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EDITORIAL

Till We Shall be Perfectly Formed



Lorna Van Gilst

A friend recently reported the birth of her “perfectly-formed” grandson. She knows, of course, that some babies are born with webbed hands or cleft palates or purple birthmarks. She knows that some are born with cerebral palsy or Down’s syndrome. And some are born transsexual or homosexual.

My friend knows that her new grandson, at this moment, appears to have all the body parts and functions that can be observed or tested. Is my friend’s grandson perfect? No, of course not. She knows that before long he will scream and grab toys from his sister and tell some lies. He may develop tooth decay or deafness or dyslexia. But in her eyes right now, he is all that she had hoped. He is created by God, in God’s image, a child of God’s covenant.

Whatever this young man’s future, he is an image bearer of God. He is part of God’s good creation—a creation distorted by the fall, a creation redeemed by God’s grace. Children born with cerebral palsy are also image bearers of God, and so are those born with sexual distortions. Apart from the grace of God, there is no perfection in humanity. That is why we do so much damage when we affirm or reject people’s worth on the basis of human standards of perfection.

Christian schools are notorious for casting young people into such rigid molds of who we ought to be. Every year some of our students leave, or they live in daily anguish. As many as 5 percent of young peo-

ple in our schools are homosexual. As many as 23 percent are abused, sexually or verbally, till they are shamed into feeling worthless and guilty for their sexual “inadequacies” in themselves or in the satisfaction of the abusers. I know some of these people, although I didn’t realize until long after the abuse that they were living such lonely lives. They tend to hide for a long time. Often, they hide behind textbooks, behind performance, even behind humor. They need, somehow, to achieve respect or attention.

Gary hid behind academic performance. Then he waited until college to tell his parents that he is gay. Then he was cut off from them. “They’re crushed,” he told me. “They don’t know what to do with me. At first I couldn’t even go home because they couldn’t handle it. They didn’t want the neighbors to know. What was I supposed to do? I’ve been living with this fear for years. I couldn’t tell anybody until I got away from home. My mom says it can’t be true—I’ve been brought up in the church! So where can I turn?” Gary chooses his friends very tentatively. He lives in a world that stereotypes “real men” as jocks, and he’s tried to be one, but it hasn’t worked.

Can I tell Gary it’s all right to find a gay community? Should I nudge him out of the Christian community so we don’t have to deal with his kind? Gary needs Christian friends. He needs support. He didn’t choose this kind of dilemma. “No one would choose to be gay,” he says.

“It’s too miserable a life.”

None of us chooses, I tell him. None of us chooses the circumstances of our birth. But we respond to them. God promises to be faithful in his love, to be sufficient in his grace. How can we put those promises together with the agony Gary endures?

It’s a broken world, I tell him. And yes, it’s a sexually-oriented world. That too is God’s gift—maleness and femaleness are God’s creation. We are created to need one another, to commune together, to be intimate. But not indiscriminately so. C. S. Lewis writes about the eternal longing within each of us for something more than this earth can fulfill. That longing, he says, is a longing for God, who is whole and who makes us whole. We tend to think that a sexual relationship will make us whole, but unless we have intimacy with God, we’ll go on searching for wholeness within our own human attempts.

We as a Christian school community have failed, perhaps as much as a brothel, to provide Gary with the model of godly love that he needs, so he’s ready to turn to the gay community, where he will be accepted for who he is. We’ve published books like *God’s Temples* (Christian Schools International) and Lewis Smedes’ *Sex for Christians* (Eerdmans), but we haven’t learned yet how to talk and walk with our homosexual brothers and sisters in Christ, modeling for them the love of Christ that fulfills. ■

Homosexuality, Scripture, and the Body of Christ

by Michael Williams

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In an article entitled "Homosexuality and the Old Testament" (1983), Michael Ukleja claimed that "only towering cynicism can pretend that there is any doubt about what the Scriptures say about homosexuality." It is patently clear, Ukleja concluded, that the Bible condemns homosexuality. While this position generally represents the majority of the Christian scholarly community, the consensus that Scripture bans and condemns homosexuality has come under attack during the past decade or so. This is due to the rise of a revisionist movement that has attempted either to give approval to homosexuality (orientation as well as behavior) on the basis of Scripture, or to suggest that Scripture is silent on or irrelevant to the issue of homosexuality. The latter suggestion—that Scripture does not provide us with normative insight in regard to homosexuality—is the more unfortunate of the two tactics because the net result is one that undermines the Christian community's confidence in Scripture to speak authoritatively on the issue of human sexuality or any other topic.

To read the inscripturated Word of God passionately, believingly, and

open to its transforming message is good; in fact, it's the necessary starting point for a faithful encounter with the text. But more needs to be said than this. As evangelicals, we in the Reformed tradition have plenty of good terms that define the nature of biblical authority. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. It is faithful and reliable in its intended purpose of proclaiming the redemptive message of God centered in Jesus Christ. As the all-sufficient redemptive Word of God, the Bible is perspicuous, that is to say, clear, in its presentation of that message. While such phrases get at the nature of biblical authority, and they inform an appropriate heart-stance toward the text, they say almost nothing about *how* we can be confident that our interpretation of the Bible is correct. The main purpose of this essay is to discuss the biblical attitude toward homosexuality. But along the way I will point out ways that homosexual hermeneutics has imposed an agenda upon the biblical text, in the hope that it will help us become a bit more confident in our reading of Scripture.

Before we proceed, something of a caveat. I do not believe that there is anything wrong *per se* with questioning traditional interpretations. In fact, I would contend that without constant reappraisal the traditional becomes traditionalism. It is true that reappraisal opens one up to the possibility of revision, but it also opens the door to reaffirmation, and the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Our consideration of the biblical attitude toward homosexuality will

center around Paul's argument in Romans 1, a text that has long been assumed to constitute the *locus classicus*, the sum of biblical teaching on the subject. The popular notion seems to be that if Romans 1 is upheld as condemning homosexuality, then homosexuality must be condemned by the Christian community. Conversely, and this makes far less sense to me, it is assumed that if Romans 1 can be interpreted in any other way than condemning homosexuality, then there is no biblical argument against it.

What is often missed here is that Romans 1 is not the sole biblical text relevant to the issue. Paul's argument in that text stands upon, and indeed derives its force from, attitudes toward homosexual activity that are to be found in the Old Testament and intertestamental Judaism.

The Old Testament Background for Paul's Argument in Romans 1

The first reference to homosexuality in Scripture is found in Genesis 19, the story of Lot and the angelic visitors. The story of Gibeah in Judges 19 provides a parallel. Two angels are sent to Sodom to investigate the outcry against the sins of Gomorrah and the city in which Lot is residing, Sodom (Gen. 18:20-22). Lot received the angels into his house, and that evening men surrounded the house and demanded to see his visitors: "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out that we may know them" (19:5). The meaning of this text is plain enough. The men of Sodom are demanding that Lot release his visitors in order that the men may

sexually abuse them.

