-gay movement for answers as an important stage of spiritual growth, something that I needed to go through at the time in order to face being gay with full integrity. I can now clearly see how this very painful time led me to rely even further on God's existence, beyond ways I could find in my family or the church.

It's hard to think about how my life would be different if I hadn't given in to that night of breakdown and surrender, giving up my own personal quest for the answers I demanded from God, and allowing the terror of Reality to enter me. It seems to me that all that was true and beautiful and spontaneous wouldn't have been able to survive the lock-down I placed on my soul during my ex-gay journey.

I feel that I know much more about the nature of God now, and the nature of his gifts – the most important lesson being that we can never comprehend, label or limit the beauty and grandeur of God's presence in our lives. It won't fit into any box ever built. My sexuality, my gay sexuality, somehow fits into this beautiful mysterious ineffable dance that is the reality of God's breath in this world.

To young people of faith struggling to find answers to questions of sexual orientation, I would say the following words:

*You must be true to yourself by being true to what you believe to be the highest source of good in the world. Let your journey for answers will take you to a place beyond yourself, in which you surrender to the presence and reality of something beyond yourself, something you can no longer limit by your mind or beliefs or fears. God's gifts can only become real when we TRULY stop trying to claim them for our own, stop telling God what we want him to do with us, and let him show us the things he truly wishes to give us. At the end of this journey, you will discover that God is infinitely more beautiful and gentle and loving than you could ever imagine, and that you were created to take part in the joy and light of his creation. God created you and wants you to fully accept this gift of life - nothing in the world can change that fact.*

- Sept. 17, 2002

**Other resources regarding ex-gay therapy:**

American Psychological Association. Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation and Youth.  
<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbc/publications/justthefacts.html>

Ex-Gay Nomad. (1998). [members.aol.com/exgaynomad/index.htm](http://members.aol.com/exgaynomad/index.htm).

The Human Rights Campaign. (2000). *Finally Free: Personal Stories: How Love and Self-Acceptance Saved Us from "Ex-Gay" Ministries*. [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org).

Maniaci, T., & Rzeznik, F. M. (1993). *One nation under God [Videotape]*. New York: First Run Features.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. (1998). *Calculated Compassion*.  
[www.thetaskforce.org/reslibrary/list.cfm?pubTypeID=2](http://www.thetaskforce.org/reslibrary/list.cfm?pubTypeID=2) - pub13

Shidlo, A., Schroeder, M., & Drescher J. (Eds.). (2001). *Sexual conversion therapy: Ethical, clinical and research perspectives*. New York: The Hawthorn Medical Press.

# Coming Out

*Realizing and accepting one's alternative gender identity and/or same-sex orientation can be easy, painful, and/or wonderful. We all have different coming out stories. At the time of this writing, Matt Enders was the youngest board member of the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests. Shown by Matt's story, coming out is sometimes a series of coming out to different individuals and communities.*

## Coming Out

*By Matt Enders*

Coming out is a difficult thing. It's different for every person. No two stories are the same. Multiple factors play a part in the process; family, friends, community and religion, to name a few. Being unsure of knowing how people are going to react to me coming out was a barrier I had to overcome. Courage was not one my stronger points in life. But I knew that if I was going to be happy with my life, then I had to grow a backbone and say something. So, here's my story. I grew up in a pretty rural part of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. No, I'm not Amish, and I guess all hope for trying to be is gone. I figured I could never say anything about it growing up. It was one of those things you couldn't bring up at the dinner table on a Tuesday night with the family. I have a cousin who came out when I was much younger. I noticed the reactions my relatives took to him, and realized that I was not going to listen to their negative comments about me.

College was my time to fly the coop, and start "living." Studying music, there was plenty of "family" around. I saw that it was an accepted way of life, so I began telling some of my friends at college that I am gay. Some of them responded with, "Well, I'm glad you finally told us!" Then I came home for the holiday break my first year of school. I decided to spread my support system to my friends from high school. Not sure if they would have the same reaction, but surprisingly they did.

My brother and sister in law were getting married the following spring, and I didn't want to say anything to my family until after the wedding. I guess I was just being paranoid about the whole situation. I didn't want anything to ruin the family ties before the eventful day. I first told my mom while I was driving her home from school. I asked her, "What would you say if I told you I was gay?" She was shocked of course, and her main concern was me contracting AIDS. Taken aback myself, I admitted that I wasn't having sex, relieving her for a short time. The hardest thing I thought I would have to do would be telling my father. Well, luck was with me, and my mom told him before I had a chance to. She told me the next day that I had to talk with my dad, and answer a few questions. So I sat down with him and he asked

me, "So, is it that you don't like girls, or that you like boys?" Noticing how uncomfortable they were made me feel a bit better. I realized they weren't going to judge me right there on the spot. They both wanted to know more about what I was going through, and try to understand me better.

Growing up in the Brethren church I thought I had things figured out. I knew the church as a whole wasn't open and accepting, but I knew that progressive changes were occurring in several surrounding congregations. I had hope that my home church in Lancaster might possibly be supportive of me.

I soon found the answer to that question through my youth pastor. One summer in high school I attended Annual Conference, the yearly denominational meeting of the Church of the Brethren. I was there with a few close friends from my youth group as well as our youth pastor. We were talking on the beach one day, and my youth pastor made a few snide remarks regarding a guy he went to college with. He mentioned that this guy was "one of 'those' kinds of people," and "he couldn't understand why he would want to be like that." Disheartened, I greatly valued his opinion up to that point and believed that was the view of most of the church.

As I went on to college I lost touch with going to a Church of the Brethren simply because there

were none located near my university. I did however work at the Brethren camp that I attended for endless summers as a kid. I worked there all four summers as a camp counselor while in college. It was a great place for me, and I developed many close friendships while there. My first summer on staff at camp, I came out to a few of my coworkers. I carefully decided whom I could tell, and whom I couldn't. Most were supportive. A few were quite surprised, because they had "never known anyone who was gay" before. I prefer to let people know of my sexuality after they get a chance to know me. Therefore they can't base their opinions on that particular characteristic. Gay people are everyday normal folks too.

As the summers progressed my support system grew at camp, until one fateful day. One of my friends from my first summer moved her way up to becoming my boss by my last summer. She was fine with my sexuality and I believed we were fairly close. Well, one day someone on staff found out about me who hadn't previously known I am gay. The staff person didn't believe that gay people should be in a counseling position with smaller children. "We can only be effective teaching classes to the kids, directing a camp, but nothing more." Word came back to my "friend" who was now my boss, and she had to make a decision about what to do. There were three weeks remaining in the summer, and I was counseling most of the time. She decided to make the statement that "homosexual staff members will not be able to uphold a counseling position." This affected at least two of us on staff that summer, and possibly more.

This was my first "obstacle" that I'd come upon since I came out four years earlier. I never experienced prejudice first hand until that day. It made me open my eyes and realize that I had to stand up for who I am. Just because I'm a gay man doesn't mean that I can't do something that straight folks have every opportunity to do. BMC (Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Interests) provided me with an outlet that I could channel that energy into. Working with both the church and the social aspect of the GLBT community has given me new hope that things are slowly beginning to change from the traditional mindset.

Awkwardness aside, my friends, parents, brother and sister in law are the most supportive people I have in my life. I love them dearly, and they're always there for me. I know it's a rare situation, so I'm very grateful for them. I wasn't sure how any of them would react, but I soon came to see that no matter what, they love me for who I am.

#### **Other web resources regarding coming out:**

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC). [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org).

Out Proud. [www.outproud.org/](http://www.outproud.org/).

Oasis Magazine. [www.oasismag.com/](http://www.oasismag.com/).

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Persons (PFLAG). [www.pflag.org/](http://www.pflag.org/).

Queer [Theory.com](http://Theory.com). (2000). Coming out in an Academic Environment. [www.queertheory.com/articles/articles\\_coming\\_out\\_academic.htm](http://www.queertheory.com/articles/articles_coming_out_academic.htm)

#### **Other books regarding coming out:**

Kreider, R. S. (Ed.). (1998). *From Wounded Hearts: Faith Stories of Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, and Transgendered People and Those Who Love Them*. Chi Rho Press: Gaithersburg, MD.

Kreider, R. S. (Ed.). (2002). *Together In Love: Faith Stories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Couples*. Strategic Press: Kulpsville, PA.

Savin-Williams, R. C. (2001). *Mom, Dad, I'm Gay: How Families Negotiate Coming Out*. American Psychological Association: Washington DC.

## Gender Identity

*A subject often ignored, gender identity and transgender issues are becoming more and more prevalent on Brethren and Mennonite College/University campuses each year. For this edition of the Kaleidoscope packet, BMC asked a Manchester College graduate to tell his story. The following essay gives a brief introduction into the life of one transgender individual on a Brethren campus.*

I was born, biologically, as a female. I did not, however, grow into a woman. Throughout the process of growing up, my gender became incongruent with my biological sex, as it is understood in our culture. This does not mean, however, that I did not experience what it felt like to be a woman for most of my life. For the most part, I was perceived and treated as a girl/woman for most of my life. Biologically, I developed breasts, menstruated for nine years, and went through all the other puberty-related issues that females do. It is my opinion that women are intelligent, emotionally and spiritually evolved, and beautiful. I love women, but for whatever the reason and whatever it means, I am not a woman.

As a child, I demonstrated all the classic symptoms of what is known as Gender Dysphoria. I am not sure why this is still considered to be a mental disorder, but if it were a list of how I felt and feel today, I would check nearly all of them. My parents only forced me into dresses during holidays and allowed me to pick the toys I wanted to play with and dress how I wanted to dress. Although neither of my parents are involved in the transgender movement, nor even have college degrees, they wanted me to be happy, and I was happiest with my shirt off pushing a plastic lawnmower behind my father's when he was mowing. I don't believe that every little girl that prefers baseball to Barbie's and every little boy that prefers pink to blue is going to grow up to be transgender. However, if these two children have parents that make them feel wrong for their preferences and choices, I believe they will have problems later in their development.

During high school, I felt an intense anger without ever fully understanding what I was angry about. In retrospect, I believe now that anger stemmed from the rules and expectations changing for me. I could no longer run around with my shirt off, boys did not want to play with me anymore (at least, not in the way I wanted them to) and the beautiful and lenient stage known as "tomboy" was supposed to be over. So much of my adolescence was spent feeling lonely and sad. In high school, I found myself in the works of Sylvia Plath, Dorothy Allison and bell hooks. It was also that time I discovered the singer/songwriter/folk goddess Ani DiFranco. At the time, I thought I could model myself after these women, and that if I had a template of something to be, it would be easier to "be" it. For me, it was easier to be seen as a feminist, and later a dyke, than it was to be viewed as a woman. Although immersing myself in feminist culture did not make me a woman, it did make me a feminist, and I am truly thankful my life went in that direction.

I began taking testosterone in 2006, after I had moved away from my family. It was only after making this decision that I came out to them as transgender. The majority of my friends already knew, and even if they did not understand, they supported me. It was terrifying to tell my family, not because I thought it would be shocking for them, but because gender is something pervasive and fixed in this culture. It determines how we respond to and treat someone. The biological sex is the first thing that an expecting mother learns about the fetus in her womb. For better or worse, we attribute certain characteristics that may or may not have anything to do with how a person feels based on their genitals, and the sticky web of *gender* begins before anyone has any say over it. My family was and continues to be as supportive as they can be with the understanding of the situation that they have.

