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## THE SCHMELING DECISION—WHAT NOW?

by George Watson

When the Discipline Hearing Committee issued its decision, the initial reaction of many was huge disappointment at the ruling that Pastor Schmeling would be removed from the Clergy Roster in August. But upon further study and reflection it became clear to our supporters and to the opposition just what a momentous opinion the Committee had written.

The Committee really "got it", or at least most of them did. The outstanding skills of Pastor Schmeling and the wonderful ministry taking place at St. John's in Atlanta convinced the committee that the present policy is "at least bad policy, and may very well violate the constitution and bylaws of this church." It is too bad, though understandable, that the Committee felt it could not rule on the constitu-

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## CHANGE WITHIN A GENERATION: GAYS IN THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

by Barbara E. Solt

Thirty years ago, when I chaired a synod-wide committee on Justice and Social Change, the bishop asked us to wrestle with "the issue of the ordination of gays." He informed us that a seminarian had recently committed suicide and it was understood that "the issue" was the reason. Thus began what has been a concern and a commitment for this life-long Lutheran and social worker, committed by

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tionality issue. They instead left that to the Committee on Appeals, which has the authority to rule on the constitutionality of the policy. It is expected that Pastor Schmeling will request that this happen.

The Committee on Appeals will not conduct a new hearing. It will rely on the transcript of the Discipline Hearing Committee, the evidence submitted in Atlanta, and the briefs and written arguments that will be submitted by each side.

The Discipline Hearing Committee chose not to rely on the hope that the Committee on Appeals would rule that the present policy is unconstitutional. They took the extraordinary and unprecedented step of calling on synods to memorialize the Churchwide Assembly to change the policy.

There have been many prior attempts at Churchwide Assemblies to change this policy. These attempts have mostly been ruled out of order. It is crucial at this juncture to understand why, so that this time, at least, the issue can be brought before the Assembly properly. To do that it is important to understand how the policy came to be.

"Vision and Expectations" is a document that was developed by the Division for Ministry (now the Unit for Vocation and Education), in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and then approved by the Church Council. It describes what the church expects of its ordained pastors. It contains one sentence that pertains to pastors who are homosexual, "Ordained and commissioned ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships." Changes to that document must travel the same path by which it originally became ELCA policy, that is, any proposed change must be developed by the Unit for Vocation and Education, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, and then be approved by the Church Council. What role can the Churchwide Assembly play in this? The Churchwide Assembly could vote to request or direct that the Unit for Vocation and Education, Conference of Bishops, and Church Council process such an amendment.

"Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline", according to the ELCA constitution, is developed by the Committee on Appeals and approved by the Church Council. This document also contains a sentence that pertains to pastors who are homosexual, "Practicing homosexual persons are precluded from the ordained ministry of this church." As with "Vision and Expectations", synods can memorialize the Churchwide Assembly to request and direct that the Committee on Appeals and the Church Council initiate the process for its amendment.

It is, therefore, vitally important for as many synods as possible to pass such memorials. Templates have been developed and are available at the Goodsoil website, goodsoil.org. The process could be done independently of the Churchwide Assembly, but it is, unfortunately, the history of this church, that it moves only after it is clear that its movement will be supported by a strong majority of its members. It has rarely chosen to take a

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both religious and professional orientation to working for social justice and to repairing those rents in the social fabric and personal wholeness that occur when social justice is not achieved.

Stunned, the committee did indeed wrestle over the next several months and finally concluded that, in order for the church to change its policy faithfully in relation to gays, theologians needed to find scriptural revelation that would contraindicate that which had been taught on the subject to date. Basically, we agreed that it would be difficult to bring about a change in this church's orientation unless theological validation at the very least supported a new approach, and preferably provided the beacon to light a new pathway toward acceptance of what had heretofore been virtually a cultural taboo.

I have long since lost contact with the other members of that committee, so I do not know how this request from the bishop changed their hearts and minds, but for me this event was a seminal moment for my developing engagement with and concern for how society defines and relates to the spectrum of sexual and gender orientation and the expression thereof.

Social workers understand behavior in terms of the interaction of the person and the environment, with the awareness that psychic and biologic motivators are influenced by and influence social dynamics. Some refer to this as the "nature-nurture" influence. "Labeling theory" is another way social behaviorists define individual and group dynamics, recognizing that just as most behavior manifests itself in a spectrum of intensity, so labeling is a reflector of society's level of understanding and/or acceptance of that behavior.

### Change From What I Saw Thirty Years Ago

In considering the request of the editor of *The Network Letter* to "write something," I have found myself reflecting on these past thirty years of experience, on how my church, my profession, and I have grown in our quest for fidelity to our call to love one another, to treat others as we would be treated, and to welcome strangers. What can my experience and understanding bring to the forum?

I have decided that telling my own story might bring hope and perhaps new perspective to those who are impatient with the pace of change. My story might be like old home movies or a walk through an old photo album, in which we recognize how different we have become only after seeing how different we are now from that "before time," as one friend calls recollections. In my review, I have been reminded how both my profession of social work and my church have changed along the way.

Forty years ago, while in graduate social work school, I attended an urban congregation and sang in the choir, which was directed by a man who had a roommate that, I realized somewhat tentatively, was what today we would know to be a partner. This was quite startling at the time, for this wide-eyed small town girl whose coursework taught that schizophrenia resulted from passive fathering and dominating mothering and that ho-

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prophetic stance on internal matters.