Yet, in *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, D. S. Bailey argues that the crowd was seeking only to make the acquaintance of Lot's guests—or more precisely in Bailey's argument, to check the credentials of these foreigners, an act that violates the hospitality of Lot's house. Bailey notes that the Hebrew verb *yada* carries the explicit idea of sexual relations only some 10 to 15 times of its 943 occurrences in the Old Testament. The more usual meaning of the word is "to get acquainted with" or "to have knowledge of." While Bailey's count of *yada* as referring to sexual relations is undoubtedly low, in general terms he is correct. The verb *yada* is an extremely common word, and its usual denotation is "to know." How does one word do double duty for such diverse meanings as "to know" and "to have sexual relations?" By the Hebrew association of both knowledge and sexuality with intimacy. Intimacy is the key to both in the Old Testament. The KJV of Genesis 4:1 reads "And Adam knew Eve his wife." The NIV renders it "Adam lay with his wife." The idea is that Adam and Eve were nakedly intimate, as the next phrase makes clear (she conceived). The book of Hosea capitalizes upon *yada's* semantic richness in its use of Hosea's intimacy with his wife (and lack of it) as an analogue of Yahweh's intimacy with his covenant people Israel, and in the process tells us something about the biblical understanding of the knowledge of God.

But this does not directly help us with Genesis 19. Which denotation of

yada is appropriate in this text?

Bailey's interpretation suggests that the story of the angelic visitors is not about homosexuality but hospitality; thus it is irrelevant to the subject. John Jefferson Davis (*Evangelical Ethics*) points out that this has become something of a stock homosexual approach toward this text. Bailey has allowed a word count rather than context decide the meaning of *yada* in Gen. 19:5—and a very advantageous word count at that. It is instructive to note that *yada* appears 12 times in Genesis, 10 of which refer

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**As the body of
Christ we are
called to represent
God's mercy
and grace within
the world.**

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to sexual intercourse. Have I myself just engaged in a word count and used it as a clue to meaning? Yes, but I've done so purposefully in order to make a couple of comments regarding hermeneutics.

First, the decisive determination of a particular word's denotation is made by its use in a given context. Words have meanings, but only within contexts. Think of the English word "bar." What different meanings can it convey? One can eat a candy bar as he or she is barring a door. A legal

neophyte passes the bar and then celebrates by going to a bar. Context is the key to meaning.

Second (and this one is a bit more technical than the last), when immediate context fails—and sometimes it does—, when a word or phrase is capable of ambiguous interpretations, the reader must look for meaning clues in progressively more remote contexts. One might say that that is what Bailey is doing; and he is. The problem is that he has jumped immediately to the most remote context before exhausting more approximate contexts. If the immediate context of a work or phrase is ambiguous, one then moves to other occurrences within the next larger context, the book—hence our comment regarding the occurrences of *yada* in Genesis. If still ambiguous, the interpreter must look at other books written by the same author, then books of similar vintage and genre, and so on until one finally arrives at the least remote context necessary. In his reply to Bailey, Derek Kidner (*Genesis*) notes that statistical approaches to word meaning militate against the rarer sense of a word as a possibility. Yet sometimes the denotation is other than the more usual sense.

In the case of Genesis 19, however, word countings and remote contexts are equally beside the point. The context of the angelic visitation and its set up in chapter 18 make it clear that a homosexual relationship is the only possible understanding of the text; that is to say, the men of Sodom were demanding that Lot's visitors be turned over to them in order that they might engage in homosexual acts.

Desperately seeking to keep the men of Sodom from “knowing” his visitors, Lot says to the townsmen: “Don’t do this wicked thing. Look I have two daughters who have never slept (*yada*) with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them.” When the Lord sends the angelic investigators to Sodom he speaks of the grievous sin of the inhabitants of that city. Is it not clear that Lot was offering his virgin daughters as a sexual substitute to those who were demanding to have sexual relations with Lot’s visitors? Is it not the behavior that is named after that city that supplies the example of the grievous sin referred to in 18:20? The NIV rendering of Gen. 19:5 is appropriate to the only possible sense of the passage: “Bring them out to us *that we can have sex with them.*”

Christian and Jewish commentators alike have seen this text as a clear reference to homosexuality. Bailey’s attempt to dismiss Gen. 19 from the discussion is unwarranted and self-serving for homosexual hermeneutics. Philo, a contemporary of Jesus, wrote that the men of Sodom “lusted after one another, doing unseemly things, and not regarding or respecting the common nature . . . the men became accustomed to be treated like women” (*On Abraham*). The writer of the book of Jude noted that “Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion” (v. 7).

The Jewish and Christian reaction to sodomy as a perversion, a pagan abomination, is consistent with the Old Testament law. The Mosaic legislation brands sodomy as particularly heinous. “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Lev. 18:22). Homosexual intercourse was grouped with incest and bestiality, and carried the capital penalty: “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination (something detestable and hated by God); they

shall be put to death, their blood is upon them” (Lev. 20:13).

Some have suggested that what is in view here and elsewhere in the biblical condemnation of homosexual activity is actually the ritual prostitution that was common in the ancient Near Eastern fertility religions such as Baalism. Thus it is a cultic rather than a moral matter under consideration. That argument, however, is clearly untenable in that the prohibition appears with others of a clearly moral nature, and that Leviticus places no conditions upon the condemnation.

In an article in the *Des Moines Register* in 1990 (“What the Bible

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The condemnation of homosexuality does not appear to be Paul’s intent in Romans 1 and 2.

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Says About Homosexuality”), Martha Reineke admitted that homosexuality is condemned by the Old Testament Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26) but dismisses the entire contents of the Levitical legislation on the grounds that the Old Testament case law has been rendered obsolete under the terms of the New Covenant. In other words, the Old Testament law stands for Christians as dead Jewish law. Again, the intent is to declare the biblical materials irrelevant to the issue of homosexuality. Reineke cites examples from the code which show that she conveniently misses the distinction between cultic instruction and moral imperative. The homosexual condemnation is grouped with injunctions against eating pork and wearing garments made of blended fibers and

instructions about shaving one’s beard. The Holiness Code consisted of instructions for the maintenance of purity in the communal life of Israel. Reineke’s examples are taken from the purely cultic arena, instruction that was designed to make Israel visibly peculiar from her neighbors, and thus socially help to protect her unique relationship to Yahweh. But there is more to the Code than cultic instruction. The legislation of Leviticus also includes case applications of the moral law codified in the Ten Commandments. And the condemnation against homosexuality in 18:22 is found within such a context. Immediately prior to the ban on sodomy we find condemnations of sexual relations with a neighbor’s spouse (v. 20) and the sacrifice of children to the pagan god Molech (v. 21). Immediately following the ban on sodomy we see a condemnation of bestiality (v. 23). Following Reineke’s logic, are we to assume that these also are merely cultic instructions of a bygone Hebrew dispensation? Once again, context is run over roughshod in the press to affirm homosexuality.

The Old Testament condemnation of homosexuality was so strong that by intertestamental times it was a sin that was seen by the rabbis as being very rare in Israel. Indeed sodomy came to be associated with a paganism that was identified as characteristic of Israel’s heathen neighbors. One talmudic tractate prohibited leaving animals in the care of Gentiles, because they “frequent their neighbor’s wives, and should one by chance not find her in, and find the cattle there, he might use it immorally” (cited in Davis).

