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**A COMPREHENSIVE AND CRITICAL  
REVIEW ESSAY OF  
*HOMOSEXUALITY, SCIENCE, AND THE  
“PLAIN SENSE” OF SCRIPTURE,  
PART 1***

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In the last decade we have seen published a few important collections of essays on the Bible and homosexuality by biblical scholars and theologians representing both sides of the fence.<sup>1</sup> Of these, the one recently edited by David L. Balch may well be the best, at least from the side of

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<sup>1</sup>See Jeffrey S. Siker, *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994; contributors are from various theological disciplines); Robert L. Brawley (ed.), *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996; contributors are all biblical scholars, mostly Presbyterian seminary professors); and Choon-Leong Seow (ed.), *Homosexuality and Christian Community* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996; a collection of essays by professors at Princeton Theological Seminary). Another book, edited by Walter Wink, is a collection of essays limited to authors endorsing homosexual practice: *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999). The quality of the Wink volume does not match those above. On the whole the essays resemble more brief editorials than researched contributions. It is surprising that Augsburg Fortress, the publishing house of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (presumably with a vested interest in representing the diverse perspectives of its denomination), has failed to publish a single work critiquing the pro-homosexuality argument, even a few essays in a larger book, while publishing several that advance such an argument (in addition to the Wink volume, books by Robin Scroggs and Martti Nissinen on the biblical side alone; also chapters in books by William Countryman, Paul Jersild, and Ilona Rashkow).

those who endorse same-sex intercourse.<sup>2</sup> To say this, however, is not to claim that the scholars endorsing same-sex intercourse have made a convincing case. On the contrary, they all (along with some of the authors who oppose same-sex intercourse) exhibit serious problems at various points in terms of exegesis, logic, and/or interpretation of the data. Nevertheless, they collectively make one of the best cases for same-sex intercourse from a Christian perspective available today and so deserve extended comment. The book is a product of a 1996 conference spearheaded by Balch, a Lutheran professor of New Testament at Brite Divinity School (Texas Christian University). Already in 1998 Balch published short summaries of some of the papers.<sup>3</sup>

Balch set out to produce a book that was “intentionally balanced, with arguments at both poles of the debate.”<sup>4</sup> Although his book does better on this score than previous collections,<sup>5</sup> it still falls short of the mark. To be sure, the book does offer pro- and con-positions from various perspectives:

	<i>Pro-Homosexual Behavior</i>	<i>Anti-Homosexual Behavior</i>
The Bible and Science	Christine E. Gudorf	Stanton L. Jones/ Mark A. Yarhouse
Old Testament	Phyllis A. Bird	Christopher Seitz
New Testament	David E. Fredrickson	Robert Jewett
Theological Ethics	Nancy J. Duff	K. Greene-McCreight

<sup>2</sup>Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. In this connection it may not be accidental that all three blurbs on the back cover are written by scholars supportive of same-sex intercourse: James A. Sanders, Victor Paul Furnish, and Ralph W. Klein.

<sup>3</sup>“Romans 1:24-27, Science, and Homosexuality,” *CurTM* 25:6 (1998): 433-40.

<sup>4</sup>*Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, 5 n. 1. In terms of denominational affiliation, the contributors cover a wide gamut: three Lutherans, two Episcopalians, two Methodists, two Presbyterians, one Disciples of Christ member, one Roman Catholic, one United Church of Christ member (though no Baptist or Pentecostal). However, denominational affiliation on this issue for the most part means very little. The one Roman Catholic, Christine Gudorf, certainly does not represent the official or majority Catholic position.

<sup>5</sup>In each of the collections cited in n. 1 above, contributions from scholars opposed to same-sex intercourse are in a distinct minority: four or five out of thirteen in Siker; two out of nine in Brawley; three or four out of thirteen in Seow.

Some unevenness already arises here. Robert Jewett, dealing solely with Rom 1:24-27, arrives at a position that is more ambivalent, than opposed, on the question of same-sex intercourse. Kathryn Greene-McCreight's essay reflects a level of tentativeness and apology that is uncharacteristic of any of the essays by advocates for homosexual relationships.

Still more problematic for an editor aiming at balance is that the book begins with two additional essays written by authors adopting the pro-homosexuality side: Mark G. Toulouse (dean of Brite Divinity School), writing on changes in American church policy toward homosexuals since 1956; and William R. Schoedel (with an expertise in Greco-Roman anthropology and second-century church history), writing on Paul in relation to the Greco-Roman background (essentially the same topic taken up by Fredrickson, though from a slightly different angle). The last essay of the book, written by Balch himself ("Concluding Observations . . . Including a Comparison of Christian with Jewish Biblical Interpretation"), also belongs to the same camp.<sup>6</sup> In the end, then, seven of the eleven articles of the book are written by proponents of homosexual behavior. Of the remaining four articles, one expresses some ambivalence (Jewett's) and another is overly apologetic about being against same-sex intercourse (Greene-McCreight's).

In this first of two essays, I will assess the contributions of those writing on the relation of the Bible to science (Jones/Yarhouse and Gudorf) and those writing on homosexuality from the perspective of theological ethics (Greene-McCreight and Duff), as well as Toulouse's historical survey.

### **I. Mark G. Toulouse, "Muddling Through: The Church and Sexuality /Homosexuality"<sup>7</sup>**

Toulouse provides the reader with an informative but sometimes naïve evolutionary approach in his survey of changing American attitudes towards sex and homosexuality over the previous forty years or so. The reader

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<sup>6</sup>Although Balch claims to hold back his own conclusions in the interests of balance, and does indeed demonstrate some evenhandedness, his bias comes across clearly, sometimes in direct statements (esp. pp. 299-304).

<sup>7</sup>Pp. 6-42.

should practice a hermeneutic of suspicion as regards the interpretative grid employed by Toulouse to evaluate trends. At the beginning of his essay, Toulouse tells his readers that “as part of the context for the church’s discussion of human sexuality, it would be good to remember that liberal positions tend to look increasingly conservative as time passes”<sup>8</sup>—not stopping to ponder the fact that some liberal positions never look “conservative” even with the passage of ample time, and some are proved to have been wrongheaded all along and then forgotten. Yet Toulouse’s comment, like the subsequent discussion, is perhaps calculated to prepare the reader for the inevitable conclusion: acceptance of homosexual unions will one day look both conservative and correct. Indeed, the last sentence of the article says as much: “If the church continues to rethink this issue [of homosexuality] in ways comparable to the movement of the past forty years, future imaginary time travelers will find our own time as foreign to them as the 1950s now seem to us.”<sup>9</sup>

#### *Assessing Toulouse’s Four Trends in Sexuality*

Toulouse identifies “four trends related to sexuality in general.” The first trend is a “shift from a rule-oriented ethic toward a more realistic assessment of the context of sexual activity,” that is, “from an emphasis on sex as an act to an emphasis on sexuality as involving a relationship.”<sup>10</sup> This distinction is important for Toulouse because he subsequently characterizes conservative opposition to same-sex intercourse as rule-oriented and based on acts rather than relationships.<sup>11</sup> The way in which the distinction is framed already prejudices the case as a battle between legalists and humanitarians, between those who do not have the capacity to think through complex situations case by case and those who do. That is unfortunate because the issue is a good deal more complex, as the example of Jesus indicates. Jesus both intensified sexual ethics (condemning adultery

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<sup>8</sup>“Muddling Through,” 8.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>11</sup>E.g., *ibid.*, 22, 34.

of the heart and forbidding divorce and remarriage) *and* aggressively reached out to sexual sinners. The trend that Toulouse identifies could be formulated differently; for example, as a movement from emphasizing other-fulfillment to self-gratification, from sacrificing the exception to promote the norm to sacrificing the norm to promote the exception, from societal good to an individual pursuit of pleasure. This too would be a prejudicial oversimplification, but no more so than the one offered by Toulouse.

The second trend proposed by Toulouse arose as an offshoot of the birth control pill: a greater appreciation of sex in its own right, quite apart from procreation. For Toulouse the result is all good: a recognition of “the essential unity of body and spirit” and an end to the “sexual dualism” of the past where sexual passion even within marriage is viewed as bad.<sup>12</sup> Again, here, one wonders: is there not an accompanying downside? For all the gains and conveniences allowed by the pill, are family structures better off? Trends since the introduction of the pill point to exponential increases in sexual promiscuity, divorce rates, sexually transmitted diseases, and (ironically) out-of-wedlock births. The capacity to have sexual intercourse with a markedly reduced “risk” of conception *may* have led to a greater appreciation of the value of sexual intimacy (can this conclusion be taken for granted as true?) but it may also have promoted a lesser appreciation of the need to tie sexual pleasure with responsible, other-gratifying behavior. To say this is not to argue either for or against birth control but merely to point out the one-dimensional nature of Toulouse’s analysis. Not everything in the sexual sphere is getting better with the passage of time. And, of course, one should beware of an artificial dualism intimated by Toulouse’s framing of the subject. Both now and throughout the history of the church it has not been necessary to detach sexual intercourse from an openness to procreation and lifelong commitments in order to arrive at a positive view of sexual pleasure.

The third and fourth trends are the affirmation of the equality of women and the “growing compatibility” of Catholic and Protestant positions on sex, two trends that appear indisputable.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 14-15.

With the delineation of these four trends, Toulouse has prepared the reader for his ensuing discussion of “unifying trends emerging from the homosexuality debate.” Since things have gone from worse to better in the sexual domain over the last four decades, we should expect increasing openness to homosexual behavior to be a good thing as well. Of course, a more nuanced picture of sexual trends in the last forty years would alter the outlook on trends in perceptions of homosexuality.

*Assessing Toulouse’s Two Trends in the Homosexuality Debate*

Toulouse points to two significant trends in the homosexuality debate, both of which, he argues, “point to the development of a ‘muddled middle’ in the churches, rather than an all-out culture war, in relationship to this issue.”<sup>13</sup> As with the discussion of sexuality, Toulouse distinguishes the views of “evangelical” Christians from “mainline” Christians, though seeking to show that the gap between both groups on the issue of homosexuality is closing.

The first trend is the shift in thinking about homosexuals, in three stages: from homosexuals as “degenerates” (homosexuality is viewed as sin in all its aspects), to homosexuals as “diseased” (homosexual practice may be sinful but the orientation itself is viewed as a disease to be cured, akin to alcoholism), to homosexuals as “disordered” (an increased appreciation of the difficulty of changing homosexual preference). Toulouse presents these trends as significant but must also admit that the majority of mainline Protestants in the so-called “muddled middle” today continue to treat homosexual actions as sinful.<sup>14</sup> Complicating the picture further, though not acknowledged by Toulouse, is the fact that in Christian Scripture and tradition sin has often been likened to a diseased and disordered state and its intractable character recognized. This would blur the categories considerably as distinct “stages” and call into question any rigid chronological succession, let alone a progression of mature theological

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 24; and see the 1996 poll of evangelical and non-evangelical churchgoers cited by Toulouse, which indicates that opposition to same-sex marriage ranged at that time from 73% to 87% (p. 33).

thinking. Even so, Toulouse is correct to point to an increasing openness to homosexuality in American society, and to see this openness as a by-product of viewing homosexual attraction as a condition difficult to erase. This correlation is not logically (or biblically) intrinsic, but it is adopted by much of the general public, including churchgoers.

The second trend that Toulouse sees in the homosexuality debate is the ability to make a distinction between endorsing same-sex intercourse and supporting civil rights legislation for homosexuals. This trend is beyond dispute. However, the implicit tenor of Toulouse's discussion will probably leave readers with two impressions. First, it is the more reasonable elements of the evangelical wing of the church that have found ways of affirming civil rights legislation for homosexuals. Second, evangelicals who oppose such legislation are beset by irrational fears that homosexual unions will be given moral validation, while opponents of homosexual behavior will be socially and legally marginalized. In response, it is difficult to see how such fears are entirely irrational, given the current near-total marginalization of voices that question the legitimacy of homosexual behavior in such sectors as the media, the arts, the National Education Association, many public school systems, institutions of higher learning (including some mainline seminaries), the national Democratic Party, and, increasingly, major corporations; given, too, the heightened pressures on mainline denominations to end their "discrimination" against ordaining "practicing, self-affirming" homosexuals and blessing same-sex unions. *Of course* granting civil-rights status to homosexual preference will have an enormous impact on legitimizing homosexual behavior in the public eye. There will be institutional grounds for regarding those outwardly critical of homosexual intercourse as the moral equivalent of racists.

*Is Toulouse Right About the' Existence of a Large "Muddled Middle"?*

The conclusion of Toulouse's article is more of a lengthy update of the impact of homosexuality on mainline churches from 1996 to 1999. His major point is that there is no "clear evidence of a Christian culture at war with itself on this issue." There are vocal minorities on the left and the right but the overwhelming number of Christians belong to this "muddled

middle" that does not want to talk about the issue of homosexuality and wishes it would go away.<sup>15</sup> The conclusion is suspect. The intensity of the debate in mainline churches over the last decade would suggest just such a "Christian culture at war with itself." Moreover, the term "muddled middle" implies, falsely, that the masses of church-going Christians are ambivalent about homosexual practice. Yet wishing that the homosexuality issue would go away is far more likely to characterize those who are not inclined toward changing the church's historic and unequivocal opposition to same-sex intercourse. Those who can least afford the homosexuality issue to go away in the church are advocates for homosexual practice. For them everything depends on a radical overhauling of a sexual norm that has persisted unchanged for two millennia in the church. A more likely conclusion than the one put forward by Toulouse is that the mainline church debate on homosexuality has lately been as close as it has only because denominational administrators, professors, and specialized clergy tend to favor the homosexual agenda at a higher rate than churchgoers generally. For example, Toulouse cites some split decisions in the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) that indicate to him a large "muddled middle." Yet split decisions probably mean the opposite: deep divisions with very little middle. The most recent representative survey of Presbyterians on the issue indicates a majority of members continue to regard same-sex intercourse as sin.<sup>16</sup> Given the heavy indoctrination by the media, the arts, politicians, secular academic institutions, and even most mainline seminaries for the normalization of homosexual behavior, we can expect

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>16</sup>A PCUSA-sponsored Presbyterian Panel Survey in 2000 indicated that 58% of members (compared to 58% of elders, 50% of pastors, and only 27% of specialized clergy) disagreed (18%) or strongly disagreed (40%) that homosexuality should be considered an acceptable alternative lifestyle; only 28% of members agreed (18%) or strongly agreed (10%) (compared to 28% of elders, 41% of pastors, and 61% of specialized clergy); 15% of members were uncertain (compared to 14% of elders, 9% of pastors, and 12% of specialized clergy)—hardly a huge "muddled middle." At the 2000 General Conference of the United Methodist Church, delegates voted by a two-thirds majority to continue to forbid the ordination of self-avowed, practicing homosexuals and to forbid UMC ministers from celebrating homosexual unions. Homosexual activism has made its greatest inroads in the smaller Protestant denominations: the Unitarian-Universalist church, the United Church of Christ, and (most recently) the Episcopal Church in America.

increasing numbers of people becoming favorably disposed or ambivalent toward such behavior, or just plain tired of fighting the battle for fear of losing status. Yet, as matters currently stand, the “muddled” middle is really not so “muddled” at all on the issue. “Besieged” is probably a better word than “muddled.”

The use of the term “middle” raises also the question of what constitutes a “middle” (Toulouse never quite explains). Do sheer numbers determine what constitutes the “middle”? Or is ideological stance the determinative factor? Or does the “middle” have to do with fidelity to central elements of the Christian faith as attested by Scripture and two millennia of church tradition? Or is personality the key, such that those who tend by nature not to be vocal about issues of concern, or who tend towards fatalism, would constitute the middle? Doubtless, those who regard same-sex intercourse as sin, a form of behavior that stands outside the pale of the church, have reasonable grounds for concluding that they represent the middle. They stand squarely within the canon of Scripture, they stand squarely within the historic confessions of the church, they tend to be reactors rather than instigators in the homosexuality issue, and in terms of total numbers within most mainline denominations in the United States they still constitute the majority (adding worldwide denominational totals would make their numbers overwhelming). For them asking what constitutes the ideological middle on homosexuality is like asking what constitutes the middle on issues like incest, polygamy, pedophilia, prostitution, and bestiality.