To strangers, I pass as male 100% of the time. My friends know, and do their best to use male pronouns. I am stealth (no one knows) at my job, but I am not sure how I feel about it yet. At first, I wanted to see if I could pass. Now, I do not know how to bring up the subject without my co-workers feeling like they were deceived. I have decided for the time being that if they ask, I will be truthful. I have never been dishonest when speaking about myself, but I also do not feel the need to spread my biological history around. When I can financially afford to, I will have a double mastectomy (top surgery) to remove my breasts, but that is many student loan and credit card payments away. I have been binding for the better part of four years.

Transgenderism seems to be the new black, with everyone from Barbara Walters to Oprah running a special about it. To me, these shows are often formulaic and predictable. Typically, they present the story of someone who has, since their first cognitive memory, felt like the "opposite sex." Terms like *sex* and *gender* are used interchangeably, and there is an expert that states their theory about the lack of hormones released in the womb that makes someone transgender, much like a gay gene that makes someone gay. They show "before" pictures, and everyone marvels at the difference that hormone therapy and/or plastic surgery can make. Although there is validity in anyone's story, there seems to be a lack of diversity in the stories presented about transgender individuals. If it were up to me, more emphasis would be made in order to understand why people who are transgender (or queer) are treated like second-class citizens, stigmatized as outcasts for living the life they either choose to live or feel they have no choice but to live. But, it is not up to me, and that would not make as shocking and appealing television as flashing "before" and "after" pictures of trans individuals.

I applied to Manchester College after reading their mission statement. They valued differences, celebrated diversity, and maintained a liberal arts curriculum. At the time when I sat down to fill out my application, I was a strong-willed, queer-identified individual. The last thing I wanted to do was check between an "M" and an "F" on my application, but it was not until my first sociology course that I understood why, and I understood myself better. When reading about other transgender individuals, I heard my own voice and saw parts of my own story. During my four years there, I learned how pervasive gender was, dictating where I could live, which bathroom I could use, and how I was supposed to respond and interact throughout daily life.

The drag show, that is now annual at Manchester College, has its origin in my first-year. It was a day I grew to look forward to more than any holiday or birthday because it was the one day of the year where I knew it was acceptable to present myself physically the way I had always seen myself mentally. At the time, United Sexualities had a group of people who were interested in the exploration of gender. Not everyone is open to questioning gender roles, norms, and expectations. Each year we would have a drag show, we would have a wave of backlash. Our signs promoting the drag show (or any event) were torn down at nausea, or clever Bible verses were scribbled on them. Rumors would trickle down that the administration was trying to ban the drag show because it was perverse or lacked in educational purpose. Often times, it felt as though we had to go above and beyond any other group on campus to justify our events; even events much less controversial than a drag show.

There was one year where the drag show was scheduled on the same weekend that the Brethren Regional Youth Conference was meeting on campus. Parents called and refused to allow their children to attend, and the president of the college contacted me to ask if I would switch the date. This was an impossible request because of the outside performers that were attending, and it would have been impossible to reserve the venue on another day since the drag show was booked a year in advance. Although, in the end, the president supported United Sexualities, it was clear that many in the community, administration, and campus found that challenging gender or gender deviation was not acceptable and the implication was made that the community's religious beliefs were incompatible with United Sexualities as a whole.

Attending Manchester College for four years was, overall, one of the best experiences I have had thus far

in life. College seems to be a microcosm of the world at large, and it is obvious that both still need work in regards to transgender individuals. Simple things such as offering a gender neutral bathroom, allowing applicants or current students to write-in their gender(s) on applications and documents, or eradicating the question all together, and adding into the mission statement that all are welcome regardless of sexual orientation (perceived or otherwise) and gender identity (perceived or otherwise) would help transgender or gender-variant individuals feel more welcomed. I am grateful to have had professors and curriculum that not only opened my eyes to a new way of looking at the world, but also a new way of looking at and understanding myself. It is my hope that Manchester College continues its progressive work toward being inclusive of all its students, and of truly celebrating diversity.

*Kristopher currently resides in Indianapolis, Indiana. He welcomes dialogue sparked from his essay, and is available by email on file at the BMC office.*

# Campus Organizing

Different campuses foster different degrees of comfortableness for students and “out-ness” of supportive faculty and staff. Some faculty/staff even have concerns about job security regarding their personal, affirming beliefs towards GLBT people because of prejudiced constituencies. Some college campuses have GLBT groups and others do not. Those who have the privilege to be part of a GLBT group often have had similar struggles and joys, such as effective social actions and amusing social diversions.

Here is a list of some activities and ideas different groups have done:

- Start a listserv
- Create a quilt
- Attend a sporting event
- Go to a museum together
- Do a Pride/awareness week (a week of fun LGBT activities and awareness raising)
- National Day of Silence (April)
- Pride month (June)
- National Coming Out Day (October 11)
- Host a seasonal party (Christmas tree decoration swap, Monster Mash, etc.)
- Volunteer as a group at a local homeless shelter, a public television telethon, school service project, or at another charity event
- Weekly coffee/tea hours
- Film festivals
- Theater/film outings
- Attend a Mennonite Relief Sale
- Go to an amusement park or a city park
- Play readings or performances (e.g., *The Laramie Project*, *Angels in America*)
- Gay proms and dances
- National gatherings (e.g., BMC Conventions/retreats, NGLTF’s Creating Change, Midwest BLGTA college conference)
- Educational forums on sexual issues (e.g., ex-gay therapy, how to be a supportive ally, anti-hate, diversity)
- Drag shows
- Discussion groups
- Rainbow Day (a day when everyone wears rainbow colors)
- Coffeehouses where people celebrate GLBT poets, writers and musicians
- Potluck (with casserole and ice cream, perhaps)
- Use class papers, presentation, and speeches as a chance to educate yourself and others about LGBT issues
- Write an opinion piece for your school paper
- Suggest books and magazines to your library that have good information for LGBT people and allies.

## **Documents from Brethren and Mennonite College/University groups**

Diversity exists in the different ways groups function. Some have formal constitutions while others have shorter mission statements. The following writings may be helpful for those who would like to start a GLBT campus group. They are the history of the LGBT group at *Manchester College* (a Brethren college); the successful proposal and mission of Prism and purpose of Advocates at *Goshen College* (a Mennonite college); the mission statement of Alternate Ways of Loving (AWOL) at *Juniata College* (a Brethren college); the Allies constitution of *Elizabethtown College* (a Brethren college); the Rainbow Alliance constitution from the *University of La Verne* (a Brethren college); and the mission statement of A Safe Place at *Eastern Mennonite University*.

*The BMC staff is available to help individuals interested in starting a group or for other resources and ideas. Please feel free to contact them for assistance.*

## **The Beginnings of United Sexualities at Manchester College, Fall 1997- Fall 1998**

*By Dean J. Johnson*

As a Resident Assistant for three years and a Hall Director in my second year it was not uncommon for students, faculty or staff members to come out to me. A student who I had had very little contact asked if he could speak to me. We set up a meeting time. When I met with him, he came out to me. When I asked why he had approached me the student said it was because he had come out to a couple of faculty and staff members and they told him he needed to talk with me. He said that I was supposed to have the best insight about the gay community on campus and could point him to safe people to talk with and maybe befriend. After talking with this student I was a little taken a back and afraid. By this point in 1997 it was clear that my spouse and I were leaving campus at the end of the academic year to pursue further degree work. The question in my mind was, "What is going to happen with students after my spouse and I leave campus?" After talking with several colleagues, students, faculty and administrators it was decided that a GLBT allies group needed to be put into place. The idea behind the group was to create a safe community to which the GLBT students could turn. My thoughts were that the allies group could not only be a safe place for GLBT students but could also be an advocacy group for the GLBT community, including GLBT employees, at Manchester College.

Several things were going to have to happen for United Sexualities to be successful. The first matter of importance was for the group to learn who were and were not supportive of GLBT community campus wide. Second the group was going to have to be a student group which was operated by students for the GLBT community. Third, the group was going to have to work hard to establish itself as a campus funded group, which meant getting support from student government and student budget board. The forth and final thing of importance was if the group was going to be more than a support group, it needed to be active in community education and events.

I knew many in the GLBT community and those on campus who were supportive. I talked with them about the group. I then established an off campus meeting spot for the groups first meeting. The only way to know where the meeting was being held was to contact me. The hope of the secrecy was to calm the nervousness around having an open meeting. It was agreed meetings would be held off campus until things felt safer on campus. After securing a meeting place I hung posters around campus. The posters said, "Come out, come out wherever you are." The meeting time was posted along with information about how to contact me. It was important that appropriate campus administrators knew what was happening. Keeping the campus administrators informed was a way of keeping things calm. I did not let them know as a way of asking for permission. Instead, I kept the administrators informed so they would not be caught off guard. Although most of the administrators I talked with were supportive, there was no guarantee of how they would react to public pressures. Fortunately, the president of MC was supportive and maintained an attitude of academic integrity and respect for diversity.

Along with placing posters around campus, I was also able to have the information placed on the electronic bulletin board. Placing the ad on the electron bulletin board made it so everyone logging onto their computer were able to see the message. What was helpful about the e-board was that the messages could not be torn down. Many of the campus fliers came up missing. The e-board insured publicity.

The time for the first meeting arrived. About 20 people including faculty, staff and students came to the meeting. It was decided that there was a need for a larger campus group. We discussed some ideas for the year. Out of the initial meeting came the ideas for a United Sexualities listserv, a candle light vigil for National Coming Out Day, and a decision to move forward with student group status.

I arranged through the campus computing department a listserv. I was then given the tools to add and delete persons from a listserv thus making it confidential. After advertising the listserv, we had established a 50 person list which included administrators, faculty, staff and students. The purpose of the listserv was to communicate between meetings and to give current information about events happening around campus.

A small group organized the campus vigil for National Coming Out Day. The vigil was entitled,

“For Those Who Can’t.” It was to be held in honor of those who were scared or in danger if they came out. The advertisement for the vigil created a campus disturbance. National Coming Out Day was just after MC’s homecoming and signs and posters would be seen by alumni and parents. The office of the president received phone calls and threats to pull funding. The organizers prepared for a counter protest by conservative Christians from on and off campus. Signs and posters for the vigil were repeatedly torn down and replaced with scripture posters. In response to the scriptures, United Sexualities members sidewalk chalked around campus diversity and justice sayings. The event was moved from in front of the chapel to in front of an academic building due to pressure being felt by the chapel staff. To my surprise the vigil was the largest I had seen in my six years at MC. Over 80 people came out in support. No counter protest happened. It was the group’s first event and it was an overwhelming success.

Over the next few months, individuals worked on establishing the group’s constitution and place in student funding. The key to the group’s success in this area required utilizing people who knew the systems and who had worked on the funding committees to write the constitution. The group was eventually funded with student funds for the following academic year.

While some were working on a group structure, others were working on establishing educational and advocacy channels. One thing put into place was a Safe Zone program. Safe Zone is a national program which works at educating people to be effective allies. I worked with students and a network of people from other campuses to establish a resource guide and training packet. We then held a two hour training to create consistency in knowledge and security in confidentiality. Individuals taking the training were put into role plays and given a resource packet. After completing the training they were given a sticker to hang on their office or residence hall room door showing they were safe people to talk to.