It is not absolutely necessary that the action be initiated at the Churchwide Assembly. The Church Council has the authority to initiate the process, requesting the appropriate Units to prepare the necessary amendments. Undoubtedly, if all sixty-five synods sent such requests to the Church Council, it would happen. It would happen with fewer than sixty-five, but how many would be necessary is anyone's guess. Nevertheless, it would also be very important for as many Synod Councils as possible to make such a request to the Church Council. Synod Councils speak to the Church Council; Synod Assemblies speak to the Churchwide Assembly.

Having said this, it must be mentioned that there is a way for the Churchwide Assembly to act directly to change this policy. As it stands now, the Churchwide Assembly cannot act directly because the policies or documents are not ones that have been approved or "owned" by the Assembly. It is possible for the Assembly to vote to take ownership of the relevant documents. Such action would essentially make the documents equivalent to bylaws, changeable only by Assembly action. Such action would have no parallel in our church and would have serious implications for the multitude of policies and procedures used in the ELCA.

So then, where do we go from here? In addition to working toward changing the policy by passing memorials to the Churchwide Assembly and working for Synod Councils to pass requests to the Church Council to make the changes, there is one other avenue. When you look at the templates referenced earlier, you will see a third suggestion, "Endorsing Restraint." Passage of this would send a message that, while a synod might not be ready for total change in this policy, it might be willing to give space and discretion to Bishops to deal with situations such as Pastor Schmeling's in ways other than removal from the roster.

One thing is clear; we cannot sit back and catch our breath. We need to press for change at every turn. We must also support those who are in a position to effect change and give congregations such as St. John's, Atlanta, and Pastor Schmeling, space to do the ministry to which they have been called.

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mosexuality was a personality disorder that required treatment before those so defined could be wholistically functioning people.

Thirty years ago social work was engaged in moving people from institutions into the community, aided by a growing cadre of ever more specifically targeted medications. At that time, the intern of my congregation confided his gay orientation to me. Eventually he decided to take a year off after internship, but then, with full disclosure, returned to seminary, was ordained, and served two congregations before AIDS ended his life. In those few years, he moved from the closet to being an advocate for himself and others, and helped educate others so that they might avoid the illness that was storming its way through the gay community.

As my professional life moved from the traditional social agency setting into church-organizational settings, my growing "gaydar" (gay radar) as well as, perhaps, my professional code of confidentiality, listening, acceptance, and willingness to engage in difficult dialogues, resulted in my forming friendships with a number of clergy and active lay people who began to trust straight people with their life stories and struggles. Together we began to move further the process of social justice that had begun during the sixties, utilizing ever-more sophisticated change-agentry approaches. An example of this was the early attempts of this church to provide study guides and social policy statements meant to reconcile the phenomenon that was becoming so visible.

Still the church lacked a generally accepted theological affirmation of the new order that seemed to be emerging, as gays moved out of the closet, family members began to be more understanding and accepting, and labels began to change from "deviant" and "sinner" to "different lifestyle" and "child of God." Note that this last phrase indicates the church's willingness to understand a gay person as a child made and loved by God, but not yet willing to accept the adult expression of that child in terms of sexuality and life-commitment to a beloved other. One might remember that while this church first ordained women only some thirty-five years ago, the matter of acceptance of women as leaders in this church is still a work in progress in many areas.

### Change From What I Saw Twenty Years Ago

A bit more than twenty years ago, I became a member of a congregation that is known for welcoming people, who in previous generations were "strangers at the gate," to our ethnically-derived, growth-through-births congregations. Known as one of the first integrated black-white congregations, that remained integrated rather than "changing color" as many other congregations did, Augustana Lutheran in Washington, DC, was also an early welcoming community to gay people. When I joined in the mid-80s, acceptance was less than complete, as several were open about being gay at church but not at work or with their families. Most were single, or their partners were not members

## “REPENTANCE, FASTING, PRAYER, AND WORKS OF LOVE—THE DISCIPLINE OF LENT —HELP US TO WAGE OUR SPIRITUAL WARFARE.”

(*The Lutheran Book of Worship*, Ash Wednesday Exhortation)

By Pastor Richard H. Graham

There is always something frankly frightening about Lent. If it doesn't scare you, at least a little, you're not paying attention. It begins with a worship service to remind us we are born from dust and will at last return there. It continues for most people with a round of special study and prayer. We're in our Bibles more often and likely in our churches more often, too. Everyone is encouraged to examine his or her life and to tighten up his or her personal discipline. Many choose some small daily sacrifice to remind them of the sacrifice our Lord has made for them. In worship we follow Jesus as he draws closer and closer to his execution. Jesus is going to die, Lent says to us. We are going to die, too. None of this is for the faint of heart.

There is nothing wrong with being frightened, or with being reminded of our mortality. Our culture suggests to us that death happens to other people, most of them far away or different from us. Our culture suggests to us that fears are generally irrational because we are masters of our fate and have, any way, enough money to protect ourselves from the bad things that, again, happen to other people.

This is all ridiculous. It's good for us to be reminded that what our culture suggests to us is false. Life is always fragile; everyone's life is fragile. Everyone's life falls short of the ideal God has for us (mostly our lives fall short even of the ideals we have for ourselves). We need to repent. We need to grow up. We need Lent.

So if Lent seems frightening somehow, that's a good thing. Lent brings a salutary fear, most of all that peculiar fear of God, which is not terror, but which scripture calls "the beginning of wisdom." Lent brings a fear that is liberating and not paralyzing. We are challenged to ignore the trivialities of life, to focus on what matters, and to meet the crisis of our daily living with courage. We are called to realize that we are not alone, but that, with a loving Savior and within that Savior's community, we are passing through struggles toward glory. We are invited to see in our frailty and even in our mortality a link with the world around us and with all its people (for this whole creation is passing away, and all will be made new). Lent is a blessing for us, even if it frightens us. We pray that through us our Lord may make this Lent a blessing for others as well.