**II. Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse,  
"The Use, Misuse, and Abuse of Science in the Ecclesiastical  
Homosexuality Debates"<sup>17</sup>**

The article by Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse is an excellent treatment of the scientific aspects of the homosexuality debate in the church.

*A. A Review of the Arguments Made By Jones and Yarhouse*

*On Misunderstanding What the Traditionalist Position  
Must Have Science Say*

Jones and Yarhouse begin by asserting that the use of science to buttress the case for same-sex intercourse often misunderstands "what science says" and is based on a false caricature of the traditionalist position. The traditionalist view is alleged to assert (1) that homosexuality is a perversion in the sense of being statistically rare, (2) all homosexual urges are willful, (3) that homosexuality is wrong because it is a pathology, and (4) that homosexual orientation can be changed without much difficulty<sup>18</sup> into a heterosexual orientation through conversion therapy. Jones and Yarhouse argue that the traditionalist position does not intrinsically stand or fall with any of these postulates; and, in any event, the assumption that science has conclusively demonstrated the opposite of each of these four points is faulty. Furthermore, they insist, an essentialist view of homosexuality is no more intrinsically supportive of a pro-homosexuality ethic than is a social constructionist view supportive of a traditional stance against homosexuality. A condition can be biologically related and still be treated as immoral when acted upon.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Pp. 73-120 (the longest essay in the book by far). This article has just been expanded into a book: *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2000). Because of my significant agreement with the positions taken by Jones and Yarhouse, it works better for me here to summarize their arguments first and, after the full review is completed, to add some additional qualifications.

<sup>18</sup>That is, at least for those empowered by the Spirit.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 74-84.

*The Status of Scientific Knowledge About Homosexuality*

The core of the article<sup>20</sup> is a detailed delineation of the “status of our scientific knowledge.” In a well-informed discussion of recent scientific literature through 1995, they make the following points.

First, they debunk the 10% myth of homosexual prevalence in the population by pointing to eight recent studies that suggest that homosexuality characterizes no more than 3% of the population and possibly less than 2%.

Second, they inquire into possible causation factors for homosexuality: (1) genetic causation (assessed through identical twin studies by J. Michael Bailey and others, and through so-called “gay gene” studies by Dean Hamer and others); (2) brain differences (such as Simon LeVay’s study on the hypothalamus of homosexual men); (3) prenatal and postnatal hormonal factors; and (4) psychological causation. The evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each theory are soberly and fairly given. As regards psychological causation (a factor usually emphasized by opponents of homosexual practice), Jones and Yarhouse are cautious: “there is not enough evidence to prove the psychological causation hypothesis, but there is too much evidence to dismiss it at this time.”<sup>21</sup> Their conclusion: “we favor an interactional hypothesis for the formation of sexual orientation, one which suggests shifting ratios of influence from different sources for different persons, and with nature and nurture in constant interaction.”<sup>22</sup> Even these causative influences, they contend, do not “render human choice utterly irrelevant,” if choice is broadly defined as incremental reactions to external and predisposing influences that eventually lead toward a path of homosexual orientation.<sup>23</sup>

Third, they ask whether homosexuality is a psychopathology, using the four criteria of (1) statistical infrequency (confirmed in their prevalence analysis), (2) personal distress, (3) maladaptiveness, and (4) deviation from social norms (societal disapproval of homosexual behavior remains high). They show the error of appealing to Hooker’s study in the 1950s as

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 84-116

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

proof that homosexuals are as emotionally healthy as heterosexuals (her sample was nonrepresentative, as was the work of Saghir and Robins in 1973). On the basis of studies that show significantly higher percentages of homosexuals who engage in substance abuse, receive therapy, experience depression, have thoughts of suicide or attempt suicide, and have difficulty establishing long-term and/or monogamous relationships, they conclude that, although evidence "falls far short of a convincing case" that homosexuality is a psychopathology, "one would be on shaky grounds in proclaiming that there is no evidence that homosexuality is anything other than a healthy, normal lifestyle variant."<sup>24</sup> Again, a sensible and restrained conclusion.

Fourth, they ask whether change to heterosexuality is impossible for homosexuals, primarily through a critique of Douglas Haldeman's scathing review of conversion therapy. They conclude that, while "change of homosexual orientation may well be impossible for some by any natural means," the "obverse position that homosexuality is immutable seems questionable in light of reports of successful change."<sup>25</sup>

*On the Limits of Science's Role in Debates About the  
Morality of Homosexuality*

In their conclusion to the article, Jones and Yarhouse insist that science can inform the theological and ethical debate about homosexuality but it cannot be determinative for that debate. In the four areas examined above, they wisely note that even if proponents of homosexual behavior were right at every point (and the evidence to date suggests otherwise), the latter still would not have made their case for overturning the church's traditional teaching. (1) A particular behavior pattern can be common and still be immoral. (2) Unless one wants to adopt a theory of extreme biological determinism, one has to admit that the existence of causation factors for proclivities or predispositions does not obviate moral responsibility for behavior (as, for example, behavior arising out of a predisposition to alcoholism or violence). (3) Whether or not homosexuality itself is a psychopathology makes little difference for the evaluation of

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 115-16.

it as sin since not all sins are pathologies (e.g., lust, pride, idolatry) and not all pathologies are treated by the church as sins (depression, psychosis). (4) Infrequency or difficulty in changing from a homosexual to a heterosexual orientation has no intrinsic connection to the morality of homosexual behavior since the biblical standard does not require change in orientation. Neither can the church guarantee that every heterosexual will be cured of dysfunctional behavior. On what then should the church's moral evaluation of homosexual behavior be based? According to Jones and Yarhouse, it must be based on the biblically revealed will of God "that heterosexual union in marriage or chastity are the two desired outcomes with regard to genital sexual experience . . . and that God commands us to refrain from all noncommended sexual behaviors, including homosexual ones, regardless of the sources of our urges to do otherwise."<sup>26</sup>

*B. A Mild Critique of Jones and Yarhouse*

Ironically, although proponents of homosexual behavior usually claim science as their strongest card to play, this article is far superior to the one on science put forward by Gudorf from the other side and probably represents the book's best essay supporting the historic Christian perspective. In fact, this is one of the best article-length treatments on the scientific evidence available.<sup>27</sup>

*Updating Their Article and Filling in Gaps*

Unfortunately, although the book to which the article belongs was not published until early 2000, the authors do not appear to have updated their work for the years 1996 to 1998 or 1999. A number of scientific studies published since 1995 provide additional support to the arguments of Jones and Yarhouse. Chief among these are: (1) the first large-scale random study of homosexuality in identical twins, done by J. Michael Bailey (the same Bailey of several previous identical twin studies, who

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid, 119.

<sup>27</sup>Though now see their recent book, cited in n. 17 above.

also is a gay-rights supporter), which “did not provide statistically significant support for the importance of genetic factors for [the trait of homosexuality],” suggesting that “any major gene for strictly defined homosexuality has either low penetrance or low frequency” (i.e., minimal influence on sexual orientation at best);<sup>28</sup> (2) a study by Canadian scientists which was unable to replicate Dean Hamer’s finding of a linkage between DNA markers on the X chromosome and male sexual orientation, despite using a sample size twice as large;<sup>29</sup> (3) two long-term studies on depression and suicidality among homosexuals (one a ten-year study, the other a 21-year study) that “contain arguably the best published data on the association between homosexuality and psychopathology”;<sup>30</sup> and (4) the only study of sexual habits of older (50+) homosexual men, important for determining lifetime sexual habits, which found that nearly nine out of every ten had lifetime more than ten male sex partners, and of these the majority had over 100.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup>J. M. Bailey, et al., “Genetic and Environmental Influences on Sexual Orientation and Its Correlates in an Australian Twin Sample,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78 (2000): 524-36 (quote from p. 534). The study is now cited in Jones’ and Yarhouse’s just-published book. Previous non-random studies by Bailey and others, which solicited participants from gay publications, had indicated a concordance rate for homosexuality as high as 50% for identical twins (i.e., when one identical twin was homosexual, the co-twin was also homosexual 50% of the time), half that or less for non-identical twins. This new random study reached concordance figures of only 12% for identical twins, 5% for non-identical twins. This and the studies cited below are commented on in my forthcoming book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).

<sup>29</sup>G. Rice, et al., “Male Homosexuality: Absence of Linkage to Microsatellite Markers at Xq28,” *Science* 284 (April 23, 1999): 665-67.

<sup>30</sup>The two studies are in *Archives of General Psychiatry* 56 (1999): Richard Herrell, et al., “Sexual Orientation and Suicidality: A Co-Twin Control Study in Adult Men,” 867-74; D. M. Fergusson, et al., “Is Sexual Orientation Related to Mental Health Problems and Suicidality in Young People?” 876-80. The quote is from J. Michael Bailey in a commentary on these two articles (pp. 883-84). Bailey also believes that societal homophobia probably plays a role in the increased suicidality of homosexuals (“but this remains to be demonstrated,” he admits). Yet he also suggests that other factors are likely to be involved, including the possibility “that homosexuality represents a deviation from normal development . . . that may lead to mental illness” (a “developmental error”) and “lifestyle differences” associated with sexual orientation (especially “receptive anal sex and promiscuity” and the attendant fear of sexually transmitted diseases).

<sup>31</sup>Paul Van de Ven, et al., “A Comparative Demographic and Sexual Profile of Older Homosexually Active Men,” *Journal of Sex Research* 34 (1997): 349-60.

The article would have benefited further from greater use of the most comprehensive study to date of the social construction of homosexuality from earliest times to present: David Greenberg's *The Construction of Homosexuality*.<sup>32</sup> Greenberg, a supporter of homosexual behavior, convincingly argues that "where social definitions of appropriate and inappropriate [sexual] behavior are clear and consistent, with positive sanctions for conformity and negative ones for nonconformity, virtually everyone will conform irrespective of genetic inheritance and, to a considerable extent, irrespective of personal psychodynamics."<sup>33</sup> The authors of the most scientific survey to date of American sexual habits, the 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLs), noted in connection with the sevenfold increase in the incidence in self-identifying homosexuality in urban areas as compared to rural areas that: "an environment that provides increased opportunities for and fewer negative sanctions against same-gender sexuality may both allow and even elicit expression of same-gender interest and sexual behavior."<sup>34</sup> The authors of a widely respected textbook on psychiatry contend: "It is possible . . . to picture a future in which homosexual behavior will be so much in the cultural experience of every individual that the genetic contribution will become undetectable."<sup>35</sup>

Another gap in the article is the absence of any review of the plethora of medical problems, other than mental illness, associated with homosexual behavior, information that certainly factors into the discussion of whether society has a stake in providing cultural supports for homosexual behavior. Indeed, once it is recognized that cultural supports can make a significant difference in the incidence of self-identifying homosexuals and

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<sup>32</sup>*The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Jones and Yarhouse do mention Greenberg's work briefly in two short footnotes, at one point describing it as "the landmark work of this constructionist approach" (p. 80 n. 11).

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 487.

<sup>34</sup>Edward Laumann, et al., *Social Organization*, 308. The same could be said for the ninefold increase in lesbianism among female college graduates as compared to females who only graduated from high school (ibid., 305, 310).

<sup>35</sup>Paul R. McHugh and Phillip R. Slavney, *The Perspectives of Psychiatry* (2d ed.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1998), 185.

bisexuals in the population, the whole question of how frequently and how easily adult homosexuals can acquire heterosexual tastes becomes secondary.

*Why the Debate Between Essentialism and  
Social Constructionism Matters*

To be sure, Jones and Yarhouse contend that “neither the essentialist nor the constructionist view is intrinsically more supportive of a traditional sexual ethic”<sup>36</sup> so perhaps making the case for a social constructionist view matters little to them. On a logical and biblical level they are right. Whether or not society has the power to significantly affect the incidence of homosexual passions and behavior has little bearing on whether or not same-sex intercourse should be classified as sin. But this is the real world. People will respond to the issue of homosexuality in ways that are often not logical. Some look at the phenomenon of homosexuality and conclude that if society can do nothing to affect the incidence of it then it ought to learn to live with it and support the best forms of homosexual expression. Polls have demonstrated that, on the whole, people are less inclined to reckon homosexual behavior as sin when they believe that homosexuals are what they are and cannot increase or diminish homosexual urges. Never mind that people do not apply the same standard to alcoholics, pedophiles, people with a violent impulse, and so on. So whether or not there is an intrinsic connection between homosexuality and culture, there tends to be a real connection in the hearts and minds of people who decide these matters. For that reason, even if for no other, evidence that favors a social-constructionist view rather than an essentialist one is important for church debate.

When Jones and Yarhouse assert that for Christians it ought to all come down to the biblical revelation on homosexuality they are in some sense right, at least on a matter such as this which threatens to reconfigure at a very deep level the absolute, pervasive, and severe opposition to same-sex intercourse attested by the biblical witness. However, an appeal to biblical revelation carries little weight in the public sector where policy decisions

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<sup>36</sup>“The Use, Misuse, and Abuse of Science,” 80.

affecting the lives of Christians are made. Even within the church such an appeal is often not decisive. The Bible says same-sex intercourse is wrong. Why does it say it is wrong? Because God detests it. Why does God detest it? If no tenable reason is given, it undermines the credibility of the church's allegiance to scriptural authority.

*On the Place of Ancillary Effects of Homosexual Behavior  
in the Current Debate*

It is in this connection that I have some misgivings about their criticism of conservative attempts to validate opposition to homosexual behavior by pointing to such things as psychological and social constructions of homosexuality, as well as higher incidences of health problems and numbers of sexual partners. Jones and Yarhouse may have a point when they say disapprovingly that "this approach presumes the moral neutrality of homosexual behavior and searches for empirical evidences related to the *ancillary qualities* which would aid moral evaluation of homosexual practice generally."<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, it is clear that Christian traditionalists who take this approach do not themselves presume the moral neutrality of homosexual behavior but rather understand proponents of homosexuality to be making such an assumption. They know it is not enough to simply say "the Bible says 'x,'" even when the biblical testimony constitutes the basis for their own rejection of same-sex intercourse.

Moreover, these "ancillary qualities" do have a bearing on how to evaluate sexual behavior. There is nothing unusual about society looking askance at a type of sexual behavior solely on the basis that it *tends* to be socially problematic. After all, society strongly resists incest. Yet one would be hard-pressed to prove that every act of incest between consenting adults who take birth-control precautions is an inherently harmful act to the participants. The same applies to "plural marriage" (can anyone prove that adult, consensual polygamy is inherently harmful to every one of its participants at all times and places?), bestiality, prostitution, and

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 83 (my emphasis).

adult-adolescent sex.<sup>38</sup> Not even with respect to “consensual” adult-child sex is it possible to prove that irreparable harm is always done to the young participants—a point made by a recent study published in an APA journal.<sup>39</sup> One may *surmise* harm to all children or young adolescents but such harm does not show up in ways that can be subjected to psychological or physiological testing or measurements.

### *Working with the Incest Analogue*

In the case of incest between consenting sibling adults, for example, one could argue that there is something “sick” (in the loose sense) or morally odd or stunted about wanting to bond sexually with someone who is a relational “like” rather than an “other”—similar to the problem of homosexual relationships with their inherent incapacity to reach out to a sexual “other.”<sup>40</sup> Yet the real argument, the one that drives the greatest public fear (should we say “incestphobia”?) and which is most subject to proof, is that providing cultural supports for incest in exceptional cases would erode society’s will to resist the normally negative ways in which it is manifested.<sup>41</sup> In short, the less “unthinkable” incest becomes, the

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<sup>38</sup>Throughout history and in various cultures marriage and sexual intercourse with children over the age of nine has not been strictly forbidden. For example, English law at the time of the American Revolution did not regard a girl’s consent to sexual intercourse immaterial to the charge of rape unless she was under ten years old. Children aged twelve could be married. In our own society one can find children as young as nine or ten who are sexually active—hardly surprising given the kinds of things that can be seen and heard on television or video these days.

<sup>39</sup>B. Rind, P. Tromovitch, and R. Bauserman, “A Meta-Analytic Examination of Assumed Properties of Child Sexual Abuse Using College Samples,” *Psychological Bulletin* 124 (1999): 22-53. “The current results imply that the claim that childhood sexual abuse inevitably or usually produces harm is not justified” (p. 44). For a very interesting review from the traditionalist side, one that is not wholly negative, see Paul and Kirk Cameron, “Is Pedophilia Really Being Normalized?” *Family Research Report* 14:3 (Apr./ June 1999): 1-11.