While working with United Sexualities I happened to read Mel White’s book *Stranger at the Gate: Being Gay and Christian in America*. Reverend White was a ghost writer for Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. He was well established in the Contemporary Christian televangelist communities. After trying to be “cured” and denying his sexual orientation for several decades he came out in the 1980’s. Reverend White was then banished from his community and lost many of his friends. After reading his story I inquired with him about campus visits. After some conversation with the Manchester College Peace Studies Institute, the Manchester Church of the Brethren and United Sexualities I was able to secure Reverend White’s appearance at Manchester College and the Manchester Church of the Brethren in the fall of 1998. White’s appearance did not come without its controversy. In fact, Manchester College and Manchester Church of the Brethren are still feeling the effects of Reverend White’s visit.

Within a year, United Sexualities at Manchester College became a fully functional allies and advocacy group. We had accomplished what we initially set out to do: create a safer space for the GLBT community at Manchester College. We raised awareness and most of all we became a presence on the campus. Manchester did not become free of hatred or bigotry toward GLBT individuals and it is still not free of that hatred. However, Manchester is no longer in the closet. It has maintained its integrity as an academic institution. Manchester is a place where students come to grow and learn about themselves and others. Due in part to the existence of United Sexualities, students now come to Manchester and leave Manchester more aware that there are GLBT persons in the community.

## **Advocates Purpose at Goshen College**

*To work at making GC a safe and welcoming place for all people,  
regardless of sexual orientation.*

## **Prism Proposal and Mission at Goshen College**

*A Proposal*

*Submitted by a group of lesbian, gay and bisexual students at Goshen College*

*26 March 2000*

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The following information came directly from the group of students currently meeting as the LBGA. This group is currently meeting on campus weekly. LBGA is not considered a club, meaning that the group is not officially recognized by Goshen College, cannot use the communicator directly to share information regarding meetings and does not receive club money. The LBGA is separate from the Advocates, who have been highly visible and political in their approach to issues of inclusivity and justice for all students. We appreciate the work they have done and believe that the role they have taken is essential within the Goshen College community. We also feel that having a support/discussion group for lesbian, bisexual and gay students on this campus is necessary. These two groups are not mutually exclusive, but are both fundamental in creating a safe, aware and actively thinking campus community.

The following is a proposal for creating a group called Prism that would be an active member of campus. This group, similar to the survivors of sexual assault support group that is currently meeting, would have the specific mission of support and discussion for lesbian, gay and bisexual students. This proposal outlines the mission and purpose of Prism and three points we feel are essential to creating a group such as this on campus.

### **MISSION AND PURPOSE:**

Prism is a discussion and support group for lesbian, bisexual and gay students on campus. Prism seeks to create a safe environment to provide emotional support, to validate our experiences as gay, lesbian and bisexual students and to discuss issues relevant to us, as people of faith. We recognize that our sexual identity, which is different from sexual activity, is bound to our personal and spiritual identities.

Within Goshen College's commitment to community building we feel that it is important for lesbian, bisexual and gay students have a safe space to interact in faith and caring. The college years are a crucial time for growing spiritually, emotionally and intellectually. It is therefore important for lesbian, bisexual and gay students to not feel isolated and to have the emotional support that society is more than hesitant to offer. We feel that Prism is an essential part of the Goshen College community, just as ISC, GSWA, BSU and LSU [other minority campus clubs] are important in their support and specific nature.

This support group provides a space for students of gay, lesbian and bisexual orientation to be "real," not having to worry about who does and doesn't know, and who will be potentially hurtful in that knowledge. Gay, lesbian and bisexual students do not come to meetings for answers, but come to help each other actively struggle with the questions. According to one member, meetings involve "a lot of laughter and a bunch of neat people who come together to talk, not that it is always about our sexuality (an important issue, nonetheless), and it is also a place where gay/bisexual students can be comfortable and supportive about who they are and what they are going through."

### **WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT:**

- *Public acknowledgment from Goshen College.*

This includes a contact person (faculty sponsor), preferably someone with counseling skills, who is more involved in the central campus community. This also includes listing in college publications available to students such as the orientation packet, the sexuality packet and periodic reminder announcements in the communicator that this group is available to students who need this kind of support group. Without public acknowledgment and information it is easy for harmful stereotypes of the group's purpose to be created. It is important for this group to have a specific voice so that it is not misunderstood by the wider campus and so that the campus does not perceive any one student's actions or statements to be representative of the group as a whole.

- *Direct use of the campus communicator.*

Because of specific events of defacement, harassment and written abuse in the history of Goshen College, we feel that the use of the campus communicator is essential. It is a safe way to communicate with the rest of the campus community, unlike posters which can be, and have been, torn and defaced in inappropriate and abusive ways.

- *Security, which in this case means anonymity.*

Until gay, lesbian and bisexual students are not fearful of hateful, hurtful and ignorant responses from students, faculty and administration, it is important to have this space of anonymity and safety in order to actively deal with self-identity in a healthy manner. In order to assure that this group is meeting the needs of students while continuing to fit within the Goshen College standards and the Mennonite Confession of Faith there should be a time for assessment at the end of the next academic year. This will be a time for the members of Prism to reflect on their experiences as a group throughout the year. Both SDD and Prism should use this time of reflection and assessment to make sure that the goals set in place by this proposal were met. This assessment will seek to determine whether or not this has been a successful venture and whether it adequately meets the needs of members of Prism and of Goshen College.

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## **Allies Constitution at Elizabethtown College:**

### *The Allies Constitution*

#### Preamble:

As we become more aware of the vast nature of the human experience, we also become aware of the fundamental nature of the human experience. Life goes on and we continue to learn more and more about how we fit into society, and in doing so, find comfort in our individual sexuality, and also in the joy and comfort of our common humanity. As we acknowledge the inherent basic rights of all people, we realize the basic human rights granted to each person. As we do so, we realize that these rights have not always been granted for each and every person due to numerous prejudices existing in society. It is to these basic human rights, individuality of one's sexuality and the right to express one's innate nature of being that we dedicate this constitution.

#### Article 1 - Group Name

The name of this organization shall be the Elizabethtown Allies, hereinafter referred to as Allies.

#### Article 2 - Purpose and Goals

The group shall strive in all reasonable and deliberate ways to achieve the following purposes and goals:

1. To provide an environment in which gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and supportive individuals can freely assemble in order to provide mutual support and

- to address the campus on pertinent issues.
- 2. To develop educational programs and events in order to work toward the elimination of myths, misconceptions and stereotypes facing gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered individuals in today's society.
- 3. To work for the implementation and enforcement of College policies guaranteeing the right against discrimination based on sexual orientation.
- 4. To work for unity and equality among the members of the campus community and community-at-large regardless of race, religion, sex, creed, sexual orientation, national origin, age, handicap, gender, or ancestry.
- 5. To work for the right for all individuals to be able to express their sexual orientation equally.
- 6. To work for providing education pertaining to and maintaining physical, mental and sexually healthy behaviors.
- 7. To function as a supportive education resource for the community in its entirety.

### Article 3 - Membership

- 1. Membership shall be granted to any undergraduate student, alumni, faculty or College staff member, any other paid or volunteer worker associated with the College, or any friend or family of the above persons who support the purposes and goals set forth in this constitution.
- 2. Allies shall not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, sex, creed, sexual orientation, national origin, age, handicap, gender, or ancestry when establishing membership.
- 3. Voting privileges shall be granted to those who have attended at least half of the meetings each semester.
- 4. It is hereby requested that each member take an oath of confidentiality as to the proceedings of each meeting. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter discussed and the very nature of the organization, it is also requested that the members of Allies not be discussed unless with another member.

### Article 4 - Offices of the Organization

- 1. The offices of this organization shall consist of four elected positions. These executive board offices shall include President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer.
- 2. Qualifications for Office
  - A. To be an elected officer, the candidate must be a student in good standing and be currently enrolled at Elizabethtown College. Enrollment must be continued for the duration of the office. All candidates must also have voting member status in the group.
  - B. No one person may hold more than one elected office at one time.
- 3. Description and Duties of the Elected Officers
  - A. President
    - a. Coordinates all functions and activities of Allies.
    - b. Maintains communication with and between all members.
    - c. Chairs all meetings, unless having otherwise delegated this responsibility.
    - d. Oversees and ensures the completion of all duties of the officers as described in this section.
    - e. Oversees and authorizes the distribution of funds.
  - B. Vice-President
    - a. Assist the president as delegated or requested.

- b. Assume the duties and authorities of the President in case of absence, resignation, or impeachment.
- c. Oversee public relations of Allies in association with the President.
- C. Secretary
  - a. Maintain proper and accurate records of meetings, including attendance and agenda.
  - b. Notify each member of the up and coming special events, as well as regular meetings.
  - c. Give weekly reports to all members of Allies
- D. Treasurer
  - a. Maintain an accurate record of the funds allocated to Allies.
  - b. Supervise all spending decisions, after conferring with the president.
  - c. Give weekly updates to the executive board of Allies regarding funding status.

Article 5-Amendments to the Allies Constitution

1. Adoption of this Constitution will require two-thirds majority vote of the voting membership present. The Constitution shall become effective immediately upon acceptance.
2. Amendments to the Constitution may be proposed by any member of Allies during any formal meeting of the general membership.
  - A. The general membership, upon receipt of the amendment, shall discuss its merit, and then vote on the amendment. A three-fourths majority vote is required for adoption.
  - B. Amendments shall become effective immediately upon acceptance.

**Mission Statement at A Safe Place at Eastern Mennonite University**

"Our mission is to create safe space on the Eastern Mennonite University campus to discuss issues of sexuality. We understand sexuality to include gender roles, relationship building, communication, self-esteem issues, identity, orientation, and love."

**The Mission Statement of Alternative Ways of Loving (AWOL) at Juniata College:**

"The purpose of this organization shall be to serve as a social and activist student club for bisexuals, lesbians, gay people, queer people, transgender people, heterosexual allies, and anyone questioning their sexuality. We work together to make Juniata a more open and safe community by increasing awareness and acceptance of LGBTQA people and educating the campus community homophobia and biphobia. We sponsor activities and programs on campus which provide opportunities for members of the LGBTQA community and their allies to meet with each other as well as promote safer sexual practices."

## **Rainbow Alliance Constitution at the University of La Verne**

### **Title I. NAME**

Article 1. The name of this organization shall be the Rainbow Alliance.

### **Title II. MISSION STATEMENT**

Article 1. The purpose of Rainbow Alliance is to encourage individuality and sensitivity towards human sexuality through maintaining confidentiality, awareness and support. The foundation of the Rainbow Alliance is freedom, love and encouragement to all who have an open mind and a desire to understand and accept differences as a natural part of humanity.

### **Title III. GOALS**

Article 1. The goals of this organization are as follows: (see Appendix A)

1. Awareness towards GLBTA issues.
2. Unity.
3. Service.
4. Education.
5. Advocacy

### **Title IV. MEMBERSHIP**

Article 1. Qualifications

Section A. Rainbow Alliance requires membership of twelve traditional undergraduate students of the University of La Verne for "official" club recognition.

Section B. Any individual, traditional or non-traditional (CAPA) undergraduate student, masters or doctoral students, campus faculty or staff member may become a member of the Rainbow Alliance.

Section C. Membership will not be limited in size or number but will be subject to the discretion of active members.

Section D. Attendance is mandatory for officers but will be subject to the discretion of non-officers.

Section E. Members are encouraged to strive toward the member expectations that are decided by the Executive Cabinet members.