Go forth into the world to serve God with gladness;  
be of good courage;  
hold fast to what is good; render to no one evil for evil;  
strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak;

(**DISCIPLINE**, continued on page 5)

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of the church. Gradually, several gay couples arrived and took their place in the leadership of the congregation.

In the 80s and 90s, the mental health field was entering into the "Decade of the Brain" and to gene-mapping, as psychiatry focused on the chemistry and genetics that, it believed, determined behavior. Significant gains were made in realizing both how similar we humans are in general and how different we can be, due to very small biologic, often pre-conception or uterine-developed causes. At the same time, both the biological scientists and behavioral and social scientists were documenting the influence of each domain on the other, not only in terms of causation, but also in terms of capacity for building lives of quality. The term "living with" began to describe a person's relationship with certain illnesses, disabilities, personal qualities, and the like, rather than "suffering from," "afflicted with," or "challenged by."

### The Church and the Society I See Today

Today we know that most mental illness has biologic causation, for which treatment usually requires some medication to remedy the biologic imbalance. At the same time, certain diagnostic categories have been deleted from the psychiatric diagnostic compendium. Today, for social workers and others in the mental health field, homosexuality is no longer considered a mental illness. Social work's engagement in homosexuality includes working to assure parity in the workplace, assistance in managing familial issues such as managing the "coming out" process, adoption procedures, assistance to adolescents addressing their identity formation, and partnership formation and break-ups.

Today, our church does ordain gay persons. Most urban congregations (at least) welcome gay people into open participation in congregational life, whether single or partnered. Some, such as mine, as part of evangelism outreach, place worship service announcement ads in gay-community newspapers as well as others. Still, however, neither our church body nor society is ready to accept the gay adult "child of God" to be fully co-equal in expression, just as only some forty years ago women were not accorded full acceptance for ordination.

Today the struggle focuses on what to call the committed relationship of two people of the same gender. For many, "marriage" is reserved for those of different gender, with the implicit *telos* of being the social and biologic structure through which children are brought into the world and cared for. Yet society is quite willing to use that term when two different-gendered people, well beyond child-creating days, enter into marriage. Indeed, these marriages are celebrated as "senior love." In this age when heterosexuals are deferring marriage or preferring co-habitation without wedlock, and children born to unmarried mothers are increasing at a pace significant enough to cause concern to policy makers, society finds itself unable to reconcile this set of behavior with the growing trend in the gay community to want to marry, to attain the legal right to marry, to

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(**DISCIPLINE**, continued from page 4)

help the afflicted; honor all people;  
love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the  
Holy Spirit.

(*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Dismissal for Ash Wednesday)

*Pastor Richard H. Graham serves Hope Lutheran Church and  
Student Center in College Park, Maryland*

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## WHO IS MY FAMILY?

by Alan Sutherland

At the beginning of this year, I celebrated a milestone. It occurred on my sixty-third birthday. No, that wasn't the milestone—that's nowhere near either end of the age spectrum where the addition of a single year constitutes a milestone. No, on that same day, I also celebrated the fortieth anniversary of my election to the council of the Lutheran church in which I grew up, on the night of my twenty-third birthday. Being a "son" of the congregation (back in the days when only "sons" but not "daughters" could serve on the council, let alone serve as clergy), that I would someday serve on the church council was more or less a given. At least a third of the council was comprised of guys I knew from our days together in Sunday school, in post-confirmation classes, in Luther League, etc.

Why would this be of interest to anyone but me and maybe a few others who might remember Luther League with some rosy haze of nostalgia? The reason is that the concept of "sons" and "daughters" in a congregation has particular relevance to those of us in the GLBT community. It speaks to the issue of family in a way that those who have turned the phrase "traditional family values"—or even the word, family, itself—into a slogan of exclusion don't hear or don't want to hear. The main reason why I was elected to the council at such a tender age was that, due to changing demographics in that urban neighborhood, which could no longer support six Lutheran churches, the congregation was in decline.

Shortly after my election, those four of us who were the youngest members of the council were named as a planning committee to look at alternatives and report back to the council and to the congregation as to what options the church had for its future. Being laymen, and young laymen at that, the discussions were at times awkward, but the one conclusion at which we arrived fairly early was that, more than anything, a church was a group of people. It wasn't the beautiful building, it wasn't the magnificent organ, it wasn't the great choir, etc.; as significant as each of those was, it was its people. It was the people who were there when my brother, my sister, and I were each confirmed, who were there when each of my parents were buried, who saw me graduate from high school and college and then start my first job.

We've heard much discussion of "nontraditional families," from those who support us in our efforts to get our church to recognize us. While that support is warmly appreciated, it often ignores the issue that family is not just nuclear family. Ruth and

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gain the church's sanction for marriage, and to form families of creation.

Just as labeling and social awareness has changed, so has science developed, in these past several decades, the capacity for children to be conceived and brought to birth in non-traditional ways. Since the first test-tube baby, there has developed an industry of fertility treatments to aid couples in conceiving. Ethical concern about this has long since given sway to the greater social goal and biblical injunction to "be fruitful and multiply." Yet, again, while acceptance of fertility treatments seems "natural" in relationship to heterosexuals, it is a different matter for gay people who want to conceive and rear children.

### Change I See in the Future

I believe that this advancement of science is one of the ways God is speaking through history to help humankind come to a fuller understanding of how truly creative His love of the world is. In a recent discussion with clergy about the various scriptural bases for the church's position on homosexuality, one pastor stated that the bottom line of the church's rejection of gays is that the "be fruitful and multiply" injunction is biologically impossible for them, and that same-sex gender partnerships preclude conceiving children who will carry on God's kingdom on earth.