The New Testament contains prohibitions against homosexuality in three places: Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10. Both the Corinthian text and that of 1 Timothy include prohibitions against homosexuality within vice lists (which Paul often used to illustrate the kind of behavior

or disposition that he is condemning). The relevant portion of 1 Cor. 6:9 reads: "Don't you know that . . . no sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes (*malakoi*) nor homosexual offenders (*arsenokoitai*) . . . will inherit the kingdom of God?" The vice list of 1 Tim. 1:10 condemns adulterers and pervers (*arsenokoitai*).

Homosexual hermeneutics has produced a fair amount of debate regarding the meaning of the words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. Reineke suggests that the proper meaning of *arsenokoitos* is "pederast," a male who has sex with a boy. Based upon a few classical Greek uses of the term to refer to pederasty, R. Scroggs (*The New Testament and Homosexuality*) goes so far as to say that Paul "must have had, could only have had, pederasty in mind." What Scroggs chooses to overlook is that Paul is most likely using the term on the basis of the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, where homosexuality generally without any pederasty qualifier is in view. Paul is a Hebraicist, not a Greek. His primary confessional source is the Old Testament. In terms of the Leviticus texts, there is absolutely no reason to come to Reineke's and Scroggs' conclusion. Again, homosexual hermeneutics breaks the guidelines of context (in terms of our second comment). The Septuagint is contextually closer to the text of the New Testament than is classical Greek literature. Most of the authors of the New Testament were devout Jews before becoming Christians. This is especially true of Paul, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews." His primary frame of reference was the Old Testament Scriptures.

Even though both *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* are fairly rare words in the new Testament (the latter word appears only twice), based upon the Old Testament attitude toward homosexuality and the bridge between the

two texts (1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10) and the levitical legislation via the Septuagint use of *arsenokoitai*, there is no sound reason to disagree with the entries in Louw and Nida (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). They suggest that *arsenokoitai* appears to refer to the active partner in the homosexual act, the sodomist, and *malakoi* refers to the passive partner, the receiver to the sodomy. No conditions, not rape, cult prostitution, or pederasty, appear to qualify Paul's condemnation of homosexuality in either 1 Cor. 6:9 or 1 Tim. 1:10.

This debate about the meaning of words in abstraction from contexts provides occasion for one further hermeneutical comment. While word studies can be valuable, they are often poorly done, and even more poorly applied. They are all too often convenient ways of proving exactly what one wishes to prove. If there is a hermeneutical rule regarding word studies, it is that they need to be done, used, and accepted with caution. One must remember that the exegete does not come to the word study as a neutral investigator. He brings his confessional and theological prejudices with him, and those biases often shape his finding more than he allows his encounter with the text to shape his commitments. While there are many ways to abuse the word study, the particular error that we see in Scroggs' pederast interpretation of *arsenokoitai* is that he has rigged his study by jumping past the Septuagint's use of the word to get to classical occurrences of the word that seem to agree with his commitments.

Romans 1

Self-serving uses of the word study have made Romans 1 equally problematic. The debate has revolved around the word "nature" (*physis*) in vv. 26-27. J. Boswell (*Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*) argues that the word means "what is

natural to me." Thus Paul is not referring to those whose primary orientation is homosexual. According to Boswell, Paul is condemning heterosexuals acting as homosexuals in the context of either unwanton lust or ritual prostitution. *Physis* lacks a Hebrew equivalent since "the Jews referred all existing things to creation or to the Creator God, and the OT is primarily concerned with history, not philosophy and speculation" (James DeYoung, "The meaning of 'Nature' in Romans 1"). DeYoung was unable to substantiate Boswell's "what is natural to me" meaning of *physis* from extra-biblical sources. Upon looking at intertestamental Apocrypha and pseudepigraphical literature DeYoung concluded that where *physis* is used in reference to sexuality, it clearly condemns homosexuality. Both Philo and Josephus (contemporaries of the New Testament) used the word in reference to sexuality; both call up the ghost of Sodom, and both condemn homosexuality in whatever form it takes.

A relevant text comes to us from the pseudepigraphic Testament of Naphtali. After affirming that God has "made all things good in their order," the author notes that Gentiles "have forsaken the Lord and changed their order." Then he writes

But you shall not be so, my children, recognizing in the firmament, in the earth, and in the sea, and in all created things, the Lord who made all things, that you become not as Sodom, which changed the order of nature (*physis*). In like manner the Watchers also changed the order of their nature, whom the Lord cursed at the flood, on whose account he made the earth without inhabitants and fruitless.

The author of the Testament of Naphtali is obviously using a creation

order argument as a condemnation of homosexuality.

The general consensus of New Testament exegetes is that *physis*, both in its Pauline use and its use by other New Testament writers, refers to an appropriateness, usually a creation-al appropriateness. What is according to nature (*kata physin*) is then that which is in accordance with the intention of the Creator, and what is against nature (*para physin*) is that which is contrary to the intention of the Creator. C.E.B. Cranfield (*Romans*) speaks of *kata physin* as it is used in Romans as "the very way God has made us." Similarly, John Stott (*Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today*) concludes that Paul's use of *physis* in Romans 1 refers to "the natural order of things which God has established." It is to be admitted that the word *physis* is more slippery than I have indicated. DeYoung notes no less than eight different denotations within the word's semantic range. Yet the context seems to substantiate a "creation order" understanding of *physis* in Romans 1. Note how the Creator and the creation immediately precede in the context (vv. 19-23). From the context there does not appear to be any sound reason to suggest that what we are looking at is anything other than a creation order "which men have no excuse for failing to recognize and respect" (Cranfield).

We have already mentioned Scroggs' *pederasty* argument. Romans 1 has also been read as referring to this behavior. This makes no sense whatsoever in the context of Romans 1. Listen again to v. 27: "leaving the natural use of the female . . . males with males committing indecent acts." Paul does not say "men with boys." Whether one takes *physis* in v. 27 as referring to creation order (I think the context leans heavily in this direction) or merely as customary behavior, the sense is clear. Heterosexual behavior is ignored for the sake of homosexual

expressions of sexuality. Further, Paul compares ("likewise") lesbianism with male perversion. As lesbianism was most often between adults in mutuality, so the force of the comparative argues for adult-adult mutuality.

But we must deal with the "mutuality" idea further. It is typical of the homosexual argument to say that Paul knew nothing of male-male mutuality, long-term, committed sexual relationships and that the only patterns known

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The suggestion that Scripture does not provide us with normative insight in regard to homosexuality undermines the Christian community's confidence in Scripture

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to him were those of pederasty, cult prostitution, and hedonistic promiscuity. Since Paul nowhere addresses "the caring adult relationship of mutuality," his argument against homosexuality in Romans 1 is irrelevant to the modern situation (Scroggs). In reply, it must be said that there simply is no evidence for this suggestion. It is all very convenient supposition. It is merely assumed that mutuality is more common today than it was then. Even if male-male mutuality was rare in antiquity, so what? What makes mutuality (long-term loving commitment) the determining criteria for appropriate sexual relationships? One could just as legitimately argue, it

seems to me, for a mutuality model within incest, polygamy, polyandry, or adultery. As long as permanency and mutual consent characterize the relationship, it is good.