<sup>40</sup>Bestiality and pedophilia, on the other hand, represent the opposite problem: attraction to what is too much of an “other”: a non-human “other” or an underdeveloped, intergenerational “other.”

<sup>41</sup>E.g., at the hands of a father or older brother; or leading to the problem of inbreeding, though current contraceptives make this prospect less a concern.

less revulsion incest *qua* incest generates in the public mind, the more likely it is that the incidence of all types of incest will increase. Since intergenerational forms of incest are not the only forms in which incest is manifested but at most are only typical manifestations, it is appropriate to refer to this argument as one based on an ancillary quality. Homosexual intercourse provides a very close parallel case to incest—a much stronger analogue than the analogues of slavery and divorce often adduced by supporters of homosexual intercourse. Both incestuous relationships and homosexual relationships

- a. are sexual in nature
- b. are capable of being conducted in the context of adult, consensual, long-term covenant bonds
- c. exhibit an inability to reach out to an “other” (either in terms of exogamy or heterosexuality)
- d. were regarded by the authors of Scripture as instances of comparably revolting forms of sexual immorality (*porneia*)<sup>42</sup>
- e. have historically been rejected by societies because of the typical problems arising from them.

And . . .

- f. for both sets of relationships, to extend societal approval to the exception where no discernable harm occurs to the participants involved is to undermine irreparably societal resistance to the phenomenon as a whole.

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<sup>42</sup>By its very nature, incest has more gray areas than same-sex intercourse, because at some level all humans are related to one another. One has to decide what degree of relatedness will be permitted and what degree will not. Within the Old Testament there is some fluidity on this point. The laws in Lev 18 and 20 (and thus the views of early Judaism and early Christianity) are stricter, apparently, than some of the customs that show up in historical narratives (cf., e.g., Lev 18:9 with 2 Sam 13:13, 16: the former forbids sex with a half sister, the latter does not). Still, some sexual unions between relatives are consistently forbidden. The category of incest itself is not completely up for grabs. And same-sex intercourse lacks these gray areas (except in the rare instances of hermaphrodites).

*Making a Collective Argument Against Endorsing Homosexual Unions*

All of this is to say that ancillary negative effects of endorsing a particular type of sexual behavior remain enormously relevant for evaluating whether societal approval is warranted.<sup>43</sup> If a type of sexual behavior can be forbidden, or at least denied cultural supports altogether, only if every and any instance of its concrete manifestation in human lives can be shown to be of proven harm to its participants, then few if any types of sexual behavior could be proscribed. All or nearly all sexual barriers would have to be exploded—which is precisely what some vocal homosexual social commentators have advocated. It is enough to make the following collective argument against homosexual relations.

1. *The Argument from Scripture.* Scripture opposes homosexuality absolutely, pervasively, and severely.
2. *The Argument from Nature.* There is something developmentally deficient about a person being sexually attracted to the body parts shared in common with another of the same sex, about someone who can find sexual attraction only in a “sexual same” rather than a “sexual other,” about seeking a complementary sexual relationship from a person who in terms of gender is non-complementary—anatomically speaking but also with a view to a host of other features that explain why the slogan “men are from Mars and women are from Venus” has gained such wide currency in the popular psyche.
3. *The Argument from Ancillary (Typical) Adverse Side-Effects.* Homosexual relationships produce on average:
  - a much higher incidence of health problems (sexually transmitted diseases including, but not limited to, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, and rectal cancer; substance abuse; mental illness, including

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<sup>43</sup>In all fairness, Jones and Yarhouse do not discount entirely such ancillary qualities. In a footnote they define the problem as confusing “primary moral considerations, which are grounded in God’s intention for sexual expression as seen in Scripture, with secondary moral considerations, which may include scientific findings on prevalence, etiology, status as a mental disorder, and the likelihood of change from homosexuality to heterosexuality” (“The Use, Misuse, and Abuse of Science,” 83 n. 19).

- depression and suicide ideation) and, consequently, a ten-to-fifteen year decrease in life expectancy
- invariably short-term sexual relationships (especially among female homosexuals, though also common among male homosexuals)
  - invariably non-monogamous relationships (especially among male homosexuals)
  - a devaluation or even annihilation of societal gender norms, which in turn promotes the normalization of the most bizarre elements of the homosexual movement (transsexualism, transvestism), thereby increasing gender-identity confusion among youth

The first argument is, or ought to be, the main argument on which Christians base their opposition of homosexual practice because it is an argument predicated on the kind of direct revelation that traditionally constitutes the locus of authority for Christians. Unfortunately, since only some Christians today and few non-Christians give the first argument much weight, it is necessary to move to the second point. Although an argument from nature should be a second-order argument for Christians, like the first argument it has the advantage of striking at the heart of all homosexual relationships and, unlike the first argument, carries the appeal beyond “God says so” to provide rational explanations for the proscription. The problem with the second argument is that it is difficult to prove, just as it is difficult to prove—with measurable psychological or physical tests that can be subjected to rigorous scientific scrutiny—that incest, polygamy, prostitution, bestiality, and adult-child sex are harmful to the participants when they otherwise show no abnormal or peculiar behavior.

The closest one can get to measurable proof is by moving to the third argument, which demonstrates a sufficiently high incidence of ancillary problems so as to make untenable a chancy approval of the whole for the sake of the few that show no measurable harm to themselves. The downside of the third argument is that one can always find exceptional cases for whom none of the negative side-effects apply. The upside is that the damage done is subject to measurement and documentation. Society can measure numbers of sexual partners, incidence of disease, etc. The cumulative weight of adverse effects may be enough for society to say: We do not want to encourage that kind of behavior in any way, shape, or form.

To be sure, homosexual practice is not wrong in the first instance because of these ancillary effects. Homosexual relationships are wrong, first and foremost, because they violate the one form of sexual pairing validated by God in Scripture and structurally confirmed by creation/nature. Hence, even a homosexual relationship that is lifelong, monogamous, and shows no apparent adverse health effects is still wrong. That same could be said for an incestuous relationship that is lifelong, monogamous, and shows no apparent adverse health effects. It is just more difficult to demonstrate the truth of this claim to skeptics.

The damage of ancillary adverse effects need not be limited to the participants. The damage may extend to societal institutions. For example, if the church decides to bless same-sex erotic unions, and 95% or more of these will not be (a) long-term (let alone lifelong) *and* (b) monogamous *and* (c) healthy (e.g., for males involving no anal intercourse or oral-anal contact), it will almost certainly have the effect of cheapening church blessings and sanctions for heterosexual marriages or result in a radical redefinition of what marriage is. If a church begins blessing relationships that will rarely be long-term, monogamous, and healthy—and we are not talking here about perfection because heterosexual marriages are clearly far from perfect—then the blessing of such relationships begins to look ridiculous. At the very least, the impression is given that the church is content with short-term and/or multiple-partner and/or physically unsafe relationships. Observers could be excused for drawing the conclusion that such things as healthy, long-term, and monogamous relationships really do not count for much in the church's eyes. The church will have to dumb-down its expectations considerably.

In short, we have a sort of inverse pyramid here. The assertion that most has to be taken on faith is the very one that should be the most decisive for Christians: the supreme authority of the Bible's intensely rigorous opposition to same-sex intercourse. The argument that should perhaps carry the least weight with Christians for opposing all forms of homosexual intercourse, though still having real merit, is also the one that is easiest to document for those who do not take scriptural revelation at face value: the numerous adverse side-effects of promoting homosexual behavior. How much attention each argument is to be given depends as much on the composition of the audience as anything else.

### III. Christine E. Gudorf, “The Bible and Science on Sexuality”<sup>44</sup>

Christine Gudorf begins by saying that, “while largely concurring with Dr. Jones’s and Dr. Yarhouse’s treatment of scientific research,” she “will dispute their position regarding fundamental Christian teaching.”<sup>45</sup>

#### *A. On Bible Idolatry and the Analogues of Slavery, Divorce, and Women’s Roles*

Gudorf makes a number of initial claims. She labels as “idolatrous” the notion that the Bible is “*the* primary resource for Christian ethics” (it is only *a* primary source) or “the sole and absolute source of revelation,” insists that both the Bible and science require interpretation, and rejects an interpretative grid that treats the biblical teaching on homosexuality as timeless while allowing for reinterpretation of the biblical teaching on such issues as “divorce, slavery, marriage, or the role of women.”<sup>46</sup>

These remarks, apparently intended as rebuttals of the Bible-centered approach of Jones and Yarhouse, have at best only partial and misleading validity. Taking seriously a bedrock perspective on sexuality accepted implicitly or advocated explicitly by every biblical author and undoubtedly by Jesus, a perspective that stands out in relation to the surrounding ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman cultures for its singularly uncompromising and absolute proscription of all forms of homosexual intercourse, is hardly to be likened to idolatry. If anything, the biblical model is to link idolatry to those who supplant elementary ethical norms of Yahwistic and Christian faith with contrary ethical norms. Gudorf might just as well accuse of idolatry Christian opponents of economic exploitation who take seriously the Scripture’s judgments on such matters. Historically, the teaching of Scripture has indeed been regarded as *the* primary resource for Christian ethics—not just *a* primary resource among many—even as the church recognized other sources of revelation when

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<sup>44</sup>Pp. 121-41. Gudorf is the author of *Body, Sex, and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1994).

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 121-22.

such sources did not conflict outright with the basic stance of Scripture. In other words, Scripture is the most important resource for Christian ethics—of course.

This way of looking at Scripture does not preclude some development and fine tuning beyond Scripture, as the examples cited by Gudorf suggest. Nevertheless, the church has a right to be skeptical about making a 180-degree turn away from Scripture on a matter that has this much importance. The burden of proof increases exponentially the more bedrock a view of Scripture is, the more strenuously and absolutely it is held by those authors who speak to it directly, and the more pervasively it runs through the canon, explicitly or implicitly. Such is the case with same-sex intercourse, where the limitation of sexual intercourse to heterosexual marriage is everywhere presumed as normative and exclusive over against a wider culture lacking such a presumption. The analogues for disregarding Scripture adduced by Gudorf, which are commonplace among proponents of homosexual intercourse, do not appear to be as pertinent as the analogues of incest (see my discussion of Jones and Yarhouse above) and other sexual sins severely and consistently proscribed across both Testaments and consistently within each Testament. It is time to recognize that slavery, for example, is really quite a silly analogue to choose, one that reflects poorly on the hermeneutical acumen of those who apply it to the issue of same-sex intercourse. Simply put, Scripture nowhere expresses a vested interest in preserving slavery, whereas Scripture does express a clear vested interest in the male-female model of sexuality. Indeed, Israelite law puts various restrictions on enslaving fellow Israelites (mandatory release dates, the right of near-kin redemption, treating those purchased as hired laborers rather than as slaves, not returning runaway slaves). The authentic Paul who wrote Philemon and 1 Cor 7:21 for his part regarded liberation from slavery as at least a penultimate good. The homosexuality issue is put on an entirely different footing by Scripture, where there is not the slightest indication anywhere in the canon that same-sex intercourse is anything other than an abominable and detested practice, a practice to be utterly eschewed by the people of God, Jew and gentile believer alike, at all times and in all circumstances.

The analogues of divorce and the role of women are better than that of slavery but still are far cries from the incest analogue. As for divorce, it is true that, although Jesus was clearly against divorce and remarriage, the modern church has maintained a greater openness to divorce and remarriage among its members—though the degree to which the church has “caved” on this issue in recent times can itself be called into question. At least, however, the church’s moderation of Jesus’ teaching can find antecedents in the canon of Scripture. The Old Testament, of course, allows divorce (though it does not promote it) and early Christian interpreters of Jesus’ sayings on divorce and remarriage, Matthew and Paul, moderated the absolute proscription in cases of adultery or of marriage to an unbeliever. No such diversity within the canon exists on the matter of homosexual intercourse. Furthermore, regardless of the church’s compromise stances on divorce and remarriage, few people today celebrate divorce as an example of church’s “rainbow” diversity. Divorce is still recognized as a mark of the sinful failure of those who perpetrate it. And the church takes an even dimmer view of multiple divorces by the same person. A “serial divorcer,” certainly one that spoke glowingly of divorce as a gift of God, would not meet with the church’s approval (and in most mainline denominations would have a hard time being ordained to church office). The point of comparison here with same-sex intercourse is that the two sins of divorce and same-sex intercourse are forgivable and that it is possible to restore the perpetrators to wholeness—but not by encouraging them to perpetuate the behavior in question. The church does not say to the divorcé(e), “That was a good thing you did, getting divorced. We’ll continue to provide the necessary support so that you can perpetuate the cycle of divorce and remarriage with a minimum amount of negative side effects.” Yet that is exactly how proponents of same-sex intercourse view the church’s role vis-à-vis practicing, self-avowed homosexuals. What kind of analogue, then, is divorce? Not much of one. It is precisely the self-affirming, non-repentant, and serial character of homosexual practice that sets it apart entirely from the divorce analogue.

With respect to women’s roles, we again have a situation in the Bible where there are plenty of precedents for encouraging women’s full participation in the church, even if the contemporary church rightfully insists on

taking the trajectory further than did the authors of Scripture. The situation with respect to same-sex intercourse is very different. There is no precedent, not the slightest intimation, that some types of same-sex intercourse might be acceptable. In fact, while the Bible's treatment of women looks reasonably affirming when compared to its cultural context, the situation is exactly the opposite with respect to same-sex intercourse. In both ancient Near Eastern society and Greco-Roman society there are plenty of exceptions to generally negative views of same-sex intercourse (exceptions in cases of status differentiation and cultic functionaries, for example); in the Bible there are no exceptions. The view of same-sex intercourse adopted by ancient Israel and the early church, so far as we know from extant data, was the most negative of any culture of that period of time. The notion that there is some sort of trajectory for affirming same-sex intercourse already begun in the Bible is about as wrongheaded as any characterization of Scripture could be.

In short, if one is going to make an appeal on the basis of analogues, one has an intellectual obligation to ask what the closest analogues are to the matter in question. Otherwise, one might as well endorse everything that Scripture opposes. A willy-nilly, irresponsible use of analogues lacks any controls. Gudorf, who is typical of many who share her position on how to interpret the Bible, gives no indication of having adequately thought through this problem.

### *B. Science and Homosexuality*

#### *On the Resistance of Sexual Orientation to Change*

In the first half of her essay,<sup>47</sup> Gudorf treats "science on sexuality" and the question of "essentialism and constructionism." Gudorf argues that for most persons sexual orientation "is fixed relatively early in life," "is not a matter of choice by the will," and "seems extremely resistant to

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 122-31.

change, even in persons motivated strongly enough to seek out expensive and physically and/or emotionally painful change therapies.”<sup>48</sup>

Based on the evidence to date her claims are overstated. Kinsey himself did not believe that sexual orientation was “fixed” but rather that some lifetime shift along the famous Kinsey spectrum of “0” (exclusively heterosexual) to “6” (exclusively homosexual) was the norm, certainly for those with a homosexual orientation of any kind.<sup>49</sup> Homosexuals, even exclusive homosexuals, who have never experienced any heterosexual arousal are the exception rather than the rule, as Bell and Weinberg (among others) have shown. Gudorf never once mentions David Greenberg’s work, even though it constitutes powerful evidence that the incidence of self-conscious homosexual proclivities varies widely in different population groups at different times and in different places and in accordance with the level of societal sanctions.

“Change” of sexual orientation is admittedly not easy for most homosexuals but the description “extremely resistant” may go too far, and all the more so if one includes under “change” a reduction of same-sex impulses, successful management of such impulses, and a heightened experience of heterosexual arousal and pleasure. Other classes of people with conditions that society seeks to “change” also are changed only with difficulty; for example, men addicted to pornography or non-monogamous sexual relationships, pedophiles, rapists, alcoholics, drug

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 122-24. In an attempt to show that asking homosexuals to remain celibate would have harmful effects, she also cites a conclusion by Bell and Weinberg that “asexual” homosexuals with little or no sexual interest or activity exhibit the greatest amount of mental health problems (p. 124; in *Homosexualities* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978], 134, 137).