But just as the church is moving toward accepting gay individuals as fully-saved children of God, so is science increasingly demonstrating that sexual orientation is biologic rather than a life-style choice. At the same time, science has produced methodology to pro-create through other means than the traditional "plumbing process."

Recently the Director of the National Institutes of Health Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences at a conference of social work researchers used tobacco cessation as an example of how within one or two generations societal attitudes about smoking have been changed significantly. While there have been significant cancer treatment gains in recent years, it is clear from this review that smoking cessation is one of the prime reasons for the reduction in lung cancer. This one important example of how societal attitudes about the behavior of smoking has changed in forty years, from its being omnipresent in homes and public places to now being a virtual taboo, shows how societal attitude can influence personal behavior and develop positive changes. True, cancer is caused by biological mechanisms gone awry, but in some cases behavior change can be a significant preventative.

In reflecting on the amazing changes in both scientific knowledge and societal awareness over the past generation or two, I am astounded at the rapidity of change that has occurred, when one considers forty years in light of man's existence on earth. In reflection, I also have come to see that while theology may be a strong influence on society and personal behavior, theologians have not usually been the creators of change. More often, they are the belated sanctimonies of what God through His people has already created.

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Naomi were just as much a family as were Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Many of us have formed or will form nuclear families, with or without the benefit of same-sex marriage or civil unions. However, many others of us will not, and some of those who do form such bonds will find, in a country where more than half of all state-sanctioned marriages end in divorce, that "till death do us part" is a goal, not a guarantee.

Most of us already have families: parents, grandparents, siblings, nieces, nephews, etc. But, in our increasingly more mobile society, how many of them are as geographically close (not to mention, as emotionally close) as are some of the members of our own congregation? My own family, which lived for five generations in New York City, is now so geographically dispersed that only a fifth cousin, who holds on to a rent-controlled apartment in Manhattan, can still claim any ties to that city. Who among them could I have turned to when the ambulance was rushing me to the hospital four years ago?

So, for us in the GLBT community, church—that "group of people" who are the essence of what a church really is—represents much more. It is that place—those people—to whom we turn when we simply can't go it alone, as tradition has it that the now demoted St. Christopher once carried the Christ child. Yes, they're there to celebrate those significant milestones in life. Moreover, they're there to ask the simple question "How are you?" and when the answer is, "Not so good," to ease the discomfort. If, as is the case with my current congregation, they've also taken the significant step of proclaiming that they welcome gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people as fellow Christians found worthy by God who claims us in baptism, then all the more reason to see them as family.

Much of my knowledge of scriptural passages came from my maternal grandmother, who seemed to have a passage from the Bible for every occasion (some, I suspect, were of her own creation). One of her favorites was "God wends his miracles in mysterious ways." I thought of that when reading a piece of doggerel that you have probably also read, the one that ends with the words "When there was only one set of footprints in the sand, that's when I carried you." Some find that piece to be a bit treacly. Oddly, I've always found it comforting: with Christ, we are never actually alone. It's just that sometimes, in wending His miracles in mysterious ways, His messengers may be very ordinary people. Some may call them angels and that they truly are. However, we can also simply call them "family."

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So, I must conclude that our committee of forty years ago was only partially right in looking to theologians to parse revelation. Theology is only part of the process. I now believe that science has created the "narrow doorway" through which we can move into a fuller expression of life-creation. Science is now on the cusp of defining those few biological determinants that develop sexual orientation, just as we now understand the minor differences that develop racial characteristics.

At this point the reader might fear that I am proposing that science may soon discover a "biological cause" for sexual orientation and soon thereafter a "targeted treatment" for it. On the contrary, I believe that science has created the knowledge that will help change societal attitudes towards homosexuality. Just as societal attitudes towards the gay community are changing, so can they be changed even more through the interaction of personal behavior and societal acceptance.

### Response to Coming Change

The church, from its early centuries, provided a way for men and women to forego marriage and dedicate themselves wholly to Christ and the church. They could become monks or nuns living a celibate life. I would suggest that, using the "labeling theory" described in the introduction to this article, the church was affording a sanctioned outlet for persons who chose not to marry, or not to marry a person of another gender. They could live in religious communities, in which residents were called brothers and sisters, thus providing an approved, non-erotic way they could relate to one another. Just as societal definitions have been used to position a group of people in relation to other groups or each other (e.g. child, deviant, sinner, referred to earlier), so has society defined how people may relate to each other (or not) by defining and attributing labels to that relationship, such as brother or sister. Today we see the language/labeling definitional struggle being carried out in terms of marriage vs. union, husband and wife vs. spouse, etc.

After the Reformation, with the new churches sanctioning married clergy, that mechanism for some gay people to live a sanctioned, even celebrated life, greatly diminished. All this is not to say that celibate monks and nuns are gays undercover; but merely to offer a perspective on how gays who were inclined to serve the church were afforded highly favored status within the church, as long as they chose not to express their orientation.