The net effect of homosexual-revisionist interpretation, lexical fiddling, and unreliable word study comes to this conclusion: the biblical prohibitions are not at all against homosexuality. Rather, they are against violations of hospitality (Genesis 19 and Judges 19), cultic taboos (Leviticus 18), male prostitution and defilement of the young (1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1), and lustful promiscuity (Romans 1). None of these passages even alludes to, much less condemns, a loving, mutually committed homosexual partnership.

One must also remember, allege homosexual protagonists, that the biblical writers were ignorant of the modern distinction between "inverts" (those who are homosexual by orientation) and "perverts" (those who are heterosexual by orientation but engage in homosexual practices). It is the latter Scripture is condemning, so goes the argument, not the former (Scanzoni and Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*). Thus Norman Pittenger (*Time for Consent*) argues that homosexuality is "natural" and "normal" for the homosexual invert. The line that often accompanies this notion for the homosexual Christian is "God created me this way, and he only makes that which is good."

This is where the context of Paul's statement in Romans 1:26-27 becomes crucial. James Dunn (*Romans*) contends that there is an "obviously deliberate echo of the Adam narratives (Gen. 2-3) in vv. 19-25." The wrath of God is being revealed against those who have deviated from creation norms. It was Adam who gave up his knowledge of God for the sake of an idolization of the creaturely. The Bible is not without a norm for sexual relationships,

and it's a norm that argues against all deviations from it as well as against those who want to dismiss the biblical prohibition against homosexuality as culturally irrelevant due to an alleged ignorance of the distinction between inverts and perverts. God met Adam's need for companionship by way of sexual differentiation and the institution of heterosexual marriage. John Stott nicely sums up the Genesis norm:

Scripture defines the marriage God instituted in terms of heterosexual monogamy. It is the union of one man with one woman, which must be publicly acknowledged (the leaving of parents), permanently sealed (he will 'cleave to his wife') and physically consummated ('one flesh'). And Scripture envisages no other kind of marriage or sexual intercourse, for God provided no alternative.

The biological complementarity of male and female sexual organs joins the Genesis account of God's norm for human sexuality in a unified creational argument against homosexuality as "normal" or "natural." I find no reason to disagree with Stott's conclusion:

The reason for the biblical prohibitions is the same reason why modern loving homosexual partnerships must also be condemned, namely that they are incompatible with God's created order. And since that order (heterosexual monogamy) was established by creation, not culture, its validity is both permanent and universal. There can be no 'liberation' from God's created norms; true liberation is found only in accepting them.

The stream of phrases in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy 1 makes Paul's attitude toward homosexuality quite clear. He calls it a *degrading passion*, an *indecent act*, an *error*, the product of a *depraved mind*, and even *worthy of death*. In light of the creation context of Romans 1, it is quite evident that homosexuality *per se* is contrary to the will of God for Paul. Homosexual activity is inexcusable, because men are sinning against the light of creation (1:18-20; 2:14-15). They instinctively realize—with an awareness that they repress (1:18)—that such conduct is contrary to the will of God. In Romans 1, homosexuality is seen not merely as a violation of some sectarian code, but as a transgression of the basic law of God known in all cultures.

The condemnation against homosexual activity is universal and absolute throughout the biblical record. It is never contemplated that one specific form of homosexuality is condemned while others are tolerated or accepted. Paul, like the rest of Scripture, affirms only a monogamous, heterosexual relationship as the only appropriate form of sexual expression.

Paul's Argument in Romans

Notwithstanding all that we have said regarding the biblical ban against homosexual activity, the condemnation of homosexuality does not appear to be Paul's intent in Romans. To take Rom. 1:26-27 as a proof-text against homosexuality does an injustice to what Paul is saying. While I would stop just short of saying that proof-texting Rom. 1:26-27 is wrong, I think Paul would respond to it by saying something like this: "Yes, but you've missed my point." Conservative Christians have traditionally taken the text as one that compels them to call down the wrath of God against homosexuality. That "calling down of divine wrath" is precisely the sin that Paul is here con-

demning!

Paul is not seeking to indict some classes of men for their sin, but all classes, all people, because all are sinners and thus deserving of the wrath of God. He is writing to condemn any Jewish overconfidence in God's favor for and obligation to Israel. He opens up that theme by making it plain that all people, ethnic and religious heritage notwithstanding, are sinners and therefore in need of God's redemptive grace in Jesus Christ. "The principal focus of Paul's critique," writes James Dunn in his excellent study of Romans, "is Jewish self-assurance that the typically Jewish indictment of Gentile sin (1:18-32) is not applicable to the covenant people themselves (2:1-3:20)." Thus: "There is no one righteous, not even one" (3:10).

Verses 16-17 of the first chapter of Romans are programmatic for the whole book:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "the righteous will live by faith."

In the light of the gospel there is no question of men's being righteous before God otherwise than by faith. All are under the judgment of sin and death. We have all fallen from our original estate in righteousness. That's the point of Rom. 1:18-25. In fact, Dunn suggests that verse 18 functions as a heading for the entire section of the epistle. What we have then in 1:18-3:20 is a summary of human failure under the general heading of *adikia* (unrighteousness).

Paul's indictment of human wickedness focuses on man as such. Even though God's creational word

sounds in our ears, we pervert it in our rebellion from God, the order of creation, and our proper relationships with one another. The ploy that Paul uses to arrive at this universal indictment of man under the law and without grace is an us-versus-them argument. He begins with the Gentile "them" over against the Jewish "us" in 1:18-32. The Gentile sins against the truth of God (vv. 22-24), against nature (vv. 25-27), and against others (vv. 28-32). Hendrik Hart ("Romans Revisited") is correct when he says that Paul is employing the standard Jewish polemic against Gentile idolatry. Paul's intent is to characterize human unrighteousness from a Jewish perspective. The Jewish abhorrence of Gentile idolatry and the degradation of Gentile sexual ethics are part of the vicious circle of human sin—failure to acknowledge God leads to a corrupt self-understanding and degenerate behavior.

Paul's Christian audience in Rome, Gentile as well as Jewish, would be sympathetic to the traditional Jewish understanding of the abomination of homosexuality and the Jewish opinion of all Gentiles as sexual perverts. As Dunn puts it: "indeed it was no doubt precisely this tighter ethical discipline which had previously helped attract many of them to the synagogue in the first place." One can almost hear Paul's audience saying "Yes Lord, those Gentiles are pagans. Judge them Lord. Let them have it!" The Gentiles (the pagans) are not only sexual perverts, but they are also slanderers, God-haters, insolent, and arrogant. They are full of pride, malice, envy, and murders (vv. 28-32). All in all, they are not the sort of people you would invite to church or have over for Sunday dinner.

By the time Paul's audience heard the words of 2:1ff it became clear that he had set a trap for them (a good reason to ignore chapter divisions). He switches from speaking in the third person plural "they," swinging

around, as it were, to speak in the second person singular "you," my hearer. The hook had been baited in 1:18-32, and now it is set with the words "You, therefore have no excuse, you who pass judgment . . . because you . . . do the same things." Who are you to condemn anyone, you sinner? The net of unrighteousness catches the Jew as surely as it does the Gentile—or in more modern terms—the devout Bible believer as surely as it does the pagan. Dunn catches the moment well:

Paul's onlooker is presumably one who listens to the polemic of 1:18-32 and heartily joins in its condemnation of idolatry, homosexual practice, and the rest. Such a one would feel safe in passing judgment on "the other," either because he thought himself free of such vices, or because he thought the attack was directed against others and not himself. This silent onlooker is envisaged then as striking a judgmental pose either thoughtlessly or as one who presumes himself exempt from such criticism. Paul's rhetorical tactic is designed to expose the self-deceitfulness of such a pose.