<sup>49</sup>“There are very few ‘homosexuals’ who have not had at least some, and in many cases a great deal of heterosexual experience. . . . The literature constantly makes sharp distinctions between incidental and exclusively homosexual experience, . . . between ‘true inverts’ and ‘normals.’ But . . . we fail to find any basis for recognizing discrete types of homosexual behavior. . . . [When looking at ‘the homosexual’] the picture is one of endless integration between every combination of homosexuality and heterosexuality; . . . the exclusive activities of any one type may be exchanged, in the brief span of a few days or a few weeks, for an exclusive pattern of the other type, or into a combination pattern that embraces the two types” (Alfred C. Kinsey, “Criteria for a Hormonal Explanation of the Homosexual,” *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology* 1 [1941]: 426-28; cited in *Family Research Report* 15:4 [June/July 2000] 3).

abusers, smokers, people with eating disorders, and people with a penchant for violent, sadistic, or masochistic behavior. That change is difficult is hardly a novel or earth-shattering revelation. Many behaviors, including most sexual behaviors, have a biological component.

Indeed, statistical evidence to date strongly suggests that, on the whole, male homosexuals have extraordinary difficulty (relative even to lesbians) in forming monogamous unions. Would Gudorf want to argue that society endorse "open relationships" for homosexual men as an acceptable, normative pattern for such relationships, simply because of the difficulty in domesticating male sexual habits *sans* female partners? Ah, but change is difficult, nigh impossible for nine out of ten homosexual relationships. Indeed, most leaders in the homosexual community have themselves criticized attempts to foist what they refer to as the stifling, unimaginative, and unworkable model of heterosexual normality on homosexual relationships. So Gudorf is stuck: either she has to throw out monogamy as a value to be upheld in sexual relationships, at least male homosexual relationships, or she has to admit that a condition "extremely resistant to change" is no excuse for condoning the behavior that issues from the condition. In addition, Gudorf knows, or ought to have realized, that the justification she gives for endorsing homosexual intercourse would not pass muster for the human condition generally. Sinful impulses of a wide variety—feelings of jealousy, revenge, anger, and pride, for starters—are also very resistant to change. So what? How many people choose to experience anger when they are offended by the callous actions of another? If the conclusion to be drawn is that Christians should celebrate every impulse resistant to change, then the church is in deep trouble indeed. Gudorf never really engages this problem with her argument.

*On Essentialism vs. Social Constructionism and Its  
Relation to Paul*

As far as assessing the debate between essentialism and constructionism is concerned, she targets three contemporary social constructionist explanations of causation: gender-role nonconformity (e.g., the "sissy boy" or "tomboy girl"), peer group interaction (early experience of sexual arousal before substantial contact with opposite-sex peers as a stimulus to

same-sex behavior), and behaviorism (negative experiences with the opposite sex, first sexual experience with or in connection with a same-sex adult). In all these cases her verdict is that it is “impossible to know whether the sexual experience led to the orientation or some innate predisposition to the orientation led to the experience.”<sup>50</sup> Her equally brief review of identical twin studies, so-called “gay gene” research, and alleged differences in the homosexual brain is fairly presented, leading her to surmise, as did Jones and Yarhouse, that sexual orientation arises from a mix of innate and environmental factors.

Yet how she chooses to read this data is very different from Jones and Yarhouse. The mere likelihood that homosexual orientation is not of “purely environmental” origin is for Gudorf enough to “undermine the plausibility of the heterosexist assumptions in Romans 1, in which Paul implies that homosexuality is a deviation from divine creation, as are the sins he lists in verses 29-31.”<sup>51</sup> Gudorf does not pause to justify this extraordinary conclusion—perhaps because extended argument would demonstrate that it cannot be justified. How does Gudorf’s conclusion that homosexual orientation is not of “purely environmental” origin prove that homosexuality is not “a deviation from divine creation”? As we just stated above in noting the obvious, a wide array of human impulses (anger, aggressiveness, etc.) universally regarded as sinful or wrong—indeed, the vices listed in Rom 1:29-31—are not of “purely environmental” origin. Is it foolish to regard these too as “a deviation from divine creation”? Paul distinguished between, on the one hand, what was a “natural” part of God’s creation left relatively intact in spite of the fall and, on the other hand, impulses generated by the introduction of sin into the world. Paul viewed sinful impulses as innate in human flesh, inherited from an ancestor human, and never entirely within the purview of successful human management and control (at least not apart from the Spirit’s intervention; so Rom 5:12-21; 7:5-23). So far as Paul would have been concerned, the

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<sup>50</sup>“The Bible and Science on Sexuality,” 125-26.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 128. The use of the term “heterosexist” is pure ideological demagoguery. One might just as well label “homosexist” the assumption of entitlement to acceptance of homosexual behavior by heterosexuals and by God, and the consequent bashing of those who do not agree as “heterosexist.”

characteristic of innateness not only would have failed to disqualify an impulse or action from the tag “sinful,” it would have been generally *expected* of sinful impulses and actions.

Had Gudorf only consulted the data presented in Schoedel’s article<sup>52</sup> she would have seen that theories about the innateness of at least some forms of homosexual desire abounded in the ancient world, even among those who denied legitimacy to same-sex intercourse, and that whether Paul viewed homosexual passion as innate for some people would have mattered little to his rejection of homosexual behavior (or any other form of sexual immorality). Paul does not claim in Rom 1:24-27 that all people who engage in same-sex intercourse do so under complete control of their impulses. Rather, he says that God “gave them over” to be controlled by their own innate desires for dishonorable and self-degrading forms of behavior. God does not visit these desires on idolaters as punishment for their sins—after all, in Paul’s thinking the fall preceded the introduction of idolatry into the world—but rather God stands back and allows such desires to gain the upper hand. Nor did Paul believe that only idol worshipers could engage in same-sex intercourse, as is evident from his Old Testament Scriptures (the actions of the Benjamites in Judg 19:22-25, the Levitical prohibitions aimed at Israelites) and from the fact that Paul cautioned Christians against returning to the same “unclean” forms of behavior that characterized their pre-Christian lives (Rom 6:19-23; 1 Cor 6:9-11; cf. the case of the incestuous *Christian* in 1 Cor 5). Jews, he knew, were not impervious to the sins typically associated with Gentiles (Rom 2:21-23), even if Gentiles on average sinned more and more egregiously. His point to the imaginary Jewish dialogue partner was merely that sin tends to be more rampant in cultures that do not know the one true God of Israel.<sup>53</sup> Same-sex intercourse flourished in the Greco-Roman world of Paul’s times (though, of course, it also had its critics in Greco-Roman society). It did not flourish in Israel and in diaspora Jewish communities. More to the point, it was nonexistent, or virtually so, among the Jews of

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<sup>52</sup>Esp. pp. 44-58.

<sup>53</sup>As Paul goes on to say, that fact does not exempt Torah-possessing Jews from culpability for sins they themselves commit, even when Jews are not sinners on quite the same scale as Gentiles (Rom 3:7-9).

Paul's day—itself an indication of the powerful effect of cultural disincentives on the incidence of homosexuality in a given population group. Paul was speaking generally, in terms of widespread effect, not origin; collective entities, not every individual case.<sup>54</sup> In that light Paul's discussion makes eminently good sense.

In addition, there is no indication in Rom 1:24-27 that Paul considered same-sex intercourse wrong *because of* its alleged associations with idolatry. Instead, he assessed same-sex intercourse as a violation of the pattern for sexual relationships both laid down in Gen 1-3 (the intertextual echoes abound in Rom 1:18-32) and manifested in nature through visible male-female complementarity. There is no evidence that Paul regarded idolatry as a direct cause of homosexual intercourse. At most he treated idolatry as a predisposing factor for same-sex intercourse in that failure to understand God correctly through observation of creation/ nature in one area (idolatry) was likely to be attended by other such failures (same-sex intercourse as one conspicuous example). For Paul idolatry was neither a necessary nor sufficient predisposing factor for same-sex intercourse, any more so than for the other vices mentioned in 1:29-31—none of which vices, incidentally, Gudorf is arguing that the church should endorse based on some allegedly faulty link to idolatry on Paul's part. In sum, contrary to Gudorf's unsubstantiated conclusion, the notion that homosexual preferences or tastes may have, at most, a partial and indirect connection to innate causation factors has not the slightest bearing on the legitimacy of Paul's stance on same-sex intercourse, inasmuch as Paul probably would have agreed with such a conclusion or at least found it to be compatible with the broad strokes of his own theological thinking.

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<sup>54</sup>Gudorf does state later in her article that "Paul claims homosexuality is a social, not an individual, consequence of a society's idolatry" (p. 134). "He does not say that individuals become homosexual as a result of their own idolatry" (ibid.). Unfortunately, she does not draw the logical conclusion from this observation: when referring to individuals, personal participation in idolatry is neither a necessary nor sufficient cause for engagement in same-sex intercourse. In Paul's thinking, homosexuality was a consequence of society's idolatry in the same way that greediness, envy, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, slander, arrogance, and rebellion against parents were.

*On the Question of Homosexuality and Pathology*

On the question of whether homosexuality is itself a pathology, Gudorf argues based on the 1957 study of Hooker and the 1973 studies of Saghir and Robins that, while one cannot conclude that homosexuals on average experience psychological and social problems at the same rate as heterosexuals,<sup>55</sup> homosexuality per se is not implicated as pathological. She does not delve into the question of whether incest or adult-child sex could be categorized as sinful only if the perpetrators of such acts could in each and every case be shown to exhibit personal distress or societal maladaptiveness in other areas of life.

Apart from this gap in logic, Gudorf also has to explain why homosexuals experience psychosocial problems at a significantly *higher* rate than heterosexuals. She has two explanations. First, she claims, "some types of wickedness most stereotypically attributed to those with homosexual orientation are not, in fact, characteristic of them and may even be more characteristic of those with heterosexual orientation."<sup>56</sup> As an example she cites the fact that adult-child sex more frequently involves a man and a girl than a man and a boy. The problem with this logic is that mere frequency tells us little about whether homosexuals or heterosexuals tend to molest *at higher rates*. As the prevalence studies cited by Jones and Yarhouse show, homosexuals and bisexuals account for only about 2-5% of the population. It is not surprising, then, that in terms of absolute numbers the remaining 95-98% of the population accounts for more child molestation cases. However, studies have also indicated that the numbers of male same-sex child molestation cases are *disproportionately* high given the relatively small numbers of male homosexuals and bisexuals in the population.<sup>57</sup> In this case, the stereotype turns out to be true. Gudorf

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<sup>55</sup>Gudorf concedes that the foregoing studies did not "necessarily" use representative samples.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>57</sup>See the studies cited in my forthcoming book. Incidentally, Kinsey himself believed that, on average, homosexuals were more intensely sexualized and open to paranormal forms of sexuality, including sex with children or animals, group sex, bondage and sado-masochism, and oral-anal sex. Recent studies have confirmed these observations.

provides no other example so this entire first point falls flat.

Second, Gudorf acknowledges that “some types of vice are more prevalent among homosexual populations,” citing higher rates of drug abuse, alcoholism, therapy, and (among males) sexual promiscuity.<sup>58</sup> Yet, she argues, these higher rates are best attributed to “strong cultural homophobia,” especially since minority populations (ethnic minorities and the very poor) “demonstrate similar patterns.”<sup>59</sup> Some portion of the homosexual community’s problems may be attributed to societal opposition to homosexual intercourse (though that remains to be proven). However, Gudorf provides no statistical evidence that minority populations experience these same problems at *equally* high rates. Nor does she note that homosexuals on average fare better economically than the general population, experience little in the way of employment discrimination in most professional sectors,<sup>60</sup> and suffer from these high rates of psychosocial problems even in urban areas that are considered to be homosexual-affirming (such as the San Francisco Bay area and New York City). Nor does she explain why lesbians, who presumably share with homosexual males an experience of “strong cultural homophobia,” do not experience the off-the-charts promiscuity rates that have been well documented for male homosexuals.<sup>61</sup> The reason for this disparity is more likely to be attributed to the distinctive nature of male sexuality, which is more prone to visual stimulation and less constrained by the need for intimacy. Putting two males together is not exactly a recipe for long-term sexual monogamy. Lesbians do much better than their male homosexual counterparts in maintaining at least serial monogamy but do slightly worse in terms of relationship longevity (due perhaps to the higher “contentment thresholds”

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 129-30.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>60</sup>For example, government jobs, media jobs, the arts, academic positions, the mental health and medical professions, scientific research positions, the legal profession, major corporations (telephone companies, airlines, travel agencies, etc.).

<sup>61</sup>At one point Gudorf states that lesbians have fewer sexual partners on average than heterosexual women. The studies of which I am aware indicate the reverse. Lesbians have about the same number of sexual partners as heterosexual *men*, both of whom have more sexual partners on average than heterosexual women.

that females place on relational intimacy, sensitivity, and communication). Relationship breakups are recognized to be a leading predisposing factor to suicide attempts. Gudorf cannot be faulted, of course, for being unaware of the two long-term studies on depression and suicidality among homosexuals, published in 1999, that suggest causative factors other than societal "homophobia" (mentioned on p. 187 in my discussion of Jones and Yarhouse).

### *C. Biblical Theology on Homosexuality*

#### *On Homosexuality and the Covenant of Marriage*

Gudorf's discussion of "Biblical Theology on Homosexuality" in the second half of her article is even more disappointing than her discussion of the scientific data.<sup>62</sup> She begins with a discussion of "covenant," arguing that this concept "offers no basis for a blanket prohibition on homosexual activity." The "New Testament covenant" supersedes the "Old Testament covenant" along with "the purity laws under which homosexuality had been banned." "Love and commitment," not heterosexual pairing and intention to procreate (which Gudorf pejoratively characterizes as "legalistic requirements"), are "central" to the covenant of marriage. The use of a heterosexual marriage metaphor to describe the relationship of God to Israel or to the church is not a compelling argument for a heterosexual requirement in marriage inasmuch as metaphors are "one-directional." "It would be nonsensical to use this heterosexual metaphor to condemn intimacy between same-sex persons, since the metaphor's original use was to assert the intimacy between a masculine God and a collection of Israelite males."<sup>63</sup>

Gudorf's reasoning is seriously flawed at four points. First, the claim that the opposite-sex dimension was not central to the Israelite and Christian views of the marriage covenant undoubtedly would have struck the authors of Scripture and the communities for whom they wrote as profoundly absurd. Again, all the evidence available to us indicates that, with

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 131-41 (which includes the conclusion on pp. 139-41).

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 131-32.

respect to unmitigated opposition to all forms of same-sex intercourse, Israelite religion, early Judaism, and early Christianity were in a league all their own. Clearly, that the sexual partners had to be male-female was regarded as an inviolable prerequisite, not a “legalistic” requirement, much less a preferred option. Second, obviously the new covenant, at least so far as understood by the authors of the New Testament texts, did not change the verdict that same-sex intercourse was egregious sin any more than it changed the same verdict on incest, adultery, child sacrifice, and bestiality (or, for that matter, murder, theft, slander, and idolatry). Third, while love and commitment are central elements of the marriage covenant, they do not trump the prerequisites. Two adult siblings can demonstrate a level of love and commitment that excels the average heterosexual bond; that still does not legitimize incest. Fourth, the fact that the Old Testament prophets and various New Testament authors chose to illustrate the covenant relationship between “a masculine God” and “a collection of males” as a heterosexual union, despite the “nonsensical” quality of such a metaphor, is itself powerful testimony to their total abhorrence of homosexual unions. On another level, the metaphor is not “nonsensical.” It illustrates a covenant bond with an “other”—something that a same-sex union could not adequately illustrate.

*On the Stories of Sodom and the Levite at Gibeah*

Gudorf then discusses Gen 19 and Judg 19, Romans 1, and 1 Corinthians under the rubric of righteousness. She contends:

If the suffering that befell the citizens of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Benjamin should be interpreted as God’s judgment against their intention/action of homosexual gang rape, and homosexuality is therefore banned, then consistency demands that God’s justification of Lot, the Levite, and the old man of Gibeah who offered their daughters/concubine to be gang-raped and killed should be interpreted as divine approval for men’s ensuring their own well-being by delivering women to abuse and death.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 133.