Today, "lifestyle choice" is the term used most often by those who fear and reject the gay community. But what exactly does that term signify? Most often it is used to describe what straight married people have seen as a profligate engagement with multiple sex partners in a perpetual adolescence, since society and the church both define adulthood as getting married and having children. Now, with the "gay marriage" movement, there is recognition that many gay people have lived faithful lives with single partners for many years, new couples are forming, and the desire for family is blossoming with the emergence of "two Mommies" and "two Daddies" through both adoption and bio-

## TEXTS AND MEANINGS: WHY DO SCHOLARS DIFFER ABOUT THE MEANING OF TEXTS ON SEXU- ALITY?

by Arland J. Hultgren

Biblical scholars differ widely in the interpretation of texts having to do with sexuality issues, and that is particularly the case in regard to those that are brought into discussions concerning homosexuality. To be sure, there is no end to the list of texts that can be brought into the discussion. The list could include the creation narratives in Genesis and still other texts that have to do with males and females, sexual expression, marriage, and so on. But there are a select few that are almost always brought to the table, including Genesis 19:1-11; Judges 19:16-30; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; and 1 Timothy 1:10. Scholars who share the same confessional or denominational heritage and use virtually the same methods of interpretation can come up with quite different conclusions concerning the meaning of these texts and their applicability to issues facing the church and society.

It is sometimes suggested that the line of demarcation between scholars is any one of the following (or a combination of them): (1) The one group has a high view of Scripture and its authority; the other does not. (2) The one group is conservative; the other is liberal. (3) The one group is counter-cultural; the other has capitulated to the culture. (4) The one group is open to hearing what the texts actually say; the other consists of people who have their minds made up before dealing with the texts. (5) The one is committed to traditional theological norms (Scripture, creeds, and confessions); the other is not. (6) The one group honors the integrity of theological work; the other has been affected by experiences that override theology, such as having been moved emotionally by hearing the testimony of gays or lesbians, or perhaps having gay or lesbian relatives and/or friends.

In actual fact, however, the lines of demarcation listed here can be set aside. The polarizations that they cause are often inaccurate caricatures; they are unfortunate, unnecessary, and not conducive to discourse or mutual understanding. In their place I have found that there are other, more basic factors that enter into the discussion among scholars concerning the issues around homosexuality and the Scriptures. Four are of particular importance.

### Which Texts Apply?

One of the most basic questions is the relevance of some of the texts listed above. Which of those brought into the discussion has a legitimate place? The texts from Genesis and Judges stand first in line as candidates to be taken off the table. Although they have to do with male-with-male sexual activity, they do not have to do with *homosexual* activity. It can be agreed upon by all interpreters that the scenes portrayed in them are

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logical means.

This public living of a personal behavior that had heretofore been closeted has created a conundrum for society. Lifestyle choice now is being expressed not only in the freedom to love a person of the same gender, but to continue to love in a long-term, committed relationship, forming nurturing families. The church and society are now being called upon to recognize not how different gay people are from straight people, but how similar they are.

This recognition of “the other” as “not as other as originally thought” is the beginning of inter-cultural acceptance. Just as gene-mappers are recognizing how people are more similar than different, so people of different cultures recognize that they are more similar than different when they get to know one another. In Shakespeare’s story, Romeo and Juliet saw no alternative to their familial culture’s differences but suicide. Today, our country is a testimony to how far inter-ness among peoples has progressed as people using census definitions increasingly prefer “other” or “mixed” rather than the defined racial groupings.

Last summer I had the privilege to convene a national symposium of social work researchers to look at “the state of the science” of social work research related to LGBT people and to develop a research agenda for such work in the future. Of the twenty researchers, most were gay or lesbian people. Many were exploring issues of identity formation, family dynamics, health care needs, development of social supports, etc. Yet most concluded that their research was related to the human spectrum as a whole—child welfare, healthcare, managing the aging process, community building, and the like. Participants recognized how much of their work was transferable to society as a whole, even though some of it was conducted specifically within the LGBT community. A report and a significant body of publications were assembled from that symposium’s participants and are available at [www.iaswresearch.org](http://www.iaswresearch.org) (click on *Publications*).

### How Much Has Changed In a Generation

As I developed this project, I could not help but reflect on how different the time is in which I now live from the time when my career began and I chaired that long-ago committee. Like Romeo and Juliet, the young seminarian felt that suicide was the only option to deal with an unbearable conflict. Now, just as with the breakdown in the census descriptors reflects, people are choosing new ways to make statements about how they define themselves in relation to others in society or to society as a whole. In sociological terms, social norms are loosening and personal behavior is less restricted through a new order of person-environment engagement.

The social work profession has long engaged in affirmative action not only to attempt to bring justice to LGBT persons, but to

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violent. In fact, they are instances of gang rape. The violent events portrayed are abhorrent and frightening to gay as well as straight persons. In light of that, it is widely agreed by biblical scholars and others that these passages can be set aside.

Likewise, the passages in Leviticus are contested, although less so. On the one hand, the passages can be read as strict prohibitions against same-sex sexual behavior of any kind, and that is the end of the matter. On the other hand, the passages can be regarded as prohibitions in ancient Israel for some specific reasons, such as the prohibition of cultic prostitution, the need for procreation, purity concerns within Israel, the prohibition of mixing male and female roles, and so on. The question arises then whether any of these is a concern for the church or society today. In addition, the question must be raised whether the Levitical passages have relevance for the behavior of Christians. To be sure, it is in Leviticus that one also finds the commandment about love for one's neighbor (19:18). But that can be considered a matter of another order, and that commandment has virtually a life of its own in the New Testament (Mark 12:31 and parallels; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8). It is fair to ask: What is there in Leviticus that is authoritative for Christian behavior? We shall return to that indirectly when we come to some statements by Martin Luther below.

### What the Texts Mean

The most significant texts brought into discussion concerning the Bible and homosexuality for Christians are Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; and 1 Timothy 1:10. Their status as New Testament texts makes them particularly important.

But here the question of the meaning of the texts comes into play, and people disagree. Some interpreters see in these passages unequivocal prohibitions or condemnations against homosexual behavior of all kinds.