This kind of rhetorical trap is not unknown in Scripture. Two well-known examples come immediately to mind. Nathan's rebuke of David's sin with Bathsheba takes just this form in 2 Samuel 12. When David hears of the rich man who refuses to butcher a sheep from his own vast herd to feed a visitor to his home, but instead butchers the only sheep of a poor farmer to feed his guest, David "burned with anger" and condemned the rich man as worthy of death. In Nathan's retort "You are the man," David sees that he has indicted himself. Amos' use of the rhetorical trap (Amos 1-2) is a bit more drawn out, but equally effective. Amos begins his

prophecy condemning the sins of the Northern Kingdom's neighbors. With the formula "for three sins of . . . even for four I will not turn back my wrath" the Lord thunders his judgment against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab—all traditional enemies of Israel. Then the Lord decries the idolatry and lawlessness of Judah. Amos' northern audience is cheering throughout the declaration of judgment, apparently oblivious that it is moving ever closer to Israel, until 2:6: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath." Whenever I read the opening chapters of Amos I can't help but wonder whether Amos' audience was still cheering on the approaching judgment of God when they heard the prophetic word that that judgment was being addressed to them.

Henk Hart has recently suggested that Paul's argument in Rom. 1:18-32 is not his own position but merely a rhetorical ploy to draw his audience into the trap of 2:1ff. According to Hart, Paul is using a traditional Jewish view in order to turn the tables on them and indict their own censorious and self-righteous spirit. This is but one more example of homosexual hermeneutics attempting to say that the biblical text is irrelevant to the issue of homosexuality. Of course Paul is passing on typical or traditional Jewish conceptions. As Albert Wolters put it in his reply to Hart (CTJ): Paul passed on the traditional Jewish view that Yahweh is the Creator of the universe. We must respond to Hart along three lines. There is nothing in the text to suggest that Paul is using an argument with which he personally disagrees. Second, in order for the rhetorical trap to work it must be sincere. That is to say "both speaker and audience would have legitimate cause to feel duped" (Wolters). Thus, the trap works only *if* Paul agrees with the argument. The judgment of God against the nations in Amos 1-2 was true. Nathan's

implied condemnation of the rich man was sincere. Third, are we also to assume that Paul disagrees with the traditional Jewish conception of man's rebellion from God (vv. 18-24), and that Paul did not honestly believe that fallen humanity devises ever new and hateful ways of oppressing one another (vv. 28-31)? The truth-status assigned to vv. 25-27 must also be assigned to the rest of the passage as the three panels fit together as a loose sequential illustration of unrighteousness.

Nathan springs the trap: "You are the man"; Amos: "For three sins of Israel . . . I will not turn back my wrath"; and in similar style Paul: "You, therefore, have no excuse . . . for . . . you do the same things." While Paul is not legitimating homosexual activity, and neither should we, he is saying that we cannot condemn the homosexual, because apart from Christ we are equally under the righteous judgment of the law. Refusing to condemn is not the same as affirming. However strongly we may disagree with homosexual practices, we have no liberty to denigrate the humanity of the homosexual. Paul's point is that grace is the only way to acceptance with God. Grace, not condemnation, is God's solution to sin. Paul is contesting and removing any basis for soteriological boasting. Romans 1 is not about homosexuality but the universal need for God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Homosexuality and the Body of Christ

As the body of Christ we are called to represent God's mercy and grace within the world. A fundamental characteristic of those who are made just by God is the doing of mercy and the sharing of grace—as God has done in Christ to us. Part of that sharing of grace is truth-telling, and when it comes to homosexuality, truth-telling consists not only of proclaiming the redemptive love of God in

Jesus Christ, but also declaring God's norms for human sexuality.

It seems to me that Paul's argument in Romans is largely missed by two mutually exclusive positions or groups of persons. On the one side stands an increasingly belligerent Christian gay movement, which says that in order to affirm me as a Christian—to welcome me as a brother or sister in Christ—you must affirm all of me. Just like you, my sexuality emanates from the core of my being, and I am gay. To affirm a gay Christian, one must affirm him or her as not only Christian, but gay. Norman Pittenger quotes the revivalist hymn "Just As I Am; Without One Plea" right here. "The whole point of the Christian gospel is that God loves and accepts us just as we are."

On the other side stand a group of people who are equally belligerent: those Christians who believe that gay people are to be ignored as if they do not exist or else that they are to be condemned and persecuted as perverts, for certainly the kingdom of God is not made up of such damnable and disgusting sinners. The unpleasant, but very real supposition of this second group is that there is a condition upon salvation: heterosexuality. Evidently, God's grace is not sufficient for the homosexual. As a Calvinist, I can't help but suspect that there is something intrinsically Pelagian about the homophobic option.

While both positions display dysfunctional understandings of sin and forgiveness, the second is easier to deal with in the context of Romans, for it is the very thing Paul is condemning. The homosexual has been marginalized within modern evangelicalism. He or she is the modern equivalent of the biblical leper, the untouchable, the unsaveable, the unwanted, the despicable "other." The uncomfortable fact for naive, genteel, Bible-believing, go-to-meeting twice on Sunday, heterosexual evangelicals

is that Jesus died for lepers.

God's grace is sufficient for all, and it's all that is sufficient. The sole criterion that I can find for acceptance into the body of Christ is redemption in Christ by the power of the gospel administered by the Spirit of God. The fact that we are all sinners saved by the grace of God in Jesus Christ disallows any spirit of self-righteousness toward the homosexual believer, or any stance that would result in the shunning or marginalization of believers.

It is increasingly common today to hear those who disapprove of homosexuality called intolerant bigots or homophobic. Under the imperialistic regime of post-modern, politically correct, ideological pluralism, those who affirm the biblical ban against homosexual practices are decried as sexual and lifestyle fascists on almost every television comedy. As I recently heard a young gay college student on The Oprah Winfrey Show: "How could anyone call a loving relationship wrong?" If the word *truth* has any currency left at all in our secularist culture, the true is merely that conception which is passionately held. Sincerity is the sole criterion for truth when individual experience is taken as normative.

We need to realize that we live in a culture characterized by sensitivity, but a sensitivity bounded by no absolutes or fixed certainties. To speak Christianly to the culture about sexuality, the church must also be sensitive to and affirming of the divine norms for human sexuality, but also sensitive to sin, both the sin of the homosexual lifestyle and our own sinful self-righteousness and sexual hypocrisy. Where we have been homophobic we need to seek God's forgiveness. Where we have been arrogant about our own sexual "normalcy," we also need to seek forgiveness, for none of us is truly normal sexually. If we are truly sensitive to our own depravity, if we confess that

sin has tainted and twisted this area of our lives that is so central to our nature, we will realize that we have no right to set ourselves up as morally superior to our homosexual brothers and sisters.