Does consistency demand this? If a biblical text has one problematic dimension (here, the treatment of women), does that necessitate that all other dimensions (homosexuality, gang rape) are problematic? For example, some laws concerning adultery emphasize one-sidedly the husband's ownership of his wife. Should this shortcoming be used to promote an acceptance of adultery? Or should the shortcoming be corrected (emphasizing that the husband too belongs to his wife) without throwing out the primary valuation of adultery as wrong? In the same way, the behavior of Lot, the Levite, and the old man can be critiqued without throwing out the text's negative valuation of same-sex intercourse. Even more to the point, where do the narrators speak of "God's justification" of the actions of Lot in Gen 19 and of the Levite and the old man of Gibeah in Judg 19? Not everything recounted in a scriptural narrative receives the narrator's (or God's) endorsement. The narrator of the Sodom episode clearly portrays the destruction of the town as God's action against the inhabitants for the evil that they perpetrated. Yet nowhere does the narrator clearly indicate that Lot acts with God's seal of approval.<sup>65</sup> Rather, the action of the visitors/angels in blinding the mob suggests the narrator's critique of Lot's actions: Lot should have put his trust in God and not put his daughters at risk. Later, Lot reaps what he sows when his daughters get him drunk so that they can become pregnant through him (20:30-38). The father who had once "used" his daughters is now "used" by his daughters. As for story in Judg 19:22-25, Judg 19-21 begins with the notice "In those days, when there was no king in Israel . . ." and ends with the notice "In those days there was no king in Israel; *all* the people did what was right in their own eyes" (21:25). With such an overarching rubric, it becomes dangerous to argue that *any* of the participants act rightly by the narrator's standards. Indeed, the Levite is presented throughout the narrative as a self-centered coward (see esp. 19:25, 27-28; 20:5). The narrator certainly

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<sup>65</sup>There probably were two other factors playing into Lot's decision, in addition to the superior status of men: (1) conventions concerning the obligation of the host to protect at all costs visitors who come under the shelter of the host's roof (19:8); and (2) an assessment of homosexual rape as worse even than heterosexual rape inasmuch as to the act of violence is added the shaming of the victim's gender. Similar concerns undoubtedly contributed to the offer by the old man at Gibeah, with the only added factor being the secondary status that comes from being a concubine.

depicts the rape and death of the concubine as an utterly horrendous act.

*On Romans 1:26-27*

From her reading of Rom 1, Gudorf draws only the conclusion that Paul's reference to nature in vv. 26-27 bestows a positive valence on the concept of natural law. This in turn leads her to conclude: "The doctrine of creation needs to be taken more seriously by treating science as a method for uncovering divine intention within creation. . . . In the traditionally anti-intellectual ethos of conservative American Protestantism, such a shift will not be easy."<sup>66</sup> Moreover, in Rom 1 "Paul assumes that we can recognize sin and sinners, that a turning away from God manifests itself in a general turn toward evil conduct. If homosexual acts are evil, then we should be able to discern homosexuals by their generally evil conduct. But this is not so."<sup>67</sup>

The most conspicuous problem with this interpretation is that, while extracting correctly from Rom 1:26-27 the secondary point that nature plays a role in revealing God's will, Gudorf ignores the primary point that nature in this case provides clear testimony to the wrongness of same-sex intercourse so that even those without Scripture are without excuse. The complementary way in which males and females are sexually structured, along with the discomplementarity of homoerotic relationships, provides a convincing clue regarding God's intent for human sexuality, much more convincing than the presence of same-sex passions. It is ironic that Gudorf, who produces an analysis of both science and Scripture that is fundamentally flawed at so many points and not nearly as well documented as the article by Jones and Yarhouse, should uncharitably accuse those on the other side of the homosexuality issue of an anti-intellectual aversion to hearing from nature and science. Finally, Rom 1 does not tell us that every individual who turns away from God exhibits each and every one of the sins listed in 1:24-31. Paul did not think, for example, that

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 134-36.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 140.

every Gentile engaged in same-sex intercourse. Paul was speaking in corporate terms. The Gentile world, taken as a whole, was more sinful, qualitatively and quantitatively, than the Jewish world (though for Paul both worlds were still “under sin”). As we have already seen, the homosexual population, taken as a whole, does indeed exhibit higher incidence of a number of reckless behaviors.<sup>68</sup> As for any given individual homosexual, however, participation in same-sex intercourse does not necessitate a publicly perceptible transformation into a moral werewolf. The illogic of Gudorf’s comment that “If homosexual acts are evil, then we should be able to discern homosexuals by their generally evil conduct” is immediately apparent if one substitutes “homosexual acts” and “homosexuals” with other categories of sins and sinners. Often neighbors, co-workers, family, and friends are shocked to find out that so-and-so was a philanderer, wife beater, or child molester. Many polygamists appear to lead, and may well lead, otherwise upstanding moral lives. Does Gudorf want to endorse polygamy too? People are often very good at compartmentalizing

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<sup>68</sup>For example, the rapid spread of HIV-AIDS among the homosexual population in particular is testimony to widespread, irresponsible sexual behavior: multiple partners, “recreational” sex, anonymous group sex, failure to protect one’s partner through use of a condom, dangerous sexual acts such as anal intercourse, and failure to disclose to sex partners one’s own infected condition. In 1999 homosexual intercourse still accounted for 70% of new adult/adolescent AIDS cases due to sexual activity (50% of all cases), even though only 2-3% of males are homosexually active in any given year. It is hard to pin the blame on societal homophobia, given the realities manifest in the most gay-supportive and health-conscious environment in the country. According to the San Francisco Department of Health 2001 HIV Consensus Data (released Jan. 31, 2001), 28.6% of San Francisco’s estimated 52,000 homosexual men (defined here as MSM or males who have sex with males)—somewhere between one-in-four and one-in-three male homosexuals—are HIV-positive. In addition, 85% of the number of persons living with AIDS are homosexual, even though male homosexuals comprise only 16% of the adult male population in the city. HIV infection rates in San Francisco have more than doubled since 1997. Even among intravenous drug users (IDU) HIV incidence among (IDU) homosexual men was nine times higher than among (IDU) heterosexual men. The proportion of male homosexuals “reporting the use of condoms ‘always’ during anal sex [in the past six months alone] has decreased steadily from 1994 [70%] through 1999 [54%].” “The proportion of [homosexual] men reporting two or more anal sex partners [in the past six months] who reported not using condoms ‘always’ [in the past six months] has increased steadily from 1994 [23.6%] through 1999 [43%].” So much for the long-term effectiveness of safe-sex education in the homosexual population. See: <http://hivinsite.ucsf.edu/consensus>.

their own lives, rationalizing away their sinful behavior (especially sexual misbehavior), and conveying a positive public persona. Gudorf's test for discerning whether homosexual acts are sinful is simply naive and impractical.

### *On 1 Corinthians*

Under the treatment of 1 Corinthians, she summarily dismisses any attempt to discern the meaning of *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor 6:9 as hopeless, relying exclusively on the judgment of L. William Countryman. She *knows* that the terms are too obscure to "place any great weight on this passage," even though elsewhere she admits that she lacks the expertise to do firsthand exegesis and indeed does not attempt such exegesis here.<sup>69</sup> Again, had she heeded Schoedel's article (remember that Schoedel shares her endorsement of same-sex intercourse) she might have expressed less certainty about the alleged uncertainty of the meaning of these words.<sup>70</sup>

Gudorf appeals to 1 Cor 7:2, 9 to argue that "because of the temptation to immorality, homosexual marriages should be recognized by the church."<sup>71</sup> Paul would have been horrified to see his remarks used to promote what he and the whole of the ethical tradition behind and around him regarded as an immoral type of sexual union. The case of incest was ready at hand (1 Cor 5-6), the issue dealt with immediately prior to the discussion of sex, singleness, and marriage in 1 Cor 7. Had the Corinthians argued that it was better to allow the committed adult incestuous relationship in question to continue than to risk the man's passions boiling over into sexual immorality, Paul would have noted the plain contradiction in

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 136, 131.

<sup>70</sup>Schoedel, "Same-Sex Eros," 63-64. Fredrickson comes to different conclusions. I devote thirty pages in my book to demonstrating that the meaning of these terms is relatively clear. *Malakoi* means "effeminate males who play the sexual role of females" and *arsenokoitai* means "men who take other males to bed." The combination of both terms, set as they are in 1 Cor 5-7 against the backdrop of intertextual echoes with Lev 18 and 20 and Gen 1-2, amounts to an absolute indictment of all forms of male homosexual intercourse.

<sup>71</sup>"The Bible and Science on Sexuality," 140.

terms. One cannot legitimately appeal to an incestuous relationship as a means to averting sexual immorality because incest is itself an instance of severe sexual immorality. Paul puts adultery and same-sex intercourse on the same plane as incest and prostitution (the latter two included under the umbrella term *porneia*) in 1 Cor 6:9.

*Gudorf's Argument For Why Same-Sex Intercourse  
Should Not Be Considered Sin*

What, then, is Gudorf's compelling argument that homosexual intercourse is not sin? She refers to three "ways of identifying sinful acts within the Christian tradition": to check the witness of Scripture and church tradition; to examine an act's impact on the actor, church, and society; and to seek divine revelation "in the voice of conscience."<sup>72</sup> Gudorf admits that the Bible is "generally negative" toward homosexuality, but dismisses that witness by flatly asserting that the Bible's stance is based on "arguments and circumstances no longer relevant." As we argued throughout this review of her article, Gudorf nowhere makes a credible defense of this position. Gudorf also buys into Boswell's thesis that homosexuality was tolerated and even accepted for long stretches of "premodern" European history—a thesis that has not won wide support among church historians. Church tradition is decidedly on the side of staunch opposition to same-sex intercourse. Only in the last few decades have there been significant voices in the church arguing for a contrary position. Gudorf acknowledges that "Christian consciences are divided."<sup>73</sup> A more precise statement would be that the worldwide church remains strongly opposed to homosexual unions, and is still generally opposed in the West, with some slippage in America and especially Canada and parts of Europe. At least two out of the three criteria for identifying sinful acts fall squarely in the column opposed to homosexual intercourse.

As for the effects of same-sex intercourse on participants and on society as a whole, Gudorf adds to her previous discussion two points. First, she asserts that in the "anonymous urban, highly mobile society of

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 137.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 138.

postmodernity” interpersonal needs are largely limited to sexual relationships for fulfillment. Consequently, to require celibacy of homosexuals places on them an extraordinary burden, cutting them off entirely from intimacy with other human beings.<sup>74</sup> There are many problems with this argument.

- One could argue the opposite conclusion: in an age where communication networks, mobility, prosperity, and leisure time are at an all-time high (at least in the Western world), non-sexual intimacy has never been easier. In any case, Gudorf does not produce any hard data for her assumption (she does no more than quote Augustine on the superiority of friendship to marriage and alludes to the personal toll of celibacy on clerics).
- One can make a good case for the view that providing cultural supports for homosexual behavior may substantially increase the incidence of self-identifying homosexuals and bisexuals in the population, which in turn will increase the numbers of people beset by the alarming rates of medical and mental health problems, promiscuity, and high relationship—turnover often associated with the homosexual population. Homosexuality does not have a record of producing a strong bill of health for high numbers of its participants. It is difficult to see how promoting it will increase the health and well being of the general population, unless one wants to put 100% of the blame on “homophobia,” which the evidence to date does not bear out.
- As noted above, the number of homosexuals who have never experienced heterosexual arousal are a minority of the small homosexual/bisexual population (less than one quarter, perhaps one-half of one percent of the population). They would not be the only ones going through life or long stretches of life without sexual intercourse. The 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey indicated that the percentage of people in the United States who have had no sex partners since the age of 18 (2.9%) is twice that of people who classify themselves as (non-bisexual) homosexuals (1.5%). Probably most of these are not celibate by personal preference. There is no guarantee in life that suitable sexual partners will be available.

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 138-39.

- If one were to accept Gudorf's argument as valid, then a consistent church policy would have to break down sexual taboos everywhere. For heterosexuals who have difficulty finding the right person to marry, the church for consistency's sake would be logically obliged to permit an array of sexual arrangements outside of marriage to maximize the prospects for sexual intimacy (fornication, incest, plural marriage, sex between adults and young teens or even children, bestiality, etc.). Sexual intimacy would then become the paramount goal of human existence. Gudorf's argument moves in the direction of making an idol out of sexual intercourse. Jesus and the first-century church faced the same issues we face today; indeed, same-sex relationships were more prevalent in their cultural world than in ours. The difference between their view and Gudorf's is that they did not view sexual intercourse "by any means necessary" to be a God-given right, nor did they regard sexual intimacy as the highest good. They accepted one and only one model for sexual relationships: a lifelong, monogamous union between one man and one woman. They recognized that deviation from this model would "reap the whirlwind."<sup>75</sup> Marriage is for everyone who meets the prerequisites. A same-sex sexual relationship does not meet the prerequisites.

If Gudorf's first point for endorsing same-sex intercourse is not compelling, what about her second point? It comes down to the burden of proof:

. . . when the personal costs of both abiding by the teaching and of failing, despite one's best efforts, to abide by the teaching are so very high, the churches have a tremendous responsibility to define sin only where there is certainty. . . . Sin is generally not difficult to recognize. . . . But the more likely we are to know homosexual persons, and the more we know about homosexuality, the more likely we are to question the universal sinfulness of every homosexual act.

Christians might be excused for placing the burden of proof on a different side. When Scripture is so strenuously, absolutely, and universally

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<sup>75</sup>Hos 8:7.

opposed to same-sex intercourse, when the overwhelming weight of two millennia of church tradition supports such a stance, and when nature itself witnesses to the discomplementarity of same-sex intercourse, the burden of proof is entirely on those Christians who would argue in favor of same-sex intercourse. And what does socio-scientific information add to the picture? It shows that homosexual behavior is accompanied by a marked increase in catastrophic health effects (medical and mental), a marked increase in non-monogamous sexual relationships, a dearth of long-term sexual relationships, an erosion of every gender standard, and an increase in the most bizarre features of sexual activity and experimentation. This is hardly an unambiguous signal about the positive effect of providing cultural supports for same-sex unions. Gudorf would like to make the exception the rule, or convince the reader that every ill associated with homosexual behavior is to be blamed on homophobia. However, the evidence that she brings to bear provides little justification for a sea change on this most basic of sexual standards in the church.

#### **IV. Nancy J. Duff, “Christian Vocation, Freedom of God, and Homosexuality”<sup>76</sup>**

##### *A. A Review of Duff’s Argument*

##### *Duff’s Antithesis: The Freedom of God Versus the Casuistry of Absolute Prescripts*

Nancy Duff emphasizes the freedom of God as the “starting point for moral issues.” This freedom, Duff contends, “rejects casuistry as the application of absolutes to particular situations.”<sup>77</sup> “Against this view which claims to know the will of God as prescribed beforehand and subsequently applied by us to each situation, we can claim that the will of God is dynamically revealed in each situation.” Rather than believe “that commandments given in the Bible constitute prescriptive rules which are

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<sup>76</sup>Pp. 261-77. In the case of Duff’s article it will be easier to summarize the contents of the whole article first, and then to enter into critique.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 262.

to be applied to each situation, making exceptions when necessary," people operating "within Christian moral tradition" should interpret "divine commands as *descriptive* accounts of the world God has made fit for being human in." Duff's stress on divine freedom is designed to preempt the criticisms that would come from an ethic based on arbitrary and self-rationalizing human freedom. Divine freedom does not mean "anything goes," for Christians are still called to "act in ways consistent with their vocation as believers in Jesus Christ and members of Christ's church."<sup>78</sup>

Why is it wrong to apply absolutes to specific situations? According to Duff, such an approach

- constrains God's freedom, overlooking the fact that "what God demands in one situation may be different from what God demands in another."<sup>79</sup>
- distances us from a living relationship with God. "Once the moral code has been extracted from the Bible, one no longer has to discern God's present movement in the world; God's will is always known in advance."<sup>80</sup>
- is legalistic. Even when "casuistry identifies situations where laws can be suspended, e.g., lying to save the life of a friend," it tends to become callous toward those people who do not fit the exceptions and ignores the harm done to such people.<sup>81</sup>

Duff argues that "a rigidity which unintentionally denies the freedom of God" is especially likely to occur "when Christian sexual ethics combines absolute laws gleaned from Scripture with moral laws gleaned from biology"—such as when one insists that women, because of their innate capacity to bear children, *must* bear children.<sup>82</sup> Duff goes on to say that "the church errs" when it transforms "two essential functions of intercourse," "the unitive and the procreative," into commands; that is, when it

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 266-67 (her emphasis).