In the case of 1 Corinthians 6:9 they see an echo of the passages in Leviticus, pointing in particular to some linguistic similarities between Paul's Greek and that of his Bible, the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). Paul's term *arsenokoitai* is notoriously difficult to translate and therefore interpret, since it seems to have been coined by Paul himself. Some interpreters go on to suggest that Paul coined the term from the words *arsen* ("male") and *koite* ("bed") in the passages in Leviticus. But that does not solve the puzzle. What kind of "male bedder" would Paul be talking about? He uses the term *arsenokoitai* right after using another term, *malakoi* (literally "soft ones"), and translators and interpreters generally assume that the two terms are somehow related. Modern translations have sometimes combined the terms to read as "sexual perverts" (RSV, 1971), or more recently they have taken the two words to mean two different kinds of people, such as "male prostitutes" and "homosexual offenders" (NIV, 1973), "male prostitutes" and "sodomites" (NRSV, 1989), and more. It is notable that the most "conservative" of these, the NIV, does not simply say "homosexuals" but "homosexual offenders." Curi-

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assure that LGBT persons were included in the professional leadership community. Twenty years ago, the symposium would never have happened. In a generation, a significant cadre of researchers and body of findings has emerged. In the public arena, we are now struggling with how to recognize legally a phenomenon that can no longer be ignored, that is, a group of people formerly legally invisible now standing to be recognized. In only a generation many churches have moved toward including LGBT persons openly into the ranks of their rostered clergy. I believe that it is only a matter of time until the theologians and the laity of this church come to recognize Christ's call to a new order in this arena.

For those who have suffered through these years of conflict, as people moved from the closet to open presence in the pew, the past forty years may seem a prolonged agony. I submit that on this subject God's time is moving along quite well through the presence of his Word among us. It is my hope that God's creating Word in God's time will bring new perspective, hope, and good news to those who are waiting for it.

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ously, the translation of *arsenokoitai* in the NIV at 1 Timothy 1:10 is simply "perverts."

There is a long tradition of interpreting 1 Corinthians 6:9 to refer to pederasty. That is how Martin Luther understood the term *arsenokoitai*, for he translated it as *Knabenschänder* ("boy molesters," "pederasts"). He translated the other term, *malakoi*, as *Weichlinge* ("weaklings," "sissies," perhaps meaning "effeminate," as later in the KJV). Some more recent interpreters (including some that would be considered conservative evangelicals) have taken the terms to refer to those who are pederasts and those who are their victims; others have understood the terms to refer to male prostitutes and those who have a sexual relationship with them. To insist, as some do, that the passage must refer to same-gender sexual relationships of all kinds and that it condemns them, even among persons who are homosexual in orientation and living in committed relationships, is only one among other interpretations.

Clearly the most important passage brought to the discussion of homosexuality among Christians is Romans 1:26-27. Probably most interpreters would agree that, according to this passage, same-gender sexual relationships are considered a result of God's abandonment of humanity as a consequence of idolatry. That having been said, however, the context makes it clear that Paul is speaking about same-gender sexual activity among Gentiles (idolaters), not humanity as a whole, and certainly not

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about a small percentage of the population that would be considered homosexuals by today's thinking. Rather, Paul writes here about an activity located within the context of a long list of abusive and violent behaviors (1:24-32). In the lengthy discussion from Romans 1:18 through 3:20 Paul is making the case that the entire world is in need of the redemption that God has accomplished in Christ. That includes both Gentiles (1:18-32) and Jews (2:17-3:8). Like other Jewish writers before him (such as the authors of the *Testament of Levi* 17.11 and the *Sibylline Oracles* 3.595-600) that speak of Gentiles as idolaters and pederasts, Paul paints the Gentile world in lurid colors. What is characteristic of the Gentile world, according to that tradition, is that it consists of idolaters and sexual deviants who know no bounds. Every kind of same-gender sexual behavior is therefore collapsed into the text.

The question the interpreter must ask is whether that which Paul speaks of is that which we are speaking of today. Are we speaking of apples and oranges or apples and apples? Does Paul here envision a situation where a person would say: "I am a believer in Jesus Christ. I am homosexual in orientation. I am committed to a life-long partnership with my same-gender partner."

The situation described is, of course, not what Paul addresses in Romans. The concept of sexual orientation is modern. To be sure, some ancient writers sometimes took note of certain men who had a passion for boys or other men, and the writers often ridicule them; they do not show any awareness of an orientation.

It is instructive here to read through the 447 texts gathered together by Thomas Hubbard in his book *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Hubbard provides English translations of texts written by Greek and Roman authors. A reading of those texts is quite revealing about such activity in antiquity. A wide variety of activities is portrayed and discussed. The most prevalent activity referred to—I would guess in 90 to 95% of the 447 cases—is pederasty, in which an adult male acquires a boy between the ages of twelve and fifteen—sometimes younger or older—as a sexual partner for a single affair or sometimes longer, even for a few years. But there are other things in these texts as well. Some texts make it clear that certain men were publicly known for their love of boys and other men. Sometimes those persons were laughed at, sometimes they were scorned, and sometimes they were praised. Most texts by far, however, are not about persons known to have same-gender attractions as something distinctive about them, but are about men who have both boys and women (primarily their wives) as lovers. They appear to be what we today would call heterosexuals who enjoy that sort of thing or perhaps bisexuals.

The texts speak of same-gender sexual activities of all kinds. The activities run the whole gamut: pederasty, promiscuity, prostitution, drunken orgies, sexual abuse of slaves, rape of

boys and men, bawdy role play in the theater, charges of indecency at trials in court, questions and theories about same-gender sexual attraction and behavior, self-loathing by such persons, and so on.