And homosexual brothers and sisters do exist in our confessional community. Each of them, as does everyone who belongs to Christ's body, deserves to be understood, accepted, loved, forgiven, trusted, and affirmed. The love command commands love. We are never to belittle, hate, insult, or kill one another by thoughts,

words, looks, gestures, nor any other way (Heidelberg Catechism, Q105). as believers, homosexuals are members of Christ's body. They fully belong.

Yes, Scripture condemns homosexuality, in exactly the same way that it condemns pride, parental disobedience, adultery, and gossip. No one who is included in Christ's body is a perfectly sanctified creature. We are people who have the promise of participation in the new creation. While we live by the promise, we are not yet there, none of us. Augustine was right,

the body of Christ is not a collection of normal and healthy people, but a hospital for sick souls. That means that until the Lord returns and makes the promise our reality, the body of Christ will remain a collection of redeemed—and I pray progressively being reformed—tax cheats, alcoholics, wife beaters, child molesters, polluters, prideful persons, gossips and slanderers, self-absorbed careerists, racists, adulterers, sexists, money lovers, slum lords, and homosexuals. ■

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Homosexuality and the Christian School

The writer is a teacher in a Christian school.

“Mom, Dad, I’m gay!” Four words that forever changed our world. When our 23-year-old son informed us over the phone, we didn’t have a clue—we were in shock. But it explained a lot about his difficult adolescent years. The journey we have taken to accept our son has led us to some startling conclusions about homosexuality and the role of the Christian school in dealing with it.

I would expect we were at the same point most Christian school teachers are in respect to homosexuality. For two and a half decades I taught in a school where the issue was rarely discussed. Occasionally it was brought up in chapel when someone would tell about his wicked life until he converted to Christianity. Homosexuality was a shadowy thing out there condemned by the church without much attention. “No Christian would choose this, so we do not have to deal with it.” We heard the occasional rumor about so and so “accepting that evil lifestyle,” but it was always somewhere out there.

That changed when our son made his call. Although he feared rejection, his disclosure was met by our inclusive love and our need to understand. What? Why? His testimony of his love for the Lord did not seem to “square” with the concepts we had about homosexuality. And so, we embarked on a journey to try to understand. Our discussions have led us to dozens of gay people—both Christians and non-Christians—to

pastors, medical doctors, psychologists, group meetings, workshops, church, classis, and synod discussions, numerous articles, pamphlets, and several dozen books.

We soon learned several simple yet extremely profound lessons about homosexuality. The first is that sexual orientation (the direction of our romantic and sexual feelings) is not a choice, it is a given. None of us chooses our orientation; it is something to be discovered. The second lesson is that we cannot change our sexual orientation. It is fixed as deeply as is the color of one’s eyes. The third lesson, and this is one we already knew: all of us have to love and be loved. Our sexuality is a deep-seated mysterious facet of our being that connects us to other human beings. Most humans cannot remain celibate.

Homosexuality is not a respecter of class, religion, or race. It appears that about the same percent of the human race throughout history has been gay. Religion is no barrier to its seemingly random occurrence. It has no apparent cause. Various studies have examined the effects of environment in contrast with heredity. No one has been able to come up with any defensible cause. Current studies are investigating a genetic link, but they remain inconclusive. For a long time it was thought an overbearing mother and distant father caused a son to be gay. There is no support for this theory. It could be that the homosexuality in the child is the cause for the pattern, not the result.

When someone says he is gay,

you learn nothing about the moral quality of the person, neither as to lack of morals nor failure of will. Saying “I am gay” does not tell you what kind of person he is, just as saying “I am heterosexual” tells you nothing about one’s moral qualities. A homosexual person might be compassionate, committed, just, humble, or honest. And a heterosexual might be selfish, carousing, unjust, proud, or dishonest.

Another lesson we soon learned: homosexuals experience deep hurt. Many have a similar story, one of being rejected by peers, family, and church. Theirs is a story of fear of discovery and loss of respect, children, job, home, or life. Many spend a lifetime learning to love themselves. Many are very spiritual people troubled by why God has created them only to be condemned.

Because our circles are fairly intolerant of homosexuals, most Christian homosexuals mature without the information necessary to understand themselves. Because of the silence there is no place in their environment where they can get the information. Therefore, unfortunately, the nearest gay bar is about the only place they can turn to learn. Many begin their journey to self understanding through a dictionary word search, soon followed by a sneak into the gay/lesbian section of the local book store. Society’s stigma compounds the problem, resulting in psychological difficulties in accepting themselves. Most of the problems are unnecessary, created by society’s misunderstanding of homosexuals and condemnation of

them. Basically they are being condemned and persecuted for something over which they have no control.

The church's refusal to accept homosexuals causes a complicated dilemma. Homosexuals either leave the church or hide, living a lie. Some follow this logic: "Gay Christian" is an oxymoron. I know I am a Christian, so I can't be gay. Some then marry, believing that marriage will change them (also it is the best way to hide), only to discover later that marriage is not a solution, and it usually leads to divorce. Others conclude, "I am gay, so I can't be a Christian." They leave the church, reject God, and engage in a hedonistic life (as do many heterosexuals who reject God).

"What about Scripture?" you may ask. "Is not Scripture clear in its condemnation of homosexuality?" First, it is important to recognize that devout and reputable Christian scholars are answering this question with a variety of conclusions. While some continue to defend the traditional condemnation of homosexual relationships, others believe the Bible does not condemn faithful, loving, committed relationships for those who are of homosexual orientation. If you believe that slavery is okay, you can go to Scripture and find support for the institution of slavery—the Christian church did just that. But if you believe slavery is wrong, you can build a biblical case for that position. The same can be said about homosexuality.

Second, the Scripture calls us to treat each other with love. One way we can fulfill this command is to imagine ourselves in the place of our gay children. Consider what it must feel like to hear the message frequently given to gay people.

When the church condemns

homosexuality, since the homosexual is not responsible for his or her conditions, the gay person then feels people saying, "You cannot be you. You cannot be human." Some Christian gays soon leave the church. In the process some reject Christ because the message of love is not demonstrated.

What are the implications of this information for the Christian school? The Christian school is ill-equipped and ill-prepared to deal with the complicated spiritual and psychological issues associated with homosexuality. The biases on this issue are deeply ingrained in the Christian community. These biases create a very dangerous situation for the students and teachers who are gay, and it potentially threatens the viability of individual schools.

Dangers for the student

My school community and I assumed my son was heterosexual. It was a false assumption. It almost cost my son his life. He was in counseling for threatened suicide through much of junior high and early high school. Even though he had not formulated in his own mind why he was different, he was faced with daily taunts by his peers for being different. He lived alone with his struggles, afraid to be honest with us.

We *do* have gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in our Christian schools. They do not choose their orientation. They cannot change. Many students are being told directly and indirectly they are hopeless lost sinners. They learn to hate themselves. They live in constant fear of "being discovered." (Physical education classes are special nightmares for some young gay men, a place where they can be unmasked.) School for many is at best endured, a sort of prison. Homosexuals rarely receive

any positive reinforcement or positive role models. If gays are mentioned at all, it is usually in a negative context of an evil sinner living "that lifestyle."