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 265.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 273.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 266.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 267.

mandates that “one *must* be sexually active in order to be fully human” or “*must* have children.”<sup>83</sup> A moral absolute derived from nature is even worse than one derived from Scripture because at least Scripture makes some reference to God. A moral imperative based on nature, however, requires “no reference to God at all.”<sup>84</sup>

To her credit, Duff admits that, if absolute laws should not “dictate our vocation in advance,” neither should orientation at birth (an essentialist position), nor the freedom to choose (a social constructionist position). An innate predisposition can still be immoral or lead to immoral consequences; for example, predispositions toward alcoholic addiction or rage. Yet, Duff contends, “homosexual orientation does not by necessity carry the destructive consequences of alcoholism or uncontrollable rage.” Moreover, such a predisposition at least “raises the question . . . of whether homosexuality represents God’s vocation for some individuals.” Against a “nonessentialist position” that equates sovereign human choice with morality, Duff rightly argues that “our identity does not arise solely from who we decide to be but, according to the Christian gospel, from who we are called to be.”<sup>85</sup>

*Duff’s Refutation of Three Arguments Against Homosexual Intercourse:  
The Imago Dei, Complementarity, and Procreation*

Duff dismisses three claims that critics of same-sex intercourse sometimes draw from the biblical text.<sup>86</sup> (1) Barth’s argument that the *imago Dei* is (in Duff’s words) “located in our relationship as male and female” (cf. Gen 1:27) cannot be right because then a person would have to be married to reflect the image of God. (2) The insistence that only male-female sexual relationships can be complementary “overlooks the fact that two women or two men can be far more radically different from one another than a man or woman may prove to be” and “rests too heavily on biology.” (3) To rule out homosexual intercourse on the grounds that it

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 269 (her emphases).

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 273. When Paul uses a nature argument he always refers it back to the creator God. In what sense, then, would an appeal to nature of the sort made by Paul or any other non-gnostic believer contain “no reference to God at all”?

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 270-72.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 272-75.

cannot lead to procreation ("be fruitful and multiply") ignores the problem of overpopulation, the existence of infertile heterosexual couples, and the fact that adoption is open to same-sex couples.

*Duff's Argument For Homosexual Intercourse: The Absence of Measurable Harm to All*

Most of Duff's article seeks to refute the case against homosexual behavior. What is Duff's case *for* such behavior? It apparently boils down to this: it cannot be proved that same-sex intercourse does harm to the participants in each and every case in which it occurs. "What does it mean to name something a sin when there are no victims and no negative consequences of the action? . . . Those who oppose the integrity of homosexual activity tend to claim that homosexuals are selfish and idolatrous *apart from any evidence other than the sexual activity itself*"<sup>87</sup> This leads her to bemoan the fact that "the homosexual who lives in a faithful partnership with another man is [assessed] as morally culpable as the homosexual who has multiple sexual partners in an evening." Duff laments that little attention is paid to the individual circumstances of the case.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 276 (her emphasis).

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 276-77. Duff cites the following example: "Since the church does not condemn all heterosexual relationships even though they, too, can transmit sexual diseases (including AIDS), the link between AIDS and the morality of all homosexual activity seems particularly cruel" (p. 277). This is tantamount to arguing: "Since the church does not condemn all monogamous, committed relationships even though they, too, can transmit AIDS, the link between AIDS and the morality of sexual promiscuity seems particularly cruel." Neither same-sex intercourse nor sexual promiscuity in general are treated as immoral solely because they constitute high-risk behaviors from a health standpoint. Certainly, though, significant health risks are a factor in the overall moral assessment of actions. On the link between AIDS and male homosexual intercourse see n. 68 above. When one has 2-3% of the male population in any given year accounting for half of all AIDS cases where an exposure category is known and almost three-quarters of cases attributed to sexual intercourse of any sort, it is not unfair to raise questions about the morality, let alone wisdom, of male homosexual relationships. *Of course*, not every male having sex with another male contracts AIDS, or HIV, or other STDs (what single action always leads to disease?). However, the risk exponentially increases both because anal intercourse and oral-anal contact are favorite practices of the homosexual population (the male urge to penetrate in sexual intercourse is undeniably strong; an orifice in one's partner is usually needed) and because the pairing of two males tends in the direction of non-monogamous relationship patterns (given the nature of male sexuality).

*B. Critiquing Duff's Argument*

*A General Case for the Universal Application of Moral Absolutes*

Duff's article shows balance at several points (e.g., referring to divine sovereignty in determining moral behavior and to the moral ambiguity of innate behavior). However, the overall argument is strikingly weak. The key contention made by Duff, that moral absolutes stand counter to the gospel and compromise God's freedom, is untenable:

- It is logically contradictory, at least on an epistemological level, to argue that one absolutely cannot hold to absolutes. The whole credibility of Duff's argument rests on the assumption that applying absolutes to specific situations is wrong in each and every instance—no exceptions because otherwise one could argue there is nothing inherently problematic about applying a moral absolute in the case of homosexual behavior. In other words, in order to reject categorically all moral absolutes, one must subscribe to the moral absolute that holding to any moral absolutes is unjust, legalistic, and morally wrong. The kind of moral certitude espoused by Duff on this point is incompatible with her rejection of absolute moral certitude.
- Duff's view compromises the very thing she seeks to lift up: divine freedom and sovereignty. In Duff's theological framework, God is apparently free to do everything except to rule absolutely on any matter. In Duff's system God does not have the sovereign freedom to proscribe to people certain forms of behavior in advance and under all reasonable circumstances. Yet even in human child-parent relationships such a proposal would be regarded as manifestly absurd. Suppose a precocious seven-year-old approached Mom and Dad, saying: "Daddy and Mommy, I really respect your freedom. And because I respect your freedom, I cannot accept any of your rules as absolutes. But rest assured, when you are not around I will give your 'descriptive accounts of the world' due consideration on a case-by-case basis as each specific situation arises and examine them in light of the vocation that I believe you have called me to." I personally do not know any parent that would

accept such self-rationalizing logic from a child (though they would be impressed by the child's intellectual cleverness!). Why should God accept it from us?

- Since Duff purports to be talking "within Christian moral tradition," it is relevant to point out that her understanding of what a "commandment" is bears little similarity to what the writers of Scripture understood, to say nothing of the Reformed tradition of which she is a part. To characterize the commandments of Scripture as merely "descriptive accounts" *in contradistinction to* "prescriptive rules which are to be applied to each situation, making exceptions when necessary" is to depart completely from the biblical landscape. Naturally to state this is not to exclude the fact that ancient Jews and Christians had means of circumventing some commands (e.g., through the use of allegory or by positing a change in dispensations). However, such maneuvers are very different from the kind of sweeping attitude to all commandments advocated by Duff. For Duff, the very act of viewing commandments of any sort as "prescriptive rules which are to be applied to each situation, making exceptions when necessary" is wrong because it is casuistry. I do not know of any ancient Israelite or early Jewish or early Christian text that means by "command(ment)" what Duff means. The Hebrew word *mitsvah* and Greek word *en-tolē* mean "command(ment)," "order," precisely in the sense that Duff criticizes. The New Testament view does not represent a departure from the Old Testament view on this score. To confirm these observations all Duff or anyone need do is open a concordance and check occurrences of these words in their context; or read any parenetic statement in Scripture.
- It is hard to believe that Duff herself subscribes consistently and completely to the view she espouses. I doubt very much that Duff would make a similar presentation if she were discussing racism, misogyny, economic exploitation, or sexual abuse. For example, to argue that with respect to discrimination against African Americans, or wife beating, or cheating the elderly out of their life savings, or having sex with a child no absolute rules should be made in advance and applied to specific situations (making reasonable exceptions where necessary) would rightly strike most people

as perverse.<sup>89</sup> Now, granted, there are some commandments where context means everything. The commandment not to murder, for example, probably does not mean in its several biblical contexts that soldiers or local authorities cannot “bear the sword” (Rom 13:4). Within the Judeo-Christian tradition one can make a credible (but still debatable) case for killing in self-defense or killing to prevent others from being killed. Indeed, one can probably be lenient about a number of normally forbidden acts when a life or lives are at stake, whether one’s own or another’s, such as when a person is threatened with death unless they comply with a would-be executioner’s demands. Yet, apart from such a threat (or sometimes even under the circumstances of such a threat), some commandments clearly do have universal force. Without such a presumption, moral anarchy is the inevitable result (Duff’s qualifications notwithstanding).

*The Validity of an Absolute Proscription Against  
Same-Sex Intercourse*

It would be possible, perhaps, for Duff to amend her argument to say that absolute prescriptive rules are inappropriate for behaviors, such as homosexual intercourse, where it cannot be proved that every and any instance of the said behavior does measurable or otherwise scientifically discernable harm to the participants. Yet even this modification would not save Duff’s position.

- As we noted above in the discussion of the article by Jones and Yarhouse, there are a number of sexual behaviors that the church forbids absolutely, despite the fact that measurable harm to the

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<sup>89</sup>In fact, Duff’s position is very strange indeed given her gender, her denominational affiliation with the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), and professorship in Reformed theological ethics at a Presbyterian seminary (Princeton). For the Presbyterian church does not permit ordination of candidates who refuse to recognize the ordination of women. So far as I am aware she does not protest that particular “prescriptive rule which is applied in each situation.” The Presbyterian church does not take into consideration the special circumstances of individual candidates on a case-by-case basis. One rule fits all. How is it that prescriptive rules applied in an absolute way seem not to be problematic when they fit her interests?

participants cannot be proven in each and every case. Can Duff prove measurable harm to the participants in each and every case of:

- “plural marriage” or some other multiple-partner arrangement?
- “recreational sex”?
- spouse swapping, “open marriage,” or “swinging”?
- sex treated as a commercial transaction (prostitution), whether cultic or secular?
- incest between consenting adults taking birth-control precautions, or for that matter every case of intergenerational incest?
- sex between a man and his horse, a woman and her Great Dane, or any other form of bestiality?
- sadomasochistic sex or bondage between consenting adults? “consensual” adult-adolescent sex or even adult-child sex?

The answer is obvious: Duff cannot prove harm to the participants in all such cases. In fact, most of the sexual activities listed above have been regarded as normative or at least tolerable in one or more cultures in the course of world history. Duff can *surmise* harm for each instance, based on moral principles about what true humanity should look like. But she cannot produce statistics that demonstrate personal distress or some outwardly perceptible maladaptiveness to society for every participant in the aforementioned sexual behaviors “apart from any evidence other than the sexual activity itself” (to use Duff’s own words for homosexual activity). Again, even in the case of adult-child sex, “the claim that childhood sexual abuse inevitably or usually produces harm is not justified,” as a 1999 study published in an APA journal claimed.<sup>90</sup> Among all forms of sinful behavior, consensual sexual immoralities are especially difficult cases in which to document harm to the participants in every instance—and Duff is a little naive in failing to discern the power of self-rationalization, especially where sex is concerned. This point about discernable harm in all cases is critical to Duff’s overall argument for supporting at least some forms of homosexual activity. For the sake of consistency, Duff will either

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<sup>90</sup>See n. 39 above.

have to abandon this argument or she will have to embrace the obviously untenable position of accepting (indeed, working to promote) ecclesiastical and civil endorsement of some forms of all or most of the above relationships.<sup>91</sup> Yet, as she surely knows, for purposes of outlawing the whole it is enough for church and society to have some evidence of increased risk to the participants and of the likelihood that endorsement will increase the incidence of the behavior in the population. This is precisely the kind of evidence that we do have in the case of homosexual relationships.

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<sup>91</sup>If the latter, then, for example, a candidate for ordination having regular, self-affirmed sex with one or more prostitutes could not be disqualified for ordination *a priori*. The ordaining authority would have to be able to prove that such a relationship was doing measurable harm to both participants despite the consensual dimension to the relationship. It would not be enough for the ordaining authority to assume that prostitution inherently diminishes the self-worth of the prostitute or the paying “customer’s” view of the opposite sex. No, the ordaining authority would have to prove that the prostitute (usually a woman) was inherently harming herself by offering sexual services in exchange for financial remuneration. A poor self-image on the part of the prostitute would not be adequate proof because, arguably, any poor self-image might be due to “prostitution-phobia” in society. In some ancient and tribal societies, some types of prostitutes or courtesans *were/are* highly valued and in such cases did/do not necessarily experience problems in self-image. The ordaining authority would also have to demonstrate that the paying customer (usually a male) manifested a pattern of misogynist behavior in other clearly discernable ways—apart from the sexual activity in question. Clearly, requiring such proof of an ordaining authority would be ridiculous but no more ridiculous than the policy recommended by Duff for the church’s stance on homosexuality. Doubtless Duff (and others) would argue that there is a big difference between a paying relationship and a loving, committed homosexual union. No one will argue that there is a difference. Every type of relationship is different from other types; otherwise there would be no occasion to speak of different types. The issue here is, as Duff puts it, victimization and discernable negative consequences (p. 276). If a person is not married—or even if the person is married and has the spouse’s consent—why shouldn’t a sexual relationship where money is exchanged be permissible? Again, we come back to the question of proof for every case, which neither Duff nor anyone else can supply. If Duff would like an even closer analogy, one could make the case for approving incest between two loving, adult siblings. It is helpful to remember that in the discussion of incest in 1 Cor 5 Paul tags on the example of prostitution in 1 Cor 6:12-20 (and adds to the vice list of 1 Cor 6:9-10 the sexual sins of adultery and same-sex intercourse). Duff’s position on homosexuality may well be close to the position espoused by the Corinthians on incest. If we adopt Duff’s reasoning, Paul made a serious error in not giving due consideration to whether the incestuous relationship in question was a committed and loving relationship between two adults. His blanket prohibition of every kind of incest, in agreement with the laws of Lev 18 and 20, was apparently one of those instances of unjust casuistry that Duff laments.

- Duff's argument for a victimless form of homosexual behavior is also predicated, apparently, on the assumption that youth cannot be "recruited" into homosexuality. As we have argued, based on cross-cultural comparisons and evidence for some limited sexual "elasticity" across the Kinsey spectrum, this assumption is probably false.<sup>92</sup> If false, then the significant health risks associated with homosexual behavior would be passed on to higher numbers of youth, along with problems in establishing long-term monogamous same-sex relationships and the likely promotion of gender-identity confusion.
- Against Duff's argument that restrictions on God's freedom are especially likely to occur when absolute laws are derived from Scripture and nature, the confluence of Scripture and nature would appear to be powerful evidence of precisely how God has chosen to manifest divine freedom. The analogue that Duff sees in the case of women and procreation is a strange one to cite. Jesus and Paul certainly did not insist that women *must* bear children. Both encouraged women (and men) who had the gift to remain single to do so. They viewed neither procreation nor sexual gratification as the highest good. Yet, they believed<sup>93</sup> that there were some actions that were clearly "against nature," like homosexual intercourse and (to judge from Lev 18:23; 20:15-16) bestiality. Surely Duff would acknowledge that the nature argument can be validly applied to human-animal sexual intercourse. Or would she contend that we are wrongly practicing casuistry here too? Should a person assume that sexual intercourse with his/her dog is wrong all the time or should we consider matters case by case? There is a difference between saying that nature *prescribes* certain acts and saying that

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<sup>92</sup>School clubs for gay and lesbian youth often promote a message such as "how do you know whether you are gay or lesbian unless you try it?"—a clear indication on the part of the homosexual community of the belief that sexual experimentation can increase the incidence of self-identifying homosexuals in the population. Self-identifying adult homosexuals have been molested as children at much higher rates than heterosexuals (both girls and boys by adult men)—evidence that even unwelcome or uninvited sexual experience in childhood can materially affect the incidence of homosexuality. See pp. 188 and 200 above.

<sup>93</sup>Certainly Paul and, given the evidence from other early Jewish texts, probably Jesus. See the chapter on "The Witness of Jesus" in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*.

nature provides clues that certain acts are best *proscribed*.