Reading through them, one comes to realize that those who claim that there were instances of homosexual marriages in the world of Paul, that Paul would have known about them, and that he therefore implicitly condemns them are grasping at straws. There are texts concerning the Emperors Nero and Hadrian, for example, that speak of long-term relationships with men or boys, and even of a marriage in the case of Nero and a boy named Sporus. Yet these are hardly cases where the relationships are healthy and stable in any sense of those words. In fact, the instances cited are treated in the texts as eccentric and abusive. In both cases the partners of the Emperors are youths. Hadrian was thirty-four years older than his companion, Antinous. Nero castrated Sporus. According to one version of the death of Hadrian's consort Antinous, Hadrian sacrificed him to the gods of Egypt. On reading through the various texts gathered by Hubbard, it is fair to say that in no case does one find reference or hints to what we would call committed same-gender relationships entered into by persons who love one another and pledge life-long fidelity. What we see instead is plenty of evidence for promiscuity and abuse.

### Consistency of Application on Moral Issues

For the sake of argument, let us say that the biblical passages brought to the discussion are clear prohibitions against same-gender activities of any kind. Then the question arises whether they have a status of applicability that other passages of Scripture do not have.

Here the discussion often turns to how we deal with other passages, such as those that have traditionally been used to endorse slavery (Eph. 5:5-8; 1 Tim. 6:1-2) and to prohibit the ordination of women (1 Cor. 14:33-36; 1 Tim. 2:11-12). Occasionally those passages that speak about divorce are brought to the table as well (e.g., Mark 10:2-12; 1 Cor. 7:10-11). Then one might go on to say that we do not endorse slavery; we ordain women; and we permit divorce. In short, we do not apply these biblical teachings in strict, literal ways, so why should we do so in the case of texts that might speak against homosexual activity?

But then comes the "gotcha" response. In each of those cases the texts cited can be countered by other passages in Scripture, passages that might inspire Christians to oppose slavery (Philemon 16-21), ordain women (Gal. 3:28), or allow for divorce (Matt. 19:9). The argument goes on from there to say that, in the case of homosexuality, however, there are no counter texts.

There is one issue, however, where that argument fails to be convincing. That is the case of the remarriage of divorced persons. Divorce, it is said, can be forgiven. Perhaps so, but it is clear that once it has happened, the remarriage of divorced persons is problematic from the viewpoint of the New Testament.

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The earliest New Testament writer, Paul, allows only two possibilities for divorced persons: either to remain single or to be reunited with the former spouse (1 Cor. 7:11). The Gospel of Mark and the Q tradition (=material common to Matthew and Luke, derived from a common source other than Mark) implicitly prohibit the remarriage of divorced persons as well (Mark 10:11-12; Q, Luke 16:18) insofar as such unions are called adulterous. To be sure, the evangelist Matthew has his famous exception attached to both the Q tradition (Matt. 5:32) and in his revision of Mark (Matt. 19:9). According to the text in Matthew, remarriage is allowed for the man who has divorced his wife on the grounds of her "unchastity" (if that is what *porneia* means, as the NRSV has it; the NIV has "marital unfaithfulness"; and the Roman Catholic NAB has "unless the marriage is unlawful"). But if a man marries a divorced woman, he commits adultery.

The argument that divorce can be forgiven, opening up the way for remarriage, is a false conclusion from the texts of Paul, Q, and Mark. The point in all three cases is that to remarry someone other than the first spouse after divorce is to enter a life-long, illicit, adulterous affair. In the case of Matthew that is the same, except for the "exception" specified. If we ask what Jesus would have taught, we shall probably have to go with Paul, Q, and Mark: the remarriage of divorced persons is prohibited on moral grounds.

The irony of all this is that the Roman Catholic practice of not conducting new marriages for divorced persons (except for making the first marriage sacramentally null and void by annulment) is more "biblical" than the typical Protestant practice of conducting second marriages on the basis of pastoral discretion (perhaps after counseling and the passage of time).

And what are the practical consequences of being "biblical" in this matter? Any pastor who would tell remarried persons in his or her congregation that they are living in perpetual adulterous relationships would not last long in any parish one can name. But if he or she says that the biblical texts on same-gender sexual activity are about homosexuality and are normative for theology and practice, there is no problem for many who consider themselves "conservative." A "selective fundamentalism" is acceptable.

As an aside to all this, it is interesting to observe that the various proposals to legislate that marriage is between one man and one woman are not as "conservative" as their proponents and supporters think. To make them truly "conservative," they should prescribe that marriage is between one man and one woman *for life*. As they are now, the proposals mean "one man and one woman" *at any given time*. To add "for life" and consequent penalties for divorce, even if rare exceptions were made for it in extreme cases, would kill the proposals quickly.

### Broader Hermeneutical Differences

In the end, one has to decide what is at the heart of the matter in the interpretation and application of the Scriptures. Here

there are differences among interpreters. Lutherans have traditionally interpreted the Scriptures in light of the Christ event and for proclamation; they have been wary of looking to the Bible to find patterns for society and even to consider it the sole source in moral teaching.

That wariness goes back to the Reformation. In his famous essay on "How Christians Should Regard Moses," printed in volume 35 of *Luther's Works*, Martin Luther makes the case that, for Christians, the basis for moral behavior is natural law, not the commandments in the Old Testament (not even the Ten Commandments). In one of his most audacious statements, Luther says (p. 165):

Moses has nothing to do with us. If I were to accept Moses in one commandment, I would have to accept the entire Moses. Thus the consequence would be that if I accept Moses as master, then I must have myself circumcised, wash my clothes in the Jewish way, eat and drink and dress thus and so, and observe all that stuff. So, then we will neither observe nor accept Moses. Moses is dead. His rule ended when Christ came. He is of no further service. That Moses does not bind the Gentiles can be proved from Exodus 20[:1], where God himself speaks, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." This text makes it clear that even the Ten Commandments do not pertain to us. For God never led us out of Egypt, but only the Jews.