Instead, they need to hear they are valuable creatures of God, fearfully and wonderfully made. We need to teach about sexual orientation. This information needs to be included throughout the curriculum and given before puberty—basic attitudes are formed before fifth grade. These lessons need to be taught for two basic reasons: 1) to give the struggling students the information they need to determine who they are; 2) to create compassion in the heterosexual and respect for the homosexuals among us as valuable creatures made in God's image. We need to tell them they do not have to face their struggle alone. The school needs to make it clear that it will not tolerate *any* harassment over sexual orientation. As soon as someone is perceived as different, he or she is commonly stereotyped and harassed by peers. Our son was harassed in junior high and called a faggot even before he knew what the word meant. Such students who have been harassed for being gay are less likely to turn to teachers for help because they fear being rejected by teachers as well.

The dropout rate for homosexuals is higher, the GPA is lower, and the suicide rate is higher, on average. Thirty percent of teen suicides occur as the result of feelings about sexual orientation. Since homosexuals make up approximately 6 percent of the population, this means a high percent of young homosexuals are at risk of killing themselves. Regardless of what we think about homosexuality, we cannot tolerate harassment of any kind toward any student. Failure to accept a person's sexual orientation is

a subtle form of harassment that negates the person and says, in effect, that they do not deserve respect and compassion.

Some consultants believe that we are entering a particularly dangerous era in dealing with this issue. In the past, a homosexual person came to the realization that he or she was gay or lesbian in the college years. Currently, because of American pop culture and television, individuals are being educated at an earlier age. High school is the average age of self-realization, and sometimes as early as junior high. At that point, these students either reject or accept themselves. They begin to realize that they are what they have been taught to hate. They come to this realization at an age before maturity has developed. Consequently, some consultants fear the suicide rate will rise if society continues its rejection of gay and lesbian persons. The proper information needs to get to young people *before* adolescence.

Dangers for the teacher

If the teacher is homosexual or openly supportive of homosexuals, his or her job is potentially on the line. Our Christian communities are extremely intolerant on this issue. If teachers defend homosexuals in any way, they are accused of "encouraging" or "recruiting" homosexuals by those who do not wish to understand that you simply can't make someone gay. They will accuse the teacher of supporting the unforgivable sin, or of tolerating evil.

Another difficult area for the teacher comes in dealing with students. If a student comes to a teacher and confides, "I think I'm gay," how might one respond? First of all, we

must be *very* careful what we say. We need to know where the person is before we consider their suspicions. Sexual orientation emerges over time, and at least 10 percent or more heterosexuals struggle with issues of sexual identity. The person may or may not be gay. Most students just need someone to talk to. A teacher should not break that trust. We must be open and offer a supportive ear without rejecting the student. But some need more supportive counseling.

Most classroom teachers are ill-prepared to deal with the complex psychological and social issues that students experience when they realize that they are gay. Don't hesitate to refer them to a trained Christian counselor sympathetic to the plight of homosexuals.

Referral or not, an opening statement like the following might be useful: "I don't know if you are gay or not. Many students have difficulty in this area. I do know this, whether you are gay or straight, I love you and I know God loves you. What is your concern?" Have the student do the talking, and listen well. Remember, not all individuals who experience difficulty over sexual orientation are gay. Many adolescents have uncertainties about their sexuality. The following are a few comments from teachers heard by young homosexuals which hurt them more: "If you didn't act so gay, the other students would not harass you." "Homosexuals are evil and should not be in this school." "God does not intend for you to be gay. Let's pray about it on a weekly basis and he will change you." Such comments create a false hope that leads to greater problems when the change does not occur. Never say that a person can't be gay and Christian.

Dangers for the school

The Christian school is ill-prepared to deal with the issue. The issue is very divisive in our Christian communities. Just discussing it in or out of the classroom has the potential to divide the community that supports the school. So far most Christian schools have been silent on the issue, pretending "we don't have a problem." Schools need to do the following: 1) Educate teachers about all sides of the issue. 2) Set up a committee of parents, clergy, staff, and administration to set guidelines for the school. Guidelines might address these matters: How will the issue be presented in the classroom? What can or should be discussed at each grade level? How will the issue be addressed outside the classroom? May two gays come together to the school prom? Will they be expelled? What policy do we have if a staff member informs the community that he or she is homosexual? Get the policies in writing *before* a problem occurs, so individuals know where they stand. 3) Establish a faith-based support group for students, both gay and straight, struggling with sexual orientation. 4) Create a safe environment for all students and stop the harassment. Get the message out that bigotry of any kind will not be tolerated. Create positive images of gay people. Stop the stereotyping.

Can we continue to ignore and abuse our homosexual students? The Christian school does not have the luxury of ignoring the issue. Considering the dropout rate, GPA effects, suicides, professional ethics, and the overpowering message of love in the Scriptures, we are forced to dis-

cuss and investigate the issue. We do have homosexuals among us. We are responsible before God in how we deal with them. North American popular culture is educating the youth about homosexuality, and homosexuals are beginning to identify themselves at the average age of 15. Many are outing themselves while still in high school. Your high school and soon junior high school will have students who will identify and accept themselves as homosexual.

What will be the response of the Christian community? The only scriptural response is the rule of love. Precious lives are at stake. The gospel of love is at stake, for when we fail to extend love and understanding, homosexual youth will feel hate, fear, and rejection. To fear or to understand? Where is our calling? To love or to hate? Of which is the Christian school an instrument? ■

Suggested support—where to turn:

AS WE ARE is a Grand Rapids-based organization that sponsors AWARE Grand Rapids. Their mission is to offer faith-based support. Contact Rev. Jim Lucas 1616-456-6174.

PFLAG (Parents & Friends of Lesbians And Gays) is an international organization with local chapters. To find the one nearest to you contact 1101 14th Street NW, Suite 1030, Washington, DC 20005.

GLSTN (the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Teachers Network) is a national organization that brings gay and straight teachers together to combat homophobia in the school as well as support for gay teachers. GLSTN, 122 West 26 St., Suite 1100, New York, NY 10001.

For further study:

Begin by reading the Report #42 on Homosexuality passed by the Christian Reformed Church synod in 1973. Be sure to read the complete 23-page report, and not just the two-

page concluding "Pastoral Advice re Homosexuality." This is a very remarkable study, largely forgotten by the church. It covers all the bases and is a sympathetic look at the nature of the issue. It says gays do not choose to be gay and most cannot change. It then discusses the difficult problem of celibacy. It also looks at the major passages from Scripture and examines some of the alternative interpretations, but each time agrees with the traditional interpretation. The conclusions are that homosexual orientation is not sin, but that homosexualism (explicit sexual activity) is a sin, and that homosexuals are called to remain celibate. This document raises questions concerning many facets of the problem.

Notes on some recommended books:

1) Alexander, Marilyn, and James Preston. 1996. *We Were Baptized Too: Claiming God's Grace for Lesbians and Gays*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. *We Were Baptized Too* is a "searing indictment of our quite uncomfortable position regarding homosexuality," says Bishop Tutu. Alexander and Preston expose the church's failure to live up to its covenant of baptism, and its failure to practice Micah 6:8 in regard to gay and lesbian persons. They refuse to leave a church that rejects them and remind the church of its call to love. They have experienced rejection in the House of Unconditional Love. A must read.