Section F. All members are eligible to vote.

### **Title V. A. ELECTIONS**

Article 1. Elections shall take place in the Spring semester.

Article 2. The election(s) shall be by ballot and shall be determined by majority vote (51%).

Article 3. Nominees can be nominated by member or self nomination.

Article 4. Each candidate will be responsible for making a personal statement of qualifications. No other member may make statements for them.

### **Title V. B. SPECIAL ELECTIONS**

Article 1. If any office shall become vacant, the president will order an election to the office at the earliest possible date.

Article 2. If the office of the president becomes vacant, the vice president will become president and an election will be held for a new vice president.

Article 3. If and only if the current president is not fulfilling his/her duties, the members have the power to impeach the president and elect a new president by 2/3 majority vote.

### **Title V. C. EXECUTIVE CABINET MEMBER QUALIFICATION**

Article 1. Only full time students of the University of La Verne are eligible to hold offices.

Article 2. All Cabinet members must meet and maintain a 2.0 GPA.

**Title VI. A. EXECUTIVE CABINET**

Article 1. The officers of this organization shall be the President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.

Article 2. Officers shall serve a term of no less than 1 year.

Article 3. Elections shall take place at the beginning of Spring semester.

**Title VI. B. DUTIES OF EXECUTIVE CABINET MEMBERS**

Article 1. The President shall:

1. Be a full time undergraduate at the University of La Verne.
2. Have some form of connection and genuine sensitivity towards GLBT issues.
3. Maintain regular attendance at all official meetings.
4. Be the organization's spokesperson to the public.
5. Carry out the order of business of official meetings.
6. Call emergency meetings when necessary.
7. Keep updated records of his/her term(s).
8. Shall attend a minimum of three Leadership topic meetings per year.

Article 2. The Vice President shall:

1. Be a full time undergraduate at the University of La Verne.
2. Have some form of connection and genuine sensitivity towards GLBT issues.
3. Maintain regular attendance at all official meetings.
4. Serve as Program Coordinator.
5. Be *pro tempore*, assume the duties of an absent president.
6. Perform duties delegated by the president.
7. Keep updated records of his/her term.
8. Shall attend a minimum of three Leadership topic meetings per year.

Article 3. The Secretary shall:

1. Be a full time undergraduate at the University of La Verne.
2. Have some form of connection and genuine sensitivity towards GLBTA issues.
3. Maintain regular attendance at all official meetings.
4. Maintain accurate record of all official meetings prepare and distribute agendas and minutes.  
Subsection A. The Minutes shall be distributed no later than six working days after the preceding official meeting, unless stated otherwise.
5. Maintain an accurate log of membership and officer attendance.
6. Serve as official correspondent and shall maintain all incoming and outgoing communication records.
7. Keep updated records of his/her term.
8. Shall attend a minimum of three Leadership topic meetings per year.

Article 4. The Treasurer shall:

1. Be a full time undergraduate at the University of La Verne.
2. Have some form of connection and genuine sensitivity towards GLBT issues.
3. Maintain regular attendance at all official meetings.
4. Provide written monthly statements of all transactions.
5. Fill out all paperwork regarding budget requests and check signing.
6. Provide fundraising ideas.
7. Keep updated records of his/her term.
8. Shall attend a minimum of three Leadership topic meetings per year.

**Title VII. ADVISOR QUALIFICATIONS**

Article 1. The advisor(s) shall be a full time faculty or staff member of the University of La Verne.

Article 2. The advisor's role shall be to offer help to the students of the organization when necessary, in such areas as leadership, organization and social skills.

Article 3. The advisor(s) will enforce the constitution and by-laws of the organization.

Article 4. The advisor(s) shall make an honest effort to make general meetings, officer's meetings, events and forums.

Article 5. The advisor(s) shall act as representative to the organization to staff, faculty, and administration when needed or appropriate.

Article 6. The advisor(s) shall manage paperwork that comes to the advisor and distribute it as necessary.

Article 7. The advisor(s) signs all official paperwork and requests.

### **Title VIII. MEETINGS**

Article 1. The organization shall have at least two general meetings per month. The members shall decide the day, hour and location at the first meeting of the semester.

Article 2. The executive cabinet shall meet as needed but minimally once a month in addition to the general meetings.

Article 3. Meetings shall be run observing Robert's Rules of Order.

Article 4. An emergency meeting will require the presence of the executive cabinet, with the chairperson casting any tie breaking vote.

Subsection A. The result of this meeting shall be made available at the next general meeting.

Subsection B. All decisions will be supported by the organization.

### **Title IX. FUNDS**

Article 1. All university funds will be used only for functions that the money was specified for.

Article 2. Receipts will be kept for all monies spent.

### **Title X. ETHICS**

Article 1. Each member is expected to support the ruling of the organization.

Article 2. Each member shall be equal in responsibility and integrity.

Article 3. Each member is accountable for his/her own behavior.

Article 4. Each member is expected to contribute his or her time to the organization.

Article 5. Dependability, consideration and honesty are qualities each member should develop within himself/herself.

Article 6. Any official organization interaction should not reflect personally on any individual member.

### **Title XI. ANTI-HAZING STATEMENT**

Article 1. Any action taken or situation created intentionally whether on or off campus, to produce mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, harassment or ridicule will not be tolerated. Such activities as situations include, but are not limited to, the creation of excessive fatigue; physical or psychological shock; wearing publicity apparel which is conspicuous and not normally in good taste; engaging in public stunts and jokes; morally degrading or humiliating games and activities; late night sessions which interfere with scholastic activities; and any other activities which are not consistent with the regulations and policies of the educational institution.

### **Title XII. METHODS OF AMENDMENT**

Article 1. Amendments to the constitution must be submitted in writing one week prior to voting.

Article 2. Voting on any amendments must be at a regularly scheduled meeting.

Article 3. Passage of any amendment shall require a 2/3 majority vote of members.

### **CONSTITUTION EXTRAS:**

Article 1. Rainbow Alliance semester log is the responsibility of the cabinet and is held by the advisor(s) at the end of each semester. It should be a reflection of each semester's accounts for that year including officer term logs, photos and important news of that time pertaining to GLBTA issues. Its purpose is to be a foundation for future generations of Rainbow Alliance members to reflect upon and learn from its predecessors.

Article 2. Cabinet officers must alternate responsibility for attending club meetings where representation is necessary for club funding, recognition and other necessities.

**Appendix A:** Elaboration of Rainbow Alliance Goals: We hope the following goals will help create and promote a campus atmosphere of acceptance and understanding of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) individuals.

1. **Education/Awareness:** Educating ourselves and the ULV community regarding issues of importance to GLBT community. This includes, but is not limited to, the coming-out-process, civil rights issues (such as hate crimes, marriage laws, discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere,

- sodomy laws, etc.), health issues, military policies, media representation, etc.
2. **Unity:** A resolve to stay united in our efforts to create a safer environment for GLBT persons here at the ULV campus and in our surrounding communities.
  3. **Service:** We will seek to provide services to the local GLBT community, such as information on safe sex practices, GLBT events, health/mental health services, GLBT scholarship resources, etc.
  4. **Advocacy:** Advocating for GLBT members of the ULV community. This includes creating forums for discussion and taking a stand when issues of discrimination or prejudice are brought to our attention, both on and off campus.

### **Other Resources for Campus Organizing and Campus Resources:**

Alternate Ways of Loving at Juniata College: <http://clubs.juniata.edu/awol/>

Campus Pride: [www.campuspride.net/](http://www.campuspride.net/).

Gay at Messiah College: [www.gayatmessiah.org/](http://www.gayatmessiah.org/).

Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). [www.glsen.org/](http://www.glsen.org/).

The Gay Straight Alliance Network. *Take It Back: A Manual for Fighting Slurs on Campus*  
<http://www.gsanetwork.org/takeitback/>

Gerth, J. (1999). Queer History at Earlham College.  
[www.earlham.edu/~spectrum/queerhistory.html](http://www.earlham.edu/~spectrum/queerhistory.html).

GLOW at the University of Waterloo: [www.glow.uwaterloo.ca/](http://www.glow.uwaterloo.ca/)

Kaleidoscope is a program of Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests to serve high school and college aged youth and young adults. K-Scope is a listserv for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender questioning and allied people on peace church campuses, those in high school, young people in general, and interested individuals. [groups.yahoo.com/group/K-Scope/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/K-Scope/),  
[kaleidoscope@bmclgbt.org](mailto:kaleidoscope@bmclgbt.org)

Lambda Legal: Getting Down to Basics: Tools to Support LGBTQ Youth in Care.  
[www.lambdalegal.org/take-action/tool-kits/getting-down-to-basics/](http://www.lambdalegal.org/take-action/tool-kits/getting-down-to-basics/) .

The National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Resources in Higher Education.  
[www.lgbtcampus.org/](http://www.lgbtcampus.org/).

The National Gay & Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF). (1996). *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Campus Organizing: A Comprehensive Manual*.  
[www.thetaskforce.org/reslibrary/list.cfm?pubTypeID=2#pub19](http://www.thetaskforce.org/reslibrary/list.cfm?pubTypeID=2#pub19)

Safe Schools Coalition - [www.safeschoolscoalition.org/](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/)

United Sexualities at Manchester College:  
[www.manchester.edu/OSD/Activity/Organizations/SpecialInterestGroup/US/index.html](http://www.manchester.edu/OSD/Activity/Organizations/SpecialInterestGroup/US/index.html)

# **Interrelated Social Justice Issues**

*How is heterosexism like sexism, and poverty like racism, and ableism like ageism? They are all words used for the experience when someone uses a difference to justify an advantage over someone else's difference. Some people experience multiple forms of discrimination and the discriminations interrelate. If people care about discrimination regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, this writer believes they ought to care about all manifestations of discriminating injustice. As Martin Luther King Jr. noted, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."*

*The following articles are offered from Lisa Ann Pierce and Ann Noffsinger Anderson. Lisa has been Brethren and is now a participant of St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship. She is also an active leader with the organization Women Against Military Madness (WAMM). Ann is a retired teacher and speech therapist, but is an active grandmother and has been an activist within the Church of the Brethren.*

## **To Become Human Again**

*By Lisa Ann Pierce*

I learned early in life about the concrete connections between racism, sexism, and heterosexism. I learned about these connections when my uncles and cousins exchanged jokes about Mexican immigrants, women's anatomy, and the effeminate men who lived together down the road. As a child, I could not have articulated the nuances of discrimination and power that were embodied in their jokes and laughter, but I deeply understood one important message about the targets of the jokes: If they're not safe, I'm not safe.

As a young child only beginning to come to awareness of my lesbianism, I did not yet know that there were others who felt like me—that I was a member of a larger oppressed community. But I sensed a commonality of sorts with people treated as "other" by members of my family. Casual linkages in crude language were the only clues I needed to recognize this commonality, which I now think of as dehumanization. Not until I was a young adult would I come to read Audre Lorde's "There is No Hierarchy of Oppressions." Lorde's writing added the definitions I needed to make meaning of the connections I had experienced.