Luther goes on to say that the Ten Commandments are to be kept "not because Moses gave commandment, but because they have been implanted in me by nature, and Moses agrees exactly with nature" (p. 168). For Christians, natural law becomes the guide in Luther's thinking at this point. He sums matters up in this way: "Where [Moses] gives commandment, we are not to follow him except so far as he agrees with the natural law" (p. 173).

That does not of course settle things in regard to homosexual behavior. Using the natural law argument, there are those who argue that, since we are of two sexes, only heterosexual sexual activities are normal and allowable (within marriage).

But that is not the only possible conclusion. Is human anatomy the only clue to what is natural? What of the brain and, even more, of the elusive mind? What is the role of self-understanding? Moreover, within the larger natural world, homosexual orientation is evident among animals of various species, perhaps even all. It is generally recognized in the various branches of the sciences that "normal variants" of phenomena exist, which are unusual (as a general rule), but are not considered abnormal.

To act according to natural law, therefore, is to act in accord with what is appropriate in nature, and that cannot be predicated on anatomical characteristics alone.

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## THE NETWORK FOR INCLUSIVE VISION

The Network for Inclusive Vision provides a public roster of church leaders committed to bear witness to the inclusive Gospel of Jesus Christ by fostering the full inclusion of sexual minorities, that is, persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (GLBT), in the congregational life and ordained ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

### Our Members

Network members, about 1,300 of them, are members of the ELCA, lay persons, seminarians, diaconal ministers, deaconesses, associates in ministry, professors, bishops, pastors—fathers, mothers, spouses, siblings—who believe it is time to register their opposition publicly to the continual expulsions and forced resignations of ELCA pastors who are openly gay or lesbian. The names of Network members are listed on a public roster, which is shared with ELCA officials and can be found on our website: [www.inclusivenet.com](http://www.inclusivenet.com) (click on roster).

We come together as ELCA church leaders who want to move from quiet questioning of our church's policies on sexuality to public advocacy for change.

### Our Message

We publicly challenge the ELCA:

- to promote an environment open to honest and faithful discussion as we seek the Spirit's guidance concerning issues around sexuality;
- to provide pastoral care for GLBT people, as for all other members of the ELCA;
- to affirm committed and faithful same-sex relationships with appropriate liturgies;
- to change the current guidelines for candidates for ministry, in "Vision and Expectations" and "Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline," which discriminate against gay and lesbian clergy, associates in ministry, and seminarians;
- to accept qualified women and men, regardless of sexual orientation, as pastors and professionals of this church and as candidates for ministry within it;

- to seek justice for victims of sexual orientation discrimination within the church and to support those who provide care for them and advocate on their behalf.

### Our Mission *(revised by the Network Board, October, 2005)*

The mission of The Network for Inclusive Vision is to foster full inclusion of GLBT people in the congregational life and rostered ministries of the ELCA by changing hearts and minds through biblical renewal. Carrying out this mission will include publishing a journal, providing materials for congregations, and fostering regional conferences.

### Your Support

1) We ask for your contributions. We have two major annual expenses:

Printing and mailing three issues of *The Network Letter*  
\$2,700

Two board meetings a year (Board members pay their own airfare and meals)  
\$2,000

Total annual expenses: \$4,700

2) We encourage you to go to local meetings of your congregation and synod to advocate for the full inclusion of GLBT persons in the church.

3) We encourage you to volunteer in their congregations to become members of their synod assemblies, in order to support resolutions for full acceptance of GLBT persons in our church, such as those posted on [www.goodsoil.org](http://www.goodsoil.org).

### Join Us!

You can become a member of The Network by sending your name, address, and ELCA Synod with an annual contribution of \$25 for an individual, \$35 for a household, or \$10 for a student, to:

Ingrid Christiansen, Treasurer  
The Network  
4145 N. Greenview Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60613-1924

Make checks payable to The Network. If you are already a member of The Network, but have not made a contribution this year, please renew your membership with a contribution. Members receive The Network publication, *The Network Letter*, three times a year.

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### Postscript

The debate over issues around homosexuality shows no sign of dissipating soon. But it is too often harmed by persons who accuse those who call for reconsideration of traditional views of being soft on scriptural authority, being liberal (meaning unfaithful to the tradition), having capitulated to the culture, having their minds made up and unwilling to listen to Scripture, disregarding theological norms of the past, or letting common human experience override sound theology. The only way forward is to ask more seriously what texts are relevant, what they actually say (and do not say), seek consistency in the use of the Bible in moral deliberation, and take up the larger hermeneutical issues.

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I am medium proud  
slightly raw and riding  
mid way through  
the parade of life,

Still hoping and  
dreaming  
of being loved for  
who I am.

not leading the charge  
nor watching  
from the sidelines.

I am medium proud.  
Not rare or well-done.

I am medium proud.

Medium.

When asked I smile and  
clearly state I'm gay  
no longer hiding behind  
the labels, tags or  
stereotypes used by others  
to define me.

Misunderstood,

I am medium proud.  
Medium proud.

Medium proud.

I am medium proud.

Walking with my  
head held high,  
choosing to be  
hated for who I am than  
loved for all that others  
wish I would be  
but know in their hearts  
I am not.

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