2) Bawer, Bruce. 1994. *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society*. New York: Touchstone. Bruce Bawer takes the reader on a journey that examines and destroys the logic of those opposed to gay rights, and also critiques the "gay subculture." He praises the subculture for some of its actions but also criticizes it for others. He writes for the majority of gays who reject the ghetto's subculture but are largely invisible and makes the best case for gay marriages as the way to attack the

promiscuity of the gay subculture.

3) White, Mel. 1995. *Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America*. New York: Plume. Married, White tried *everything* to change, including shock therapy and "cult" reprogramming. He was a ghostwriter for Falwell, Robertson, Graham, and others and produced the film on Tony Brower's last year with cancer. After twenty-five years he came to terms with his homosexuality. He now sees homosexuality as the "Right's" replacement for Communism as a way to rally the troops, and is battling his former employers.

4) Smedes, Lewis. 1982. *Sex for Christians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. The last five pages of the 1994 edition contain some second thoughts on homosexuality. Smedes points out that biblical authors knew nothing of an inborn sexual orientation. He raises questions about which the Bible is silent, such as the cause, cure, and nature of homosexual relationships.

5) Scanzoni, Letha, and Virginia Mollenkott. 1994. *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? A Positive Christian Response*. New York: Harper. Covers all the bases. A good volume for Christians to start with. The authors ask, "Is the homosexual my neighbor?" If so then we are not to bear false witness against our neighbor. Get your facts concerning homosexuality correct. Homosexuals do not choose and cannot change their orientation. What does that mean for how we treat our neighbor? At the very least, we need to support basic human rights for homosexuals.

6) Aarons, Leroy. 1995. *Prayers for Bobby*. San Francisco: Harper. Subtitled "A mother's coming to terms with the suicide of her gay son." This book contains all the emotion and the steps we went through as we contemplated how close we came to losing our son. A powerful book written by a member of Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church, which has an official stand identical to the Christian Reformed

Church's statement of '73: love the sinner but hate the sin, which the author concludes caused her son's suicide.

7) McNiell, John (a former Jesuit who has challenged his former church). 1993. *The Church and the Homosexual*. Boston: Beacon Press. The book has three themes: 1) Sexual orientation is a given and attempts at change only result in complex problems. Attempts to maintain celibacy in one who does not have that gift also lead to problems. 2) Homosexuals, rather than being a threat, have special gifts and qualities with a positive contribution to make to society. 3) Constructive sexual love between two lesbians or gays does not alienate them from God's plan.

8) McNiell, John. 1988. *Taking a Chance on God: Liberating Theology for Gays, Lesbians, and Their Lovers, Families, and Friends*. Boston: Beacon Press. McNiell relies heavily on his counseling practice to help gays and lesbians develop a healthy self-identity, become aware of the structures that oppress homosexuals, and develop their own social resources—all within the framework of the Christian faith.

9) Boswell, John. 1980. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. Chicago Press. Tough read, footnotes frequently take up half the page. Boswell traces the role of homosexuals in western civilization from the Classical era to the late Middle Ages.

His conclusions are that homosexuals were tolerated in Christendom throughout much of the Middle Ages. Intolerance developed in the late Middle Ages about the time of the Inquisition and the intolerance of states attempting to develop conformity to a central ideal.

10) Bernstein, Robert A. 1995. *Straight Parents, Gay Children: Keeping Families Together*. : Thunder's Mouth Press. Probably the best "first" book to give to parents who have just discovered they have a gay child. Bernstein tells many personal stories to remind the parents they are not alone. He relies on the role of PFLAG and the support they can give and introduces the religious problem. Easy reading. A beginner's "survival guide." Robert McNiell, in the introduction, points out that homosexuality "is neither a defect of moral character nor a failure of will."

11) Helminiak, Daniel. 1995. *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*. San Francisco: Alamo Square Press. It relies heavily on the work of Boswell and Scroggs, summarizing some of the recent scholarship. One approach to the Scriptures.

12) Harbeck, Karen M. ed. 1992. *Coming Out of the Classroom Closet: Gay and Lesbian Students, Teachers and Curricula*. New York: Harrington Park Press. This is a collection of published journal articles. Some are good, some very technical. Some deal with students, others with unique

problems of gay teachers.

13) Nelson, James B. 1988. *The Intimate Connection: Male Sexuality, Masculine Spirituality*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. Nelson explores issues such as the genitalization of sex to the neglect of intimacy and sensuousness, a sense of body-soul separation that works against true intimacy, the reasons men have difficulty in forming relationships, especially with other men (homophobia), and the need to know the face of God—to experience the love of God. He also points out the lessons men can learn from the feminist revolution, which has the potential to humanize the male who has lost and rejected the so-called feminist attributes of God.

14) Sullivan, Andrew. 1995. *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. Sullivan dissects and critiques four main political positions society has in dealing with homosexuality.

15) Fortunato, John E. 1982. *Embracing the Exile*. San Francisco: Harper.

This volume examines the spiritual/psychological walk we all must take but relates it to the special walk of homosexuals. We all must come to terms with the clash between our ego—"I am in control"—and our spirituality—"God is in control." Fortunato's conclusion is that the gay Christian learns sooner and deeper that God is in control. ■

Sexuality and Homosexuality Education in the Christian School

by Barry Veenstra

Barry Veenstra teaches health classes at Eastern Christian High School in North Haledon, New Jersey.

In an era when American society expects its young people to be sexually promiscuous, accepts illegitimacy as the norm, and embraces homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle, the role of the Christian school sex education teacher has become more vital and, in fact, more radical.

The biblical principles that so many once believed and lived by (or at least tried to) have been eroded by changes in public opinion, politics, and the media. One can trace this erosion from the fifties through the eighties simply by watching reruns of "I Love Lucy," "The Brady Bunch," "All in the Family," and "Three's Company." In the nineties the change we have experienced has been anything but subtle, as television viewers discover in watching one episode of "Married with Children." Other signs of this erosion include pop stars celebrated for their promiscuity (for example, Madonna and Dennis Rodman), condoms distributed in our public schools, and practicing homosexuals elected to public office.

No wonder that today's "progressive" thinkers regard the biblical principles of sexuality as antiquated and impractical. It is tragic when Christian educators agree.

The Christian school has a special place in the lives of students who need and want to know God's will for their sexual feelings, inclinations, and behavior. Additionally, many students who have not yet adopted biblical principles as their own need to be

confronted with the truth that only the Bible can provide.

At Eastern Christian we accomplish this in many ways. The topic is discussed in biology, Bible, and Family Living classes, each emphasizing the issues from the point of view of the subject. In our health classes the subject of sex becomes a hot topic during the "Current Health Issues" unit. Here the students select what topics they would like to discuss, research, and write about. They choose a variety of subjects, including abortion, euthanasia, and alcohol abuse. Inevitably, however, we spend the most time talking about sex—dating, "petting," teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, homosexuality, and more. We also turn to magazine and newspaper articles, videos, guest speakers, small