As a Black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, poet, mother of two including one boy and a member of an interracial couple, I usually find myself part of some group in which the majority defines me as deviant, difficult, inferior or just plain "wrong." From my membership in all of these groups I have learned that oppression and the intolerance of difference come in all shapes and sizes and colors and sexualities; and that among those of us who share the goals of liberation and a workable future for our children, there can be no hierarchies of oppression. I have learned that sexism (a belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over all others and thereby its right to dominance) and heterosexism (a belief in the inherent superiority of one pattern of loving over all others and thereby its right to dominance) both arise from the same source as racism—a belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby its right to dominance ("There is no hierarchy of oppressions," by Audre Lorde, *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin*, 14:1983, 3-4).

If racism comes from the same source as sexism and heterosexism, then racism really must matter to me as a white, lesbian woman. With the help of mentor-friends and writers like Audre Lorde, Suzanne Pharr, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I have come to realize that there are significant interrelationships between racism, sexism, militarism, poverty, and heterosexism. Over the years, my understanding of the complexity of these relationships has begun to grow, but a simple truth still reverberates: What

dehumanizes others dehumanizes me.

And so I come to the occasion for this article, which can be articulated simply in the following question: Why should those who are concerned about justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people also care about racism, sexism, poverty, and militarism? Because what dehumanizes others dehumanizes each of us.

Consider this short exploration of some of the connections between racism, sexism, poverty, militarism, and heterosexism:

1. The LGBT community is more than a market share and, contrary to our portrayal in the dominant media, we are not all white and affluent. There are women, people of color, and poor people who are also gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender. The issues of sexism, racism, and poverty intersect directly in their lives and in the lives of the people who love them.
2. As Suzanne Pharr has noted, homophobia is a tool of sexism. Homophobic slurs are used to force compliance with traditional gender roles. Think of the circumstances in which the words “dyke” and “fag” are used. They are usually applied to people—regardless of sexual orientation—who are not feminine or masculine “enough.” Homophobia is used to enforce gender roles that privilege men and oppress women.
3. Racism and sexism relate closely to poverty, since people of color and women are disproportionately represented among the poor. Employment, housing, and other forms of economic discrimination enforce social roles that privilege white men and oppress others.
4. Militarism is the orientation of a society’s resources toward violence, usually for the sake of enriching and empowering the elite. Militarism drains away resources for human services, stripping away services for the most vulnerable in our society: the poor, the children, and the old. Conveniently, this drives more young people to seek opportunity in the armed services, where a disproportionately white officer corps directs the enlisted, among whom people of color and the poor are over-represented. They are sent to do battle at home (e.g. the 1992 Los Angeles riots) and overseas against other people who are most often also poor people of color. The military is used to enforce international roles in a political and economic order that privileges the global North and oppresses the global South.
5. War relies on the dehumanization of the enemy and the eroticization of violence. Racism, sexism, and homophobia are tools of aggression in wartime. Ask any war veteran what racist slurs they learned in the military and you can probably make a good guess about what conflicts they fought. Likewise, ask women war veterans about their experience of sexual harassment and/or rape. Women, however, are not the only targets of rape, and I suspect there is a strong relationship between the extraordinary homophobia of the armed forces and the historical use of rape by the victors of war.
6. The dehumanization of war also happens within a warring nation’s boundaries. As war powers are increased, civil liberties decrease. Immigrants and people of color are targeted as potential “enemies” (e.g. the Japanese detention camps of World War II, the secretive detention of Arab Americans following September 11, 2001). Law enforcement—already prone to “profiling” people of color—is further empowered and rights of due process are limited. Communities traditionally targeted by law enforcement are made more vulnerable—especially people of color. Nationalism invades the public sphere and conformity of thought and politics is rewarded, if not enforced (e.g. McCarthy-era extortion of LGBT people).

7. If nothing else moves you to believe that racism, sexism, poverty, and militarism are concerns for the LGBT community, consider this: The people who speak, act, and organize against LGBT people also speak, act, and organize against people of color, poor people, and women who step out of traditional roles.

For example:

- Right-wing politicians have targeted “welfare queens” and “degenerates,” trumpeting “family values” while systematically dismantling the social safety nets that protect families.
- Jerry Falwell blamed whole groups of people for the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001: “pagans,” “abortionists,” “feminists,” and “gays and lesbians.”
- The Nazis of Adolf Hitler’s Germany made camps for Jews, Roma, the disabled, gay men, and the “antisocial,” including lesbians.
- People driven by fear and hatred attacked James Bird, Matthew Shepherd, Brandon Teena, and thousands of other victims of modern-day hate crimes based on gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, ability, or socio-economic class.
- Neither neo-Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan, nor the average unorganized bigot draw boundaries around their hatred. In words and in deed, they attack African Americans, Jews, LGBT people, women, the disabled, and others.

So if hatred can be this inclusive, shouldn’t also our work for justice and love be inclusive? As it has been said, none are free as long as some are oppressed. This is a basic reality of human existence: When we dehumanize others, we also dehumanize ourselves. When we stand by while others are dehumanized and do nothing, we are likewise dehumanized.

The truth is that we need one another. We have so much to learn from one another about discrimination and the struggle for justice. But solidarity does not come easy. Many of us in the LGBT community were raised with unearned privileges granted by our race, sex, or socioeconomic class. We are often unaware of how privileged we are. For example, we do not realize how we sometimes leverage the privilege of our race or sex against the oppression of our sexual orientation. (It is, after all, easier to bear the risk of coming out when we are not also bearing the risks inherent in racism, sexism, and poverty. When we do trade our white/male privilege or affluence, sometimes we do not realize the terrible toll this takes on women and people of color in our community, who are cast invisible and irrelevant by our political choices.) Likewise, we are prone to viewing economic freedom as true freedom, so we tend to believe that having products marketed to us is the same thing as being equal. Obviously, this is a freedom that is not equally accessible to all.

So how do we begin to build solidarity around issues of heterosexism, racism, sexism, poverty, and militarism? Here are a few modest suggestions:

Those of us who are privileged in a racist, sexist society need to learn to listen to others.

We need to acknowledge the pain and damage that we cause when we perpetuate racism, sexism, poverty, and militarism.

We need to live by the words of Jewelle Gomez: “Repeat after me: We are different. We are the same.” Recognizing our similarities offers a foundation for our work together; recognizing our differences leaves room for our individual strengths and experiences to make a difference.

And—most difficult of all—we need to move to new tables where there is room for everyone, including people whose agenda extend beyond marriage rights, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” and employment non-discrimination to include concerns about such topics as welfare, police brutality, immigrant rights, and affordable housing. Only once we engage this difficult dialog can we begin to realize a true, shared freedom. Only when “their” agenda becomes “our” agenda can we begin to realize justice together. This is our opportunity, as dehumanized people, to become human again.

## **Multiple Discriminations in a Brethren Woman's Life**

*By Ann Noffsinger Anderson*

"Queer," "nigger," and "retard" are too frequently used slang terms for three diverse groups of human beings that are used to "put down" classmates in high schools today. I heard them used as I walked in the halls of an inner city high school where I taught. Uncomplimentary labels are not only heard in high schools but sprinkle conversations of many adults as well. Name-calling and disparaging gestures are hurtful to their recipients and extremely unkind to the population they represent.

After years of discrimination, Afro Americans and disabled people now have some laws, which protect and give them more opportunities but many feel that they are too little, too late. In addition, many gays and lesbians feel that they have very little, if any, legal protection. Discrimination, in a country founded and constantly contributed to by an extremely diverse population, continues to be widespread.

My involvement with diversity began in the 1940's when my father, a member of the Church of the Brethren, became the principal of a school that was transformed from being nearly all white to being nearly all black within a few years. This was revolutionary! It had never happened before. Blacks had always stayed in "their neighborhoods" and swam in their swimming pools. The turmoil of that shift in population was punctuated with more than one incident of his being at the wrong end of a weapon wielded by whites. They did not want Negroes for neighbors. They were angry! I suspect that he was probably a scapegoat. Fortunately, he mediated his way to safety and no harm was ever done to him. Needless to say, those incidents were very powerful learning experiences for me when I was a schoolgirl.

At about the same time our church voted to build a new building in another neighborhood. The issue of whether to stay integrated or leave was hotly debated and my father was on the side of staying. The original building was close to "his" school. The irony of that decision was that in a very short time the new neighborhood was also integrated and still is. The membership of the congregation has decreased markedly and that congregation struggles for survival while striving to creatively minister in new ways.

After grade school, racial discrimination still encroached my life in college. As a college student, I remember waiting all afternoon for lunch once because one person in our party was black. The group decided to wait as long as it took.

In the 60's, my husband and I were involved with Brethren Action Movement. The fellowship of that group motivated us to purchase a home in an integrated neighborhood and send our daughters to the nearby school. Many of our family members and close friends told us how foolish we were for doing this. Seven years later after several attempted break-ins and my husband being held at gunpoint in our front yard we eventually sold that house for the same amount that we had paid for it. That was in a period of time when property values in suburbia were rapidly increasing and so the cost of the experience was high, but I wouldn't do it differently if I could.

I eventually became a speech therapist in the school system from which both parents retired and our daughters attended. It was miraculous considering that I had numerous conversations with school board members regarding what became court ordered faculty and student desegregation. The board member with whom I spoke campaigned vociferously against busing and I felt that busing was the only way to do what realtors and home buyers wouldn't do so that all races had equal education in their neighborhood schools.

I also started teaching multi-handicapped students exclusively. While they now have the right to a free, appropriate education, their job and social options continue to be limited. More than one of my students experienced lack of understanding by members of churches that they tried to attend and were even told that the church "couldn't meet their needs." One of my young adult multi-handicapped students did so well at a volunteer job at a children's hospital that his coworkers offered to take pay cuts so that he could be hired permanently. In spite of all the persuasive tactic we used, and there were many, he was never hired.

As a professional woman in the 70's, I was once told by a school principal that he'd open the home economics room so that I could shorten my skirt. Another time he wrote my age all over my paycheck because he wanted me to know that he knew my age. When I questioned him about this, he said

that he now knew that I was older than he. "Big deal," I thought. Harassment of females in the workplace was alive and well.

When I learned at the Baltimore Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in 2001 that four people I have known personally had their ordination taken away, I was livid. "What right do we 'straights' have to determine that because of 'coming out of the closet' these clergy persons no longer had ordinations?" I thought while I stood in the line of folks outside of the Convention Center who held the names of the "defrocked" clergy. Wonderfully, many people joined our ranks but it was disturbing that some people chose to exit the building through other doors or that some tore up our mission statements in front of us. Those were transforming moments. I listened carefully to persons making speeches for and against ordination of homosexuals at the Louisville Conference in 2002 and felt ashamed and angry when the vote was taken to maintain the status quo of not ordaining homosexuals. Whenever any group is excluded, we all lose.

I still advocate for blacks and the disabled in my retirement years but I have recently had numerous opportunities to learn more about the lives of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender individuals. Without exception I find them to be fine people who are struggling for equal opportunities and acceptance. I see amazing similarities among these three disfavored groups with which I have been privileged to interact. My Christian faith leads me to believe that I need to support them. It is the least I can do.

Cleaver, R., and Myers, P. (Eds.). (1993). *A Certain Terror: Heterosexism, Militarism, Violence & Change*. Chicago: American Friends Service Committee, Great Lakes Region.

Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider*. Crossing Press: Trumansburg, NY.

The National Youth Advocacy Coalition. [www.nyacyouth.org/](http://www.nyacyouth.org/).