Based on the above observations, it is fair to say that Duff's main argument is very weak. She is no less of an absolutist or casuist in her ethical reasoning than those who oppose homosexuality. She simply has a different set of absolutes and, perhaps, less personal consciousness of the existence of those absolutes and her own casuistic approach.

*Refuting Duff's Refutation of Three Arguments  
Against Homosexual Intercourse*

The only other thing to comment on is her dismissal of three arguments made by critics of homosexual intercourse. Extensive comments are not needed here.

*The Imago Dei*

It is true that the *imago Dei* does not depend on being married to the opposite sex and procreating. At the same time, it is fair to say that some forms of sexual expression, if sexual expression is to be had, would compromise that *imago Dei*. Certainly bestiality, incest, adultery, or prostitution would compromise the divine image in humans, to name four other types of sexual expression. Again, this does not mean that humans *must* be married to fellow humans in a non-commercial, faithful, and exogamous sexual relationship but it does mean that humans made in God's image exercise that image only in a specific form of sexual intercourse and not in others. The complementarity of male and female precisely *as sexual beings* does suggest that a non-complementary sexual relationship between two people of the same sex would likewise compromise "the image of God." It is in that sense that one is to understand the conjoining of the two phrases "in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" in Gen 1:27.

### *Complementarity*

It is indeed conceivable that some partners of same-sex relationships are in many ways more different than some partners of opposite-sex relationships—but not as sexual beings. A male remains a male, a female a female, anatomically but also in other ways. A classic example in which homosexual males remain males in their sexual expression can be seen in the vast disparity between homosexual male relationships and lesbian relationships over the matter of monogamy and multiple partners. Males continue to behave as males (predominantly stimulated by sight, etc.). Same-sex relationships, as the name suggests, do not relate *sexual* “others”—by definition. When same-sex partners perceive one another as sexual others, that indicates a fundamental problem in self-perception. Such a problem is not likely to be corrected by hanging around in a sexual relationship where one is continually imaging oneself as a complementary sexual other to a same-sex partner. What such a person needs is loving, non-sexual relationships with members of the same sex where one’s gender identity can be reaffirmed and restored without the incessant compromise of one’s sexual self through attempted sexual integration with a sexual “same.”

### *Procreation*

Duff is right in one sense about procreation: a sexual relationship that does not fulfill the command to “be fruitful and multiply” is not necessarily an invalid sexual relationship. However, Duff misses the larger point. The capacity to procreate, possessed only by one form of sexual relationship (heterosexual), is a wonderful clue about how God intended and designed sexual pairing to operate. It is another heuristic device, in addition to anatomical complementarity and other complementary sexual features of male-female sexual relationships, as to what constitutes a divinely-ordained complementary type of sexual relationship. It is certainly a much better clue than allegedly innate orientations, which are more likely to be a damaging result of the fall.

**V. Kathryn Greene-McCreight,  
“The Logic of the Interpretation of Scripture and the  
Church’s Debate over Sexual Ethics”<sup>94</sup>**

Kathryn Greene-McCreight’s essay provides a somewhat helpful discussion of the problems for scriptural interpretation and authority posed by a pro-homosexuality agenda in the church.

*Debatable Caveats That Needlessly Surrender the Field?*

The article opens with two questionable caveats and a rather poorly thought-through apology. As regards the caveats, Greene-McCreight cautions that the homosexual debate cannot be resolved by “appeal to science and experience, because the data from these arenas are contradictory and inconclusive.” Nor can it be resolved by appeal “to isolated biblical texts, for the Bible is used to support the arguments of both sides of the debate.” For Greene-McCreight, “the decisive biblical texts when it comes to sexuality are Gen. 1-3 and Eph. 5,” not Lev 18:22; 20:13; 1 Cor 6:9; Rom 1:24-27 (she wants to leave the exegetical debate regarding the latter texts to biblical scholars). The real battleground, she insists, is over how to interpret Scripture (hermeneutics).<sup>95</sup>

These caveats contain an element of truth but could be challenged. On the one hand, she is right that primary weight should be given to Scripture, not science and experience. Science, as Jones and Yarhouse point out, cannot mandate a moral position on homosexual behavior that is at odds with Scripture since neither innateness nor nonpathology (were such things characteristic of homosexual desires and behavior) demonstrates the moral goodness of a given behavior. On the other hand, a solid case can be made that the cumulative weight of evidence from science and “experience” is about as strong against homosexual intercourse as it is against any other form of consensual sexual behavior that society generally rejects

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<sup>94</sup>Pp. 242-60.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 244-45. The comment on “the decisive biblical texts” is found on p. 245 n. 5.

(incest and plural marriage, for example).<sup>96</sup> Greene-McCreight appears to abandon the field altogether with her verdict of "contradictory and inconclusive."<sup>97</sup>

Her reference to "isolated biblical texts" that refer directly to homosexuality seems to buy into the flawed rationale of some critics of the traditional view. Yet the texts that speak explicitly to the issue of homosexual intercourse are more widespread than Greene-McCreight's listing suggests. Moreover, they remain the most important biblical texts for the debate, much as any discussion about adultery, bestiality, incest, or divorce would have to wrestle first and foremost with the biblical texts that speak directly to those concerns. Genesis 1-3 is a very important witness (and, less so, Eph 5) but one could argue that, if anything, Gen 1-3 is even more prone to being co-opted by the pro-homosexuality side than are the texts that are explicit about the prohibition of same-sex intercourse (see the treatment of these chapters by Bird). Perhaps the fact that Greene-McCreight's expertise is not in biblical studies explains her reluctance to give primary weight to the direct texts. The fact that "the Bible is used to support the arguments of both sides of the debate," however, is no valid argument for relegating to a secondary role the direct witnesses. One is simply obligated to work harder at understanding which side has made the better exegetical case, whether one is an expert in the field of biblical studies or not.<sup>98</sup> Hermeneutics does play a critical role in the homosexuality debate. Nevertheless, one cannot begin to talk about how the Bible applies

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<sup>96</sup>Proponents of same-sex intercourse usually cite "experience" as their main argument for approving same-sex intercourse, by which they mean the experience of self-avowed homosexuals who earnestly seek societal support for gratifying their sexual desires. Apart from the fact that no credence is given to the experience of those who renounce previous homosexual behavior, this way of casting the argument from experience naively relies on the testimony of those who have the greatest conflict of interest. This is the equivalent of relying primarily on the self-testimony of participants in an adult incestuous relationship or polygamous relationship for discerning the morality of incest and polygamy, respectively. A better understanding of the argument from experience, one which shifts the issue from the self-interested individual to the community, is to ask whether a form of sexual expression carries with it significantly increased risks to the participants and dangers to society.

<sup>97</sup>See further my comments on the article by Jones and Yarhouse.

<sup>98</sup>Possibly Greene-McCreight felt outnumbered on the biblical side, with Schoedel, Bird, Fredrickson, and Balch opposing the biblical witness against homosexuality and only Seitz and a somewhat ambivalent Jewett supporting that witness.

in a contemporary setting until one knows what the Bible meant in the context of its own cultural milieu. Primary weight in the debate must be given to the direct texts, precisely because they are not “isolated” but stand alongside a broader web of indirect texts, Gen 1-3 included but also other narratives and laws and poetic material, that tacitly assume the sinfulness of homosexual acts.<sup>99</sup>

*A Misguided Apology For Being Opposed to Same-Sex Intercourse*

Greene-McCreight undermines her own case against homosexual behavior by coming close to apologizing profusely for her opposition to homoerotic intercourse.

Let me say for the record that I am among those who wish they could be convinced that Scripture and tradition could be read to support the revisionist position. . . . It seems clear to me, however, . . . that Scripture read holistically upholds the norm of fidelity in marriage between one man and one woman . . . . While I have not yet been convinced by the revisionist position, I keep listening in hopes that someone will come up with something new.<sup>100</sup>

It almost sounds as if she is saying: “I’d really like to agree with you that homoerotic relationships are a good thing, honest I would; but, because of Scripture, I’m sorry, my hands are tied.” It seems to me that with her statements Greene-McCreight nearly relinquishes the moral high ground on this issue. None of the contributors on the pro-homosexuality side gush about their reservations in supporting a form of behavior that challenges the authority of Scripture to its core or leads to a number of negative effects for society and for participants in homosexual intercourse. Undoubtedly, Greene-McCreight is thinking of the pain experienced by self-affirming homosexual Christians when the church refuses to endorse

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<sup>99</sup>It might be more accurate to say that Gen 1-3 falls within a gray area, a “semi-direct” text on the issue of homosexuality. The delineation of heterosexuality in the creation stories at a number of points makes the authors’ opposition to same-sex intercourse (P and J) relatively clear (Bird’s objections notwithstanding).

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 245.

homoerotic behavior. She is right to want to “groan along” with those who struggle to deny homoerotic passions (cf. Rom 8:22-23, 26). Yet I doubt that if she were talking about incest, polygamy, fornication, adult-child sex, adultery, or bestiality that she would talk about “wishing” and “hoping” to be convinced that Scripture does not say what it seems to say.<sup>101</sup> I cannot imagine Paul saying to the Corinthians: “I wish I could be convinced that Scripture’s negative stance against incest, particularly consensual adult incest, is wrong” or “I keep hoping I’ll hear a good argument that allows me to set aside Scripture on this matter.” There is plenty of evidence pointing to the negative fallout from homosexual behavior that provides strong grounds for not wishing or hoping for people to act on homoerotic passions. Why would she wish and hope

- for people to compromise their own gendered existence by attempting a complementary relationship with a sexual same rather than a sexual other?
- for anyone to pursue sexual pleasures that almost certainly will not result in a sexual relationship that is both lifelong and monogamous?
- for anyone to engage in behavior that dramatically increases health risks, for example, on average reducing life span for male homosexuals by ten years or more?
- to promote such behavior when cultural supports can contribute markedly to an increase in the number of people who identify themselves as homosexual?

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<sup>101</sup>I can imagine Jesus empathizing with the pain that may have led the woman caught in adultery to get involved in an adulterous relationship. Her husband may have been cold and aloof, even abusive. She may not have had any intention of leaving the marriage. Or if she did have such an intention, her action could be “contextualized.” Because she lived in a society that made divorce initiated by women extremely difficult, an adulterous affair may have been her only means of ending a bad marriage. In practice, men were probably held to a lower standard than women. There are so many factors that could make the woman in the story a sympathetic figure. Jesus’ actions (“Let him who is without sin . . .”) make clear that he viewed her in this light. What I cannot imagine is Jesus saying to her: “I wish I could be convinced that Scripture and tradition might be read to support an occasional ‘supplementary sexual relationship.’” While I am not yet convinced that such a reading is possible, I keep listening in hopes that someone will come up with some new argument that will get me to change my understanding.”

- to affirm a kind of sexual union that will explode the traditional model for marriage that has stabilized society so well for centuries?

One wonders whether Greene-McCreight's apology (and I do not mean apology in the positive, classical sense) is in part a reflex or concession to the climate of intimidation faced by opponents of homosexual practice within academic institutions and professional societies today. Regardless, it does not reflect well on her position as a whole. It makes her look uncertain about the morality of her cause, an uncertainty that stands in sharp contrast to the certainty expressed by contributors in this volume who take a different view. It also gives the appearance of holding onto the Bible's view in an almost fundamentalist way, virtually in spite of the mass of contrary evidence from other sources of knowledge.<sup>102</sup>

*Greene-McCreight's Case Against Ecclesiastical Endorsement  
of Same-Sex Intercourse*

That having been said, Greene-McCreight does make a number of positive contributions to the side she is suppose to represent in this collection of essays. She rightly states (contrast Gudorf's observation) that the burden of proof lies with those in the church who propose a radical departure from the historic position of Scripture and church tradition.<sup>103</sup> It is they that must "give a coherent account of the unity of God's will for humanity" that explains how "God's will for our embodied lives [can] be so

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<sup>102</sup>Greene-McCreight places a high premium on the unity of the church. "I shall assume here general agreement on the importance of unity, that broken communion is to be avoided at all possible costs short of full apostasy" (ibid., 244 n. 3). She also appeals, rightly, to the need for civil discourse among those who espouse different views on the issue of homosexuality ("We have a deeper unity at stake . . .," ibid., 246). It is unclear, though, whether she believes that those who engage unrepentantly in a repetitive pattern of same-affirming homosexual behavior are to be exempted from church discipline of some sort. Does unity trump every sort of persistent and unrepentant behavior that challenges the lordship of Christ over the community called to do his will, no matter how severe the infractions? It is clear that Paul did not think so, based on his handling of incest in 1 Cor 5 and the parallels between the vice lists of 1 Cor 5:10-11 and 6:9-10 (the latter juxtaposing incest and homoerotic intercourse).

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 246.

radically different from that set forth for Israel.”<sup>104</sup> She effectively critiques the cavalier dismissal of the Levitical prohibitions, noting that it ignores the significant continuity between the Testaments that the church has affirmed for millennia to ward off antinomian and anti-Semitic tendencies.<sup>105</sup> She perceptively reminds “revisionists” that, while one may appeal to a change of covenants in the case of Old Testament regulations, “we are not fundamentally more eschatologically informed or hermeneutically privileged” than the early church or New Testament Scriptures which rejected same-sex intercourse as incompatible with Christian faith. In order to change courses now, “it seems that we must rely heavily on a confidence in our eschatological privilege over all those who came before us,” a confidence that borders on arrogance.<sup>106</sup> And Greene-McCreight notes that oftentimes revisionist appeals to the rule of love and faith

rely more on Enlightenment notions of equity and tolerance than on a biblically shaped understanding of the righteousness of God and the grace of God toward fallen humanity. The revisionist hermeneutic therefore tends to be less holistic than the traditional one, more reductionist. . . . [choosing] isolated texts to be used as a lever over against the whole to pry open a new venue on the matter.<sup>107</sup>

This last statement could not be better put, in my view. The exclusive claim of opposite-sex relationships to sexual legitimacy is a core conviction behind every single biblical text that deals directly or indirectly with sexual matters. Attempts to override this core conviction cannot help being reductionist in applying biblical texts to reach a contrary conclusion about the legitimacy of same-sex intercourse.

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 251.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 250.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 251.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 252-53.

*On Critiquing the Analogy of Gentile Inclusion*

The remainder of Greene-McCreight's essay is devoted to a critique of the analogy of Gentile inclusion in the early church, employed by Jeffrey Siker and other revisionists.<sup>108</sup> She criticizes three "key but unarticulated assumptions" of this argument. (1) The assumption that sexual orientation is "such a fundamental aspect of one's God-given identity that not to express it [in genital gratification] is to diminish one's humanity" raises the question whether children or "the celibate elderly or disabled" are "less than human." (2) The assumption that biblical rules are little more than "social constructs projected onto a religious screen" fails to wrestle with traditional claims about Scripture's inspiration. (3) The assumption that "traditionalists say that homosexuals are not recipients of the Spirit" is wrong, for receiving the Spirit "has nothing to do with one's bodily desires, but has to do with baptism."<sup>109</sup>

The last point by Greene-McCreight seems to me to be a bit muddled. The claim that receiving the Spirit "has nothing to do with one's bodily desires" is overstated. While demanding full obedience before receiving the Spirit puts the cart before the horse,<sup>110</sup> repentance and faith are preconditions for possession of the Spirit and these certainly have to do with a resolve to bring bodily desires progressively under the dominion of the Spirit. Since it is possible to be "cut off" from the "vine" for one's "unbelief," failure to "remain in God's kindness," or failure to "bear fruit" (cf. Rom 11:20-24; John 15:1-10), one can presumably also be divested of the indwelling Spirit that makes such a connection possible (cf. Ps 51: 11). In addition, a believer can by his or her conduct "grieve the Holy Spirit"

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 253-58. I am assuming that most readers will be familiar with the argument; namely, that "early Jewish-Christians saw Gentiles as being sinners because they were Gentiles, just as today most heterosexual Christians see active homosexuals as being sinners because they engage in homosexual activity" (Siker, "How to Decide: Homosexual Christians, the Bible, and Gentile Inclusion," *ThTo* 51 [1994]: 231; cited by Greene-McCreight). Not noted by Greene-McCreight (nor by myself in my forthcoming book) is that Luke Timothy Johnson anticipated Siker's use of the analogy by about a decade (*Decision Making in the Church* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 96-97).

<sup>109</sup>"The Logic of the Interpretation of Scripture," 254-55.

<sup>110</sup>It is the empowerment of the Spirit, a gift that no human can merit, that according to Pauline thought makes possible obedience to God's will.

(Eph 4:30), “put the Spirit of the Lord to the test” (Acts 5:9), and “outrage the Spirit of grace” (Heb 10:29) to a point where one’s salvation is put in jeopardy. According to Paul, being “*led* by the Spirit of God” rather than by sinful passions determines who the true children of God are (Rom 8:14; cf. 1 John 3:24; 4:6)—not just baptism or the mouthing of a confession of faith (Rom 6:15-23). So there is an integral connection between the indwelling Spirit and behavior. It is still true, though—and this is where Greene-McCreight is headed in the right direction—that a believer can engage in sexually immoral conduct and still be indwelt by the Spirit, at least for a time. This is precisely what Paul warned about in the case of the incestuous believer in 1 Cor 5. The same warning reappears in the (probably hypothetical) analogy of a believer who joins his body, indwelt as it is by the Spirit of Christ, to the body of a prostitute (1 Cor 6:15-20). To that extent, Siker’s argument falls flat when he argues from the presumed possession of the Holy Spirit by some homosexuals to validation of same-sex intercourse. The manifestation of some Christian “fruit,” let alone the mere possession of the Holy Spirit, does not rubber stamp all behaviors. Some unmarried Christian men visit prostitutes and still manage to manifest behavioral fruit in other areas of their lives. So what? Prostitution is still a sin. Fornication is still a sin. Incest is still a sin. Adultery is still a sin. Same-sex intercourse is still a sin (1 Cor 6:9).

For Greene-McCreight, the biggest problem with using the model of the early church’s inclusion of Gentiles to justify the acceptance of homosexual intercourse is that it overlooks issues of election and non-election that apply in Scripture to Jews and Gentiles but not to heterosexuals and homosexuals.

According to a holistic reading of the Bible . . . , Gentiles are not “sinners” per se. . . . Gentiles are to be avoided, yes, but not because of what they do but who they are: the nonelect. . . . The inclusion of the Gentiles has to do with God’s election of Israel and nonelection of other nations, and with the grace of God in the face of Jesus Christ overcoming the alienation of both the elect and the nonelect alike. I am at this point familiar with no theological argument to the effect that heterosexuals are more “elect” than homosexuals. . . . To

suggest that there is an analogy between Jew/Gentile and hetero/homosexual is a major category error; it is to compare apples and paper clips.<sup>111</sup>

Greene-McCreight's point is true but perhaps could be more sharply stated. The "major category error" committed by Siker and others is that Gentiles were accepted into the church on the basis of faith in Christ *without any concomitant acceptance of the behaviors, especially sexual behaviors, that typically made Gentiles sinful in the eyes of Scripture and in the eyes of first-century Jews*. None of the major categories of sexual immorality—including incest, bestiality, fornication, same-sex intercourse, prostitution, and adultery—were compromised in conjunction with Gentile inclusion. Far from it: for Paul, as also for Luke's "Apostolic Decree" (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25)<sup>112</sup> and the "Noahide laws" in early Judaism, there was nothing contingent or narrowly sectarian and nationalistic about certain fundamental sexual norms. Thus, Paul could call on the Thessalonian Gentiles whom he fathered into the Christian faith to "abstain from sexual immorality (*porneia*)" and from sinful sexual passions that typified "the Gentiles who do not know God" (4:3-5). The church embraced Gentiles without accommodating its standards on moral behavior, including sexual behavior, to suit routine Gentile practices. Siker and others would have the church embrace homosexuals and accommodate its sexual standards to suit homosexual practices. Where is the parallel? There isn't any. A true parallel would be to incorporate those with homosexual tastes into the church on the understanding that persistent and unrepentant engagement in same-sex intercourse is grounds for at least partial removal from participation in the life of the community, in the hopes of eventual repentance and restoration. This is the standard that Paul applies to incest in 1 Cor 5 and which he parallels to same-sex intercourse, adultery, and prostitution in 1 Cor 6:9.

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 256.

<sup>112</sup>That the prohibition of *porneia* in the Apostolic Decree had in view the list of sexual offenses in Lev 18, including same-sex intercourse in 18:22, is evident from the fact that all the other prohibitions in the Decree match up with the laws enjoined on resident aliens in Lev 17-18 (specifically, 17:8-10, 12-13, 15; 18:26).

There was plenty of precedent in the Scripture of the early church for not treating Gentiles *per se* as permanent outcasts from the kingdom of God: the promise that in Abraham “all the families of the earth shall be blessed”; the examples of Ruth, the widow at Zarephath, and Naaman the Syrian; Second Isaiah’s understanding of Israel’s new role as a “light to the nations”; the Book of Jonah’s rejection of nationalistic xenophobia; and so on. What precedent is there anywhere in the Old Testament for approving some forms of same-sex intercourse? Not only is there not the slightest precedent, but also Israel was more, not less, stringent than surrounding ancient Near Eastern cultures in its opposition to such behavior. Moreover, the debate about requiring circumcision for Gentiles in first-century Judaism was primarily a debate about the degree of participation in the community life of the Jewish people, not primarily or everywhere a debate about sin and salvation. The failure to fulfill a positive ritual command, even the command to circumcise, cannot be equated with the commission of an egregious sexual offense unambiguously proscribed by the Mosaic law.

The bottom line is that the Gentile analogy as applied by Siker and others simply has no reasonable controls to check abuse. Applied in the same sloppy manner with which it is applied by proponents of homosexual practice it can be used to justify numerous kinds of immoral behavior, especially immoral sexual behavior. There are only one or two controls on the application: (1) the incredibly naive standard that those committing the behavior in question demonstrate the presence of the Spirit through moral behavior in other areas of their lives;<sup>113</sup> and, possibly, (2) the frequently unreasonable standard that the behavior in question not produce indisputable, documentable harm to the participants in each and every individual case.<sup>114</sup> The degree to which a behavior is categorically rejected by the Old Testament in relation to the surrounding culture is irrelevant to the application. The question of whether that rejection is strongly and

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<sup>113</sup>Is it impossible in each and every individual case for a man who does “x” (with “x” standing for any number of sexual sins and other immoral behavior) to help out a person in need, or be friendly and kind to his neighbors, or lobby for political action that helps the oppressed?

<sup>114</sup>This, of course, would effectively eliminate categorical opposition to all incest, polygamy, and adult-child sex.

pervasively renewed in the New Testament, again in distinction to the surrounding cultures, is irrelevant to the application.<sup>115</sup> The statistically verifiable association between the behavior in question and a substantially increased risk in a host of negative ancillary effects is irrelevant to the application. In short, it is relatively easy to recognize the irresponsible way in which the Gentile analogy is being applied to homosexual intercourse simply by drawing on a few of the closest analogues and asking whether the application of the same principles to the analogues would produce desirable changes for the church.<sup>116</sup>

### *Violating the Rules of the Game*

At the end of the day, for Greene-McCreight, revisionists on the matter of same-sex intercourse have to be able to demonstrate the validity of their position by appeal “to the inner logic of traditional Christian discourse.” By this she means such things as making their case without seriously undermining the continuity between the Testaments and particularly the church’s traditional recognition that its “eschatological location is in no position of superiority to that of the New Testament writers.” “They are the rules to the game we entered into at our baptism.” To violate these rules is to move toward “sectarianism, further threatening the already-fragile unity of the body of Christ as we find it in North America.”<sup>117</sup> Her pertinent observations remind me of a statement e-mailed to me by a well-known scholar who is actively involved in church leadership and maintains a desire to retain special status for Scripture as a source of revelation. He wrote: “The issue [of affirming homosexual behavior], as you know, is [about] hermeneutics, not [Scripture’s] authority.” (The phrase “as you know” is often employed when the speaker/ writer who is uncertain about

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<sup>115</sup>As Greene-McCreight aptly puts it, “Siker’s argument assumes a fundamentally different eschatological ‘location’ for the present Christian community vis-à-vis that of the witness of the New Testament” (ibid., 256).

<sup>116</sup>Greene-McCreight also refutes the alleged analogy with Scripture’s view of slavery: “The biblical witness regarding slavery . . . never commends the holding of slaves as a witness to human redemption in Christ” (ibid., 258).

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 257-58.

the receiver's viewpoint wants to communicate that only a fool could think otherwise.) Unfortunately, in this instance this particular scholar's assessment poses a false dichotomy. While it is possible to challenge some isolated texts in Scripture without radically affecting Scripture's authoritative place in the church, the more pervasive, absolute, and severe Scripture's prohibition, the more difficult it becomes to assert that deviation from the prohibition does not challenge scriptural authority at its core. In the current challenge from proponents of same-sex intercourse, it is about hermeneutics *and* Scripture's authority.

*Acknowledging the "Goods" of Homosexual Relationships?*

Greene-McCreight ends her essay on a conciliatory note,<sup>118</sup> urging the church to repent both of its callous behavior toward homosexuals and of its double standard on sexual ethics, and calling on both sides to conduct the debate about homosexuality as "an opportunity to witness to the love of Christ." In the course of these helpful reminders, she makes two problematic observations.

First, she encourages the church to "acknowledge the 'goods' which can come from homosexual relationships": "the self-giving of two individuals in a committed relationship," "the love and care rendered to the adopted children of gay and lesbian couples," and the involvement of homosexuals in the ministries of the church. I wonder if Greene-McCreight would say the same of committed adult incestuous relationships, polygamous relationships, or adult-child relationships. I doubt it.<sup>119</sup> The reasons why should be obvious upon reflection. First, dwelling on the alleged "goods" of such relationships undermines societal repugnance for the

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 259-60.

<sup>119</sup>One can even speak of "goods" arising from adulterous relationships. The adulterous partner may have received during an affair affirmation about his/her desirability as a sexual partner. The adultery itself may alert both married partners to problems in their relationship. A brief fling may have been all that the adulterous partner needed to reinvest him-/herself back in the marriage relationship. A brief affair now and then may be much preferred to a divorce. And so on. It is fairly clear, though, that whatever "goods" arise from an adulterous relationship hardly deserve to be recognized by the church.

immoral sexual activity in question. Second, the “goods” bear no intrinsic relationship to the immoral sexual activity that constitutes the relationship as a sexual relationship (as Greene-McCreight herself acknowledges). The “goods” of which Greene-McCreight speaks do not stem from a homosexual relationship any more than similar “goods” stem from incestuous, polygamous, or pedophilic relationships.<sup>120</sup> These “goods” can arise, and better arise, when they occur apart from the homosexual dimension of the relationship. No credit, therefore, should be given to that dimension.

*Does the Church Need More Time to Reflect on the Merits of Homosexual Relationships?*

The second problematic observation made by Greene-McCreight is that the church needs more time to reflect on the issue. The request for more time is puzzling. The church has had the issue on its front burner for some thirty years. The result has been not only increasing division, friction, and acrimony in the church but also an ever-increasing erosion of the church’s traditional posture on the issue. The latter can be largely attributed to the desensitizing effect of continuous exposure to arguments that homosexual behavior is good. The same result would probably be engendered if the church spent as much time and energy reflecting on polygamy: more openness to plural marriages. At what point does the church say “enough”? Based on what has already happened in some denominations, and certainly in the public sector, it is easy to discern the answer to that question. The debate will have ended once those who vigorously support homosexual behavior have effected denominational endorsement of committed same-sex unions. Then those who take a traditional position are

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<sup>120</sup>It is questionable whether legalized adoption of children by homosexual couples is any more of a good thing than adoption of children into a plural marriage or an incestuous relationship between adult siblings. Children adopted into a homosexual relationship would be subjected to a harmful model of sexual relationships. Some researchers, including the homosexual scientist Dean Hamer (author of the so-called “gay gene” study), have noted an increased incidence of homosexuality in children adopted by homosexual couples.

likely to find few opportunities for continued presentation of the case against homosexual behavior. When a denomination says “no” to ordaining practicing homosexuals and blessing same-sex unions, we are required to “stay in dialogue.” When it says “yes” to these developments, we are told that the church has spoken and that to continue the debate would only damage the polity and unity of the church.<sup>121</sup> And why not? When one side compares the church’s rejection of same-sex intercourse to racism and misogyny, questioning the morality of homosexual behavior must be treated as prejudice and bigotry. The church is not obligated to give a forum for prejudice and bigotry—indeed, it is constrained not to do so.<sup>122</sup>

*Polygamy: A Plea For Equal Time*

Incidentally, if the churches want to commit themselves to continuing to provide a forum for the affirmation of same-sex intercourse, for the sake of fairness they might as well do the same for the question of polygamy. This is a serious, not sarcastic, proposal. Why does the church resist a long-term study of this issue while promoting study of homosexual intercourse? In my opinion, the case for “plural marriage,” both biblical and social-scientific, is much stronger than that for homosexual behavior. Given the existence of marriages with multiple wives, secondary wives, or concubines among some in ancient Israel, it would be difficult to make the case that restricting a marriage to two people is somehow more important to the authors of Scripture than restricting sexual intercourse to opposite-sex partners. Indeed, the reverse is likely to be true. We might also appeal to the model of the Trinity and give greater sanctity to relationships involving the number three (though functionally Jesus relates to God as a son/child to a Father/parent). Some will undoubtedly respond that limiting

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<sup>121</sup>Is there any continuing official dialogue (forums, debates, etc.) on the national level questioning the validity of homosexual intercourse still taking place in the United Church of Christ or in the Unitarian Universalist Association—two denominations that have affirmed the ordination of practicing homosexuals?

<sup>122</sup>See also Christopher Seitz’s insightful observations in the same book on why staying in dialogue until consensus is reached is not necessarily a good idea (“Sexuality and Scripture’s Plain Sense,” 180-81).

marriage to two exemplifies the unique devotion of the church to God. Indeed it does. Yet, for those who espouse a more pluralistic (syncretistic?) model of Christian faith in which non-Christian religions are accorded equal validity, such an argument would have only limited force. Moreover, given the extraordinarily high rates of short-term and/or non-monogamous relationships among homosexuals, heterosexuals participating in plural marriage arguably stand a much better chance of minimizing the number of lifetime sexual partners than do homosexuals and in the process do not violate the essential sexual paradigm of male-female complementarity. Although critics may charge polygamous marriages with various flaws, the self-testimony of wives in polygamous marriages does not support the conclusion that such relationships are always or even usually harmful to the participants in scientifically measurable ways. In an era where premarital, experimental, or recreational sex is so much a part of the fabric of sexual life in America, it may be silly for us to get so worked up about a lifelong commitment between a man and two or three wives, or a woman and two or three husbands. I myself do not wish the church to sanction polygamous relationships. I just do not see how the church can justify sanctioning homosexual unions while withholding approval of at least some kinds of plural marriages and various other currently proscribed sexual arrangements.

Church and society might want to correct traditional models of plural marriage by broadening the opportunity for women to have more than one husband, or by opening up to plural marriage any configuration of men and women. The key is that the relationships be long-term, consensual, and committed. If the church is willing to endorse same-sex intercourse, then in my view it owes an apology to the Mormon church for its radical opposition to polygamist practices in the nineteenth century, not to mention the continuing effect of such opposition on a reported 20,000- 30,000 polygamists in the United States today (mostly in Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico). The size of the polygamist lobby in relation to the homosexual lobby should have nothing to do with assessing the morality of the practice, particularly given the fact that it was the vehement opposition of mainline Christianity to polygamy that brought about its lower numbers. After all, Mormons in the nineteenth century participated in polygamy at a high rate. Surely, Mormons do not have a special “polygamy gene” that

non-Mormons lack. Rather, Mormons, particularly Mormon men, share with all others, particularly men, a tendency toward pluriform sexual activity that more easily comes to expression when promoted by organized social groups. The impact of indirect innate factors and cultural sanctions on the incidence of polygamist practices is comparable to the impact of the same on the incidence of homosexual behavior.

In conclusion, Greene-McCreight makes some pertinent observations about the problems of affirming same-sex intercourse, though not with as much vigor and precision as she might. Unfortunately, she also makes a number of statements that needlessly undermine the very position she espouses and mar the quality of the article as a whole.

Part 2 of Robert Gagnon's Review essay will appear in a future issue of *Horizons In Biblical Theology*.