# **Re-Thinking Anabaptist Identity**

*One can hear the expressions “culturally Brethren” or “culturally Mennonite” in many circles of people disenchanted with the denomination in which they grew up. The expressions reflects that one is not really a Mennonite or Brethren, but that the individual relates to many Mennonites or Brethren and/or retains parts of the social aspects of Mennonite or Brethren culture as opposed to religious aspects of Mennonite or Brethren doctrine. In a sense, the expressions assume denominational institutions authorize who is and who is not Anabaptist and those who grew up as such no longer can be if s/he disagrees with “official” church statements.*

*However, some people are attempting to rethink Brethren and Mennonite identity. Ted Grimsrud is a professor of theology and peace studies at Eastern Mennonite University. He presented the following paper at a MennoNeighbors meeting and discussed some of these issues.*

## **The Future of "Neo-Mennonite" Faith Communities**

*By Ted Grimsrud*

*Presented at MennoNeighbors meeting Broad Street Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, VA - 11/16/02 (MennoNeighbors has been meeting quietly for a number of years to provide mutual support and counsel to congregations, church employees, and concerned individuals who are facing challenges in relating to the reorganized Mennonite Church.)*

### **I.**

I want to address three basic themes. First, I will discuss two different ways of existing as Christians, what I will call the "House of Authority" way and what I will call the "historical consciousness" way.

Then, I will raise two questions and offer some preliminary reflections - in face of the issues raised in the House of Authority/historical consciousness question, why be Mennonite? And, then, how be Mennonite?

In 1987, after completing graduate studies in Berkeley, California, I began a seven-year pastorate in the small Mennonite congregation in Eugene, Oregon. After completing my first year, the congregation requested of our area conference that I be ordained. That request began a quite painful three-year process that did finally culminate in my ordination in March 1991. The difficulty in the ordination process arose when I was asked to respond to the Mennonite Church's Purdue Statement on Human Sexuality that had been adopted at the Mennonite Church General Assembly in 1987.

I told the ministerial committee that I thought the Statement was quite good, that many parts of it were insightful, that I expected to use it in my ministry, but that I had one question. I did not feel I could say for certain that all possible same-sex intimate relationship were morally inappropriate. That uncertainty was unacceptable for one of the committee members; it took three years for the other three members on the committee to decide to act in spite of that one members' opposition.

Shortly after that ordeal concluded for me, I was asked to write an essay for a collection of essays intended to be a Mennonite tribute to Gordon Kaufman, the great Mennonite theologian who for many years taught at Harvard Divinity School. This led to some fruitful reflections on my experience in the Pacific Coast Conference, particularly focused on why these conflicts that I found myself immersed in were so seemingly intractable. It seemed like we were just beating our heads against a wall when we tried to dialogue on the issues. Ultimately, I wrote an essay called "Mennonite Theology and Historical Consciousness: A Pastoral Perspective" that was included in the Kaufman festschrift. In that article I attempt to describe a theological orientation I call "neo-Mennonite" - meaning an orientation generally

characteristic of many Mennonites in urban and college-linked communities. I described this orientation in terms of the development of historical consciousness.

After our May 2002 MennoNeighbors meeting in Philadelphia, I sent a notice to the MennoNeighbors list serve offering copies of the neo-Mennonite essay because I thought it might be pertinent in relation to some of the conversations we had had at our meeting. I was overwhelmed to then receive over 40 requests for the essay. The comments I received in response to the article expressed appreciation for my thoughts and agreed that they were helpful to understand our present experience in the Mennonite world. When Vida Huber and Duane Bontrager asked me to provide some input for our November 2002 MennoNeighbors meeting, they suggested a kind of up-dating of the neo-Mennonite paper might be interesting. Certainly, the kinds of experiences I went through in the early 1990s have tended to be repeated in my life in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The presenting issue (perspectives on the inclusion or lack thereof of sexual minorities in Mennonite churches) and remain the same. And the underlying reality of the intractability of the conversations has remained the same.

I have been deeply interested to hear stories from friends in congregations such as Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship, Oak Park Mennonite, Assembly Mennonite, Germantown Mennonite Church, and Broad Street Mennonite Church about their various discussions with their respective conferences as the conferences have sought to discipline these congregations. It does sound like déjà vu all over again for me.

## II.

Recognizing the limitations of typologies and the fact that we are all a mixture of various tendencies, I want to suggest that in a very general sense we may speak of two ways of existing as Christians, the House of Authority way and the historical consciousness way. First, I will outline what I mean by the House of Authority way.

The House of Authority rests on three "pillars."<sup>(2)</sup> Probably all three pillars exist in various ways in just about all times and places in the history of Christianity. The first is the infallible Bible. The Bible within the House of Authority is seen to provide the authoritative answers for our questions, serving as the argument settler, the discussion ender.

The second, equally necessary pillar, is Tradition, or we could say, official interpretations of the Bible. The Bible is indeed complex and multi-faceted; it is not self- interpreting. Plus, it does not directly address all our current issues. So to make the authority of the Bible operational, this second element is also necessary – authoritative interpretive statements (that is, creeds, confessions, statements of faith, dogmas, etc.).

The third pillar is also necessary. That is, we need some human agencies to enforce the teachings of the Bible and of the official interpretations of the Bible. That is, we need a hierarchy. We need people who, by future of their office, provide interpretation and operationalization of the Bible and creeds, confessions, et al.

In Christianity's various manifestations, so long as they live within the House of Authority, they must have some version of all three pillars. The paradigmatic case probably is medieval Christendom; but various "free churches" also tend to have their own mini-Christendoms.

Though each of the pillars requires the other two to keep the House intact, in a genuine sense the third pillar (human "enforcers") is most significant. Authority within the House of Authority means authority enforced - enforced by human hierarchies. The authority of the Bible and the authority of Tradition, when made concrete, serve the authority of the Hierarchy. We see this three-pronged House of Authority as operating quite centrally among North American Mennonites; and operating quite centrally in the seemingly intractable conflicts that I have alluded to above (e.g., my own ordination struggles, the various "congregations at variance" in relation to their conferences in the Mennonite Church).

In numerous settings the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (C. of F.) has been cited as the basis for sanctions versus people and congregations advocating for a more inclusive approach. However, the content of the C. of F. is quite vague concerning "homosexuality." The "position" of the C. of F. must be inferred and enforced by human hierarchies.

### III.

The "historical consciousness way" of existing as Christians stands in contrast to the "house of authority way." Recognizing that this term is a bit cumbersome, I use it as a way of emphasizing that one of the central elements of this approach is self-consciousness that everything happens in history, everything comes from history.

This "way" understands all of our language to be human language; hence all language is symbolic, only partially representing reality. As we describe reality, we are describing it from our particular perspective - and all perspectives are limited, finite, biased.

When applied to theology, this view of historical consciousness concludes that all theology is human work. All theological statements are human statements - with the same limitations that all other human statements have. That is, all theological statements (scripture, creeds, confessions of faith, mission statements, et al) are expressed in finite, limited, metaphorical, perspectival human language.

When people accept the historical consciousness way, in effect the toothpaste is out of the tube, and the way of authority loses credence.

Theology, discernment within the faith community, expressions of faith - these are all seen as on-going conversations where limited, perspectival statements interact with other limited, perspectival statements. There is no ultimate authoritative, end-the-conversation standpoint that somehow transcends human historicity and provides a legitimate basis to end the conversation.

For the historical consciousness way, the fact that the Bible says it, or the C. of F. says it, or the pastor says it, or the conference says it, or the denominational delegate body says it, none of these end the need for continuing conversation. None of these sources of faith statements has the standing to settle differences once and for all.

Once people start thinking the historical consciousness way, they cannot go back inside the house of authority. They automatically ask why whenever they hear definitive sounding pronouncements.

I want to suggest that one of the fundamental characteristics of "neo-Mennonites" is that they perceive reality the historical consciousness way. That is, they exist outside the house of authority.

The vitality of many neo-Mennonite congregations shows that it is possible to be Christian outside the house of authority - though such a faith stance certainly presents major challenges. Neo-Mennonites must answer a very basic question: If we accept that all human language, all human beliefs, all human structures, are in some sense relative, why bother with church and why bother with religious faith?

Certainly we are seeing that one of the consequences for neo-Mennonites who both affirm historical consciousness and want to remain part of the broader Mennonite community is that they attract much hostility from Mennonites who in some sense remain within the House of Authority. The historical consciousness way is seen as a major threat to the certainties of the way of authority. Conflict results.

### IV.

In understanding all human language (and, hence, all human institutions) as limited and finite, historical consciousness ultimately desacralizes the church. There is nothing absolute about this human, all too human, institution. There is nothing sacred or even inherently necessary about it.

That is to say, it is not self-evident for neo-Mennonites why they would want to remain in the Mennonite Church. They will not be persuaded by any answer that simply cites some "authority" that claims, in effect that "there is no salvation outside the church." The answer to the question, "why be Mennonite?" must be practical, not dogmatic.

I will suggest a few possible practical reasons for being Mennonite.

The video produced by the Brethren and Mennonite Council on Gay and Lesbian Concerns, "Body of Dissent," records interviews with several quintessential neo-Mennonites who are asked, in so many words, why they want to remain Mennonites. The interviewees speak of their sense of identity of being part of the church in which they were raised, they speak of singing together in worship as a key experience that evokes a sense of wholeness and peoplehood. That is to say, especially for those who

grew up in the Mennonite Church, being part of a Mennonite community is an important element of many people's sense of identity, sense of wholeness. This is an important practical reason for being Mennonite.

In a world characterized by spiraling violence, the Mennonite tradition and Mennonite communities, with their centuries-old commitment to peaceableness provides an important context for practicing peace. As we all know, Mennonite communities have been and continue all too often to be characterized by various forms of violence. Nonetheless, we also have in the Mennonite tradition strong expressions of pacifism.

Neo-Mennonite congregations generally tend to be located in large cities. For many of their members, a big attraction to these congregations is the way they provide a sense of community in what is often a somewhat impersonal environment.

Finally, what I believe is probably the most important reason for being Mennonite is simply the need in our North American culture for face-to-face moral communities of resistance. In our society right now we are increasingly placed in an environment characterized by two extremes, either isolated individuals or the large collective of the nation-state with nothing in between. The result of the break down of the intermediate types of community is that the human need for community leads to blind patriotism.

For my Ph.D. dissertation, I studied World War II conscientious objectors. I concluded that the faith communities most of the COs belonged to were crucial in their taking a stand in opposition to the mass violence the nation-state was engaged in. These COs had an alternative locus of loyalty - their faith community rather than the nation-state.

The construction of such alternative communities remains as crucial as ever, perhaps more so. To live even relatively free from the myths of the domination system that surrounds us, we need others who share our values, who can offer us encouragement, wisdom, accountability, and fellowship along the way.

## V.

My final question, then, which is actually meant to be an open question, is "how be Mennonite?" This is a question for on-going discussion more than prescriptive statements. I will make two short comments, though, in closing. One crucial element to any viable answer to this "how" question for neo-Mennonites is the coming together at least periodically in groups such as MennoNeighbors.

Elizabeth Janeway, in her fascinating book, *Powers of the Weak*, argues that people who are "weak" have two central strategies for resisting the "powerful." These two strategies are (i) disbelief of the ruling ideologies and (ii) banding together in alternative communities. Neo-Mennonites, in affirming the historical consciousness way, are in effect disbelieving the ruling ideologies based on the house of authority. And in such disbelief, they find much power. But they must also join together in various settings - certainly within particular congregations, but also in informal groups such as MennoNeighbors and other "caususes" within existing conference and denominational structures.

A second element to the "how," along with banding together, is to find a strong sense of self-identity as people of faith seeking to follow the way of Jesus. This is where our gay and lesbian members have much to offer all of us. Through fire they have discovered who they are and the power in living openly and courageously out of their identity as children of God. In such living they have discovered great power - and provide us all with a sense of hope that comes with self-understanding and self-affirmation.

## **Anabaptist Resources:**

*The Brethren Historical Library and Archives (BHLA).*

[www.brethren.org/genbd/bhla/GuideResearchBrethrenHistory.html](http://www.brethren.org/genbd/bhla/GuideResearchBrethrenHistory.html).

Durnbaugh, D.F. (1997). *Fruit of the vine: A history of the Brethren, 1708-1995*. Brethren Press: Elgin, IL.

Loewen, H. & Nolt, S. with Duerksen C. & Yoder E. (1996). *Through water and fire: An overview of Mennonite history*. Herald Press: Scottsdale, PA.

*Martyrs Mirror*. [www.homecomers.org/mirror/contents.htm](http://www.homecomers.org/mirror/contents.htm).

*The Mennonite Historical Library (MHL)*. [www.goshen.edu/mhl/](http://www.goshen.edu/mhl/).

Roth, J. D. (1995). Refocusing a vision: Shaping Anabaptist character in the 21st Century.

[www.goshen.edu/mhl/Refocusing/](http://www.goshen.edu/mhl/Refocusing/).

Ruth, J. L. (1991). *The believer's church story*. Brethren Press: Elgin, IL.

# Queer Studies

By Joel Nofziger

The term “queer” is often used to empower same-sex oriented or gender blurring people. Many GLBT/queer people have taken back the term that historically abused them. So, what are queer studies? Queer studies and queer theory are the study of GLBT related research and history. They can include and intersect theology, political and social history, literature, sociology, psychology, and biology. Some web sources at the end provide a guide for further exploration. One issue discussed in queer studies is the question of essentialism versus constructionism. Essentialism claims an intrinsic quality to sexual orientation while constructionism claims a socially constructed identity. For example, an essentialist may claim that the biological make up of an individual determines one’s sexual orientation. A traditional social constructionist might assert that humans create the symbols they use and contexts in which they live. The symbols and meanings of the symbols create a perceived reality. In other words, the qualities people perceive are not necessarily essential, or inherent, but people create differences and understand some differences to be meaningful. Strong cases can be made for both viewpoints.

However, politically sensitive research is often slanted to suit ideological persuasions. The following review explores some of the limits of social constructionism in regards to gender identity. John Colapinto illustrates a compelling case for essentialism, in regards to biological sex/gender, in the story of David Reimer in the book *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who was Raised a Girl*.

In the opening of *As Nature Made Him*, Colapinto notes that perhaps the hardiness of David’s ethnic and religious heritage in the midst of suffering helped his parents survive their trials. David Reimer’s parents descended from Russian Mennonite families.

David and his identical twin brother, Brian, were born in 1967. His first given name actually was Bruce. About eight months after birth, Janet, the boys’ mother, decided to have her baby boys circumcised after she thought they were having trouble relieving themselves. She took them to the hospital, expecting a routine surgery, but for some reason, the surgeon decided to use a cautery machine for baby Bruce’s circumcision. A cautery machine puts forth an electric current that burns the edges of an incision so that bleeding is minimal. After two malfunctions of this machine, the third time, someone increased the amount of heat in the needle. This third time, the machine, in essence, burned off the penis of baby Bruce.

The parents, not knowing what to do, consulted with Dr. John Money, a psychologist at Johns Hopkins Hospital. Money gave them hope that they could raise Bruce as a girl and that they should begin the procedure as soon as possible in order for it to work. Surgeons would remove his testicles and at age 11 or 12, they would attempt to administer female hormones and construct a vagina. In love, the Reimer parents began to raise Bruce as a girl.

However, from the start, Brenda, as they now called him, did not comply with the social instruction with which the parents tried to ingrain him. When they put a dress on him at age two, he would rip it off. Brenda also stood to pee. David’s brother Brian noted:

“When I say there was nothing feminine about Brenda, I mean there was *nothing* feminine. She walked like a guy. Sat with her legs apart. She talked about guy things, didn’t give a crap about cleaning house, getting married, wearing makeup. We both wanted to play with guys, build forts and have snowball fights and play army. She’d get a skipping rope for a gift, and the only thing we’d use *that* for was to tie people up, whip people with it. She played with *my* toys: Tinkertoys, dump trucks. This toy sewing machine she got just sat” (p. 57).

During Brenda’s growing up years, Janet would regularly send Money follow-up information about Brenda. She mostly reported instances that one could construe as traditionally feminine, minimizing the traditionally masculine behavior. Money would simply say the masculine behavior was “tomboyish.” The

explanation was something to which Janet would cling to many years, despite Brenda's increasingly confrontational and troubling behavior.

Meanwhile, Money published work about David's case, claiming that it was a success. It "proved" nurture over nature, that humans can *learn* to be male or female. In reality, Brenda was absolutely miserable and feared Money.

Occasionally, David's parents would take Brenda and Brian to Money for sessions with him. During these sessions, Money would show them pictures of people having heterosexual intercourse. He would ask them to take their clothes off to look at each other's genitals. If they refused, Money would scream at them until they did so. The genital inspections were part of his theory that he believed would create a secure, female gender identity for Brenda. Money would also have them pose together in sexual positions and make sexual thrusts, all for the cause of his theoretical persuasion. Eventually, Brenda said she would kill herself if her parents ever made her see Money again.

After a considerably disturbing childhood and adolescence, David's father told Brenda about who he is. Above all other emotions the disclosure stirred in him, he felt relief – relief that explained his strangeness. He regained clarity and the beginnings of a sense of identity. Although his initial reemergence into society was difficult, he did adjust. Today, he is a happily married stepfather of three.

During much of *As Nature Made Him*, Colpatino also explores the life and research of Dr. Milton Diamond, a researcher who has studied biological aspects of sex. Diamond and Money seem to have been at polar ends of the nature vs. nurture debate. Throughout the book, Colpatino reveals the strongly held beliefs about essentialism and constructionism and the "scientific warfare" that took place between the two researchers as the Reimer case unfolded. David's story is not an isolated experience. Indeed, many babies are born with genital anomalies each year. The number of people born with genital anomalies is not known, but enough are born that at least three major intersex organizations exist today.

So queer studies may be interesting to some, yet why should anyone pursue it? For many young people coming to terms with a same-sex sexuality or an alternative gender identity, exploring queer studies is empowering. Many queer people have always had a "feeling that they were different." Many also feel a camaraderie with other queer people across the ages who experienced similar feelings in circumstances not unlike their own. Participating in queer studies is something with which they can identify because they are also a part of a continuing queer experience.

Another reason is that it is a form of advocacy. For many years, "queer studies" was unheard of. Yet queer studies contributes to human history and remembering is important, whether we remember the tens of thousands of gay men slaughtered in the Holocaust or the artistic genius of individuals such as Leonardo di Vinci, Walt Whitman, Virginia Woolf, or Willa Cather. These queer people of the past, to name a few, are people to which other queer people can look today. Learning from them, we recognize the potential queer people have as human beings, even though many societies may not appreciate the gifts they have to offer, not to mention the sacred humanness every individual possesses. History shows we should not turn a blind eye from history, queer studies included.

As queer studies is a relatively new field of study, some libraries may have limited resources. Fortunately, the Internet has afforded the chance to exchange and disseminate a wealth of ideas and information in queer studies. Along with the large mass of information the Internet provides, actually finding decent resources can be time consuming. Most of the following resources are from Internet along with some books and periodicals.

## **Queer Studies:**

The Advocate Online - [www.advocate.com/](http://www.advocate.com/).

Alyson Bookstore - [www.alyson.com/](http://www.alyson.com/).

Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies - [web.gc.cuny.edu/Clags/index.html](http://web.gc.cuny.edu/Clags/index.html).

Encyclopedia of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer culture - [www.glbtc.com](http://www.glbtc.com).

Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies - [www.iglss.org](http://www.iglss.org).

New York Public Library research guide on gay and lesbian studies -

[www.nypl.org/research/chss/grd/resguides/gay.html](http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/grd/resguides/gay.html).

Norton, R. Gay History & Literature. [www.infopt.demon.co.uk/gayhist.htm](http://www.infopt.demon.co.uk/gayhist.htm)

People with a History: An Online Guide to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans History -

[www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/).

[www.queertheory.com](http://www.queertheory.com).

Yale University. Gay and Lesbian Studies Research Guide.

[www.library.yale.edu/rsc/gayles/index.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/rsc/gayles/index.html).

### **Bisexual Resources:**

BiNet USA - [www.binetusa.org/](http://www.binetusa.org/).

Bisexual Resource Center - [www.biresource.org/](http://www.biresource.org/).

### **Intersex/Transgender (web):**

The International Journal of Transgenderism - [www.symposion.com/ijt/](http://www.symposion.com/ijt/).

Intersex Society of North America - [www.isna.org/](http://www.isna.org/).

Parents Celebrating Our Unique Children - [www.intersexsupport.org/](http://www.intersexsupport.org/).

Trans History - [www.transhistory.org/](http://www.transhistory.org/).

The UK Intersex Association - [www.ukia.co.uk/](http://www.ukia.co.uk/).

[www.gender.org](http://www.gender.org).

### **Intersex/Transgender (books):**

Bornstein, K. (1995). *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*. Vintage Books: New York, NY.

Califa, P. (1997). *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism*. Celis Press: San Francisco.

Colapinto, J. (2000). *As nature made him: The boy who was raised as a girl*. Harper Collins: New York.

Feinberg, L. (1993). *Stone butch blues*. Firebrand Books: Ithaca, NY.

**General Sexuality:**

Advocates for Youth - [www.advocatesforyouth.org/](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/).

Go Ask Alice - [www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/](http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/).

Kinsey Institute - [www.kinseyinstitute.org/index.html](http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/index.html).

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. - [www.siecus.org/](http://www.siecus.org/).

Society for Human Sexuality - [www.sexuality.org/](http://www.sexuality.org/).

Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality - [www.sexscience.org/](http://www.sexscience.org/).

## Leaving the College Community

Since 1976, BMC has been working to provide resources and support for the LGBT community. Once you find yourself in the world outside of your Brethren or Mennonite campus, BMC will still be around to offer support. Feel free to contact the office at any stage of your life, whether you are currently in college, or find yourself exploring the “real world.”

Peace to you on your journey,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maggie Miller". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Maggie Miller  
Kaleidoscope Coordinator 2008

PO BOX 6300  
Minneapolis MN 55406  
612.343.2060  
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[kaleidoscope@bmclgbt.org](mailto:kaleidoscope@bmclgbt.org)  
[www.bmclgbt.org](http://www.bmclgbt.org)

# Compiled Resources

## **Definitions:**

The Intersex Society of North America [www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org).

Public Health - Seattle & King County's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Health  
[www.metrokc.gov/health/glbtc](http://www.metrokc.gov/health/glbtc).

## **Web resources regarding biblical understanding and sexuality:**

*Bridges-Across the Divide*. (nd). [www.bridges-across.org/index.htm](http://www.bridges-across.org/index.htm)

Church of the Brethren. (2004). Annual Conference and General Board Resolutions and Statements (1946-2004). [www.brethren.org/ac/ac\\_statements/](http://www.brethren.org/ac/ac_statements/)

Johns, L. (2004) Homosexuality and the Bible: A Case Study in the Use of the Bible for Ethics.  
[www.ambs.edu/LJohns/Homosexuality.htm](http://www.ambs.edu/LJohns/Homosexuality.htm).

Johns, L. (2004) Statements of Mennonite Conferences, Boards and Committees on Homosexuality (1985-2004).  
[www.ambs.edu/ljohns/churchdocs.htm](http://www.ambs.edu/ljohns/churchdocs.htm).

Ontario Consultants for Religious Tolerance. (2005). Homosexuality and Bisexuality: All Sides to the Issue.  
[www.religioustolerance.org/homosexu.htm#rel](http://www.religioustolerance.org/homosexu.htm#rel)

*Welcome to Dialogue Series*. [www.welcome-committee.org/booklet-index.html](http://www.welcome-committee.org/booklet-index.html)

## **Book resources regarding biblical understanding and sexuality:**

Frontain, R. (Ed.). (1997). *Reclaiming the Sacred: The Bible in Gay and Lesbian Culture*. Harlington Park Press: Binghamton, NY.

Hershberger, A. (Ed.). (1999). *Sexuality: God's Gift*. Herald Press: Scottsdale, PA.

Kraus, C. N. & Kauffman, R. C. (Eds.). (2001). *To Continue the Dialogue: Biblical Interpretation and Homosexuality*. Pandora Press: Telford, PA.

Kreider, R. S. (Ed.). (1998). *From Wounded Hearts: Faith Stories of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered People and Those Who Love Them*. Chi Rho Press: Gaithersburg, MD.

Kreider, R. S. (Ed.). (2002). *Together In Love: Faith Stories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Couples*. Strategic Press: Kulpville, PA.

Wink, W. (Ed.). (1999). *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN.

## **Further Resources regarding sexual ethics:**

Clapp, S., Leverton Helbert, K., and Zizak, A. (2003). *Faith Matters: Teenagers, Religion, and Sexuality*. LifeQuest Publications: Fort Wayne, IN.

The GLBT Round Table of the American Library Association. (2001). Religion and Spirituality: A Checklist of Resources for Gay Men, Lesbians, and Bisexuals.  
[calvin.usc.edu/trimmer/religion.html](http://calvin.usc.edu/trimmer/religion.html).

Hershberger, A. (Ed.). (1999). *Sexuality: God's Gift*. Herald Press: Scottsdale, PA.

Johns, L. (1985) Human Sexuality in the Christian Life. <http://www.ambs.edu/LJohns/HSCL/hsc10.htm>

Krabill, W. S. (1989). Sexuality. *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*.  
[www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/s493me.html](http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/s493me.html).

The Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing. [www.religiousinstitute.org/](http://www.religiousinstitute.org/).

Sexual Ethics: Good Words Offered About Good Sex. (2003). *Dialogue*, 25 (2).

**Other resources regarding ex-gay therapy:**

American Psychological Association. Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation and Youth.  
<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbc/publications/justthefacts.html>

Ex-Gay Nomad. (1998). [members.aol.com/exgaynomad/index.htm](http://members.aol.com/exgaynomad/index.htm).

The Human Rights Campaign. (2000). *Finally Free: Personal Stories: How Love and Self-Acceptance Saved Us from "Ex-Gay" Ministries*. [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org).

Maniaci, T., & Rzeznik, F. M. (1993). *One nation under God [Videotape]*. New York: First Run Features.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. (1998). *Calculated Compassion*.  
[www.thetaskforce.org/reslibrary/list.cfm?pubTypeID=2-pub13](http://www.thetaskforce.org/reslibrary/list.cfm?pubTypeID=2-pub13)

Shidlo, A., Schroeder, M., & Drescher J. (Eds.). (2001). *Sexual conversion therapy: Ethical, clinical and research perspectives*. New York: The Hawthorn Medical Press.

**Other web resources regarding coming out:**

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC). [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org).

Out Proud. [www.outproud.org/](http://www.outproud.org/).

Oasis Magazine. [www.oasismag.com/](http://www.oasismag.com/).

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Persons (PFLAG).  
[www.pflag.org/](http://www.pflag.org/).

Queer [Theory.com](http://www.theory.com). (2000). Coming out in an Academic Environment.  
[www.queertheory.com/articles/articles\\_coming\\_out\\_academic.htm](http://www.queertheory.com/articles/articles_coming_out_academic.htm)

**Other books regarding coming out:**

Kreider, R. S. (Ed.). (1998). *From Wounded Hearts: Faith Stories of Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, and Transgendered People and Those Who Love Them*. Chi Rho Press: Gaithersburg, MD.

Kreider, R. S. (Ed.). (2002). *Together In Love: Faith Stories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Couples*. Strategic Press: Kulpville, PA.

Merla, P. (Ed.). (1996). *Boys Like Us: Gay Writers Tell Their Coming Out Stories*. Avon Books: New York, NY.

Savin-Williams, R. C. (2001). *Mom, Dad, I'm Gay: How Families Negotiate Coming Out*. American Psychological Association: Washington DC.

**Other Resources for Campus Organizing and Campus Resources:**

Alternate Ways of Loving at Juniata College: <http://clubs.juniata.edu/awol/>

Campus Pride: [www.campuspride.net/](http://www.campuspride.net/).

Gay at Messiah College: [www.gayatmessiah.org/](http://www.gayatmessiah.org/).

Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). [www.glsen.org/](http://www.glsen.org/).

The Gay Straight Alliance Network. *Take It Back: A Manual for Fighting Slurs on Campus*  
<http://www.gsanetwork.org/takeitback/>

Gerth, J. (1999). Queer History at Earlham College. [www.earlham.edu/~spectrum/queerhistory.html](http://www.earlham.edu/~spectrum/queerhistory.html).

GLOW at the University of Waterloo: [www.glow.uwaterloo.ca/](http://www.glow.uwaterloo.ca/)

Kaleidoscope is a program of Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests to serve high school and college aged youth and young adults. K-Scope is a listserv for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender questioning and allied people on peace church campuses, those in high school, young people in general, and interested individuals. [groups.yahoo.com/group/K-Scope/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/K-Scope/), [kaleidoscope@bmclgbt.org](mailto:kaleidoscope@bmclgbt.org)

Lambda Legal: Getting Down to Basics: Tools to Support LGBTQ Youth in Care. [www.lambdalegal.org/take-action/tool-kits/getting-down-to-basics/](http://www.lambdalegal.org/take-action/tool-kits/getting-down-to-basics/) .

The National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Resources in Higher Education. [www.lgbtcampus.org/](http://www.lgbtcampus.org/).

The National Gay & Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF). (1996). *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Campus Organizing: A Comprehensive Manual*. [www.thetaskforce.org/reslibrary/list.cfm?pubTypeID=2#pub19](http://www.thetaskforce.org/reslibrary/list.cfm?pubTypeID=2#pub19)

Safe Schools Coalition - [www.safeschoolscoalition.org/](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/)

United Sexualities at Manchester College: [www.manchester.edu/OSD/Activity/Organizations/SpecialInterestGroup/US/index.html](http://www.manchester.edu/OSD/Activity/Organizations/SpecialInterestGroup/US/index.html)

#### **Other Resources on Interrelated Social Justice Issues:**

Cleaver, R., and Myers, P. (Eds.). (1993). *A Certain Terror: Heterosexism, Militarism, Violence & Change*. Chicago: American Friends Service Committee, Great Lakes Region.

Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider*. Crossing Press: Trumansburg, NY.

The National Youth Advocacy Coalition. [www.nyacyouth.org/](http://www.nyacyouth.org/).

#### **Anabaptist Resources:**

*The Brethren Historical Library and Archives* (BHLA). [www.brethren.org/genbd/bhla/GuideResearchBrethrenHistory.html](http://www.brethren.org/genbd/bhla/GuideResearchBrethrenHistory.html).

Durnbaugh, D.F. (1997). *Fruit of the vine: A history of the Brethren, 1708-1995*. Brethren Press: Elgin, IL.

Loewen, H. & Nolt, S. with Duerksen C. & Yoder E. (1996). *Through water and fire: An overview of Mennonite history*. Herald Press: Scottsdale, PA.

*Martyrs Mirror*. [www.homecomers.org/mirror/contents.htm](http://www.homecomers.org/mirror/contents.htm).

*The Mennonite Historical Library* (MHL). [www.goshen.edu/mhl/](http://www.goshen.edu/mhl/).

Roth, J. D. (1995). *Refocusing a vision: Shaping Anabaptist character in the 21st Century*. [www.goshen.edu/mhl/Refocusing/](http://www.goshen.edu/mhl/Refocusing/).

Ruth, J. L. (1991). *The believer's church story*. Brethren Press: Elgin, IL.

#### **Queer Studies (General):**

The Advocate Online - [www.advocate.com/](http://www.advocate.com/).

Alyson Bookstore - [www.alyson.com/](http://www.alyson.com/).

Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies - [web.gc.cuny.edu/Clags/index.html](http://web.gc.cuny.edu/Clags/index.html).

Encyclopedia of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer culture - [www.glbtq.com](http://www.glbtq.com).

Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies - [www.iglss.org](http://www.iglss.org).

New York Public Library research guide on gay and lesbian studies -  
[www.nypl.org/research/chss/grd/resguides/gay.html](http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/grd/resguides/gay.html).

Norton, R. Gay History & Literature. [www.infont.demon.co.uk/gayhist.htm](http://www.infont.demon.co.uk/gayhist.htm)

People with a History: An Online Guide to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans History  
[www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/).

[www.queertheory.com](http://www.queertheory.com).

Yale University. Gay and Lesbian Studies Research Guide. [www.library.yale.edu/rsc/gayles/index.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/rsc/gayles/index.html).

**Bisexual Resources:**

BiNet USA - [www.binetusa.org/](http://www.binetusa.org/).

Bisexual Resource Center - [www.biresource.org/](http://www.biresource.org/).

**Intersex/Transgender (web):**

The International Journal of Transgenderism - [www.symposion.com/ijt/](http://www.symposion.com/ijt/).

Intersex Society of North America - [www.isna.org/](http://www.isna.org/).

Parents Celebrating Our Unique Children - [www.intersexsupport.org/](http://www.intersexsupport.org/).

Trans History - [www.transhistory.org/](http://www.transhistory.org/).

The UK Intersex Association - [www.ukia.co.uk/](http://www.ukia.co.uk/).

[www.gender.org](http://www.gender.org).

**Intersex/Transgender (books):**

Bornstein, K. (1995). *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*. Vintage Books: New York, NY.

Califa, P. (1997). *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism*. Celis Press: San Francisco.

Colapinto, J. (2000). *As nature made him: The boy who was raised as a girl*. Harper Collins: New York.

Feinberg, L. (1993). *Stone butch blues*. Firebrand Books: Ithaca, NY.

**General Sexuality:**

Advocates for Youth - [www.advocatesforyouth.org/](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/).

Go Ask Alice - [www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/](http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/).

Kinsey Institute - [www.kinseyinstitute.org/index.html](http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/index.html).

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. - [www.siecus.org/](http://www.siecus.org/).

Society for Human Sexuality - [www.sexuality.org/](http://www.sexuality.org/).

Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality - [www.sexscience.org/](http://www.sexscience.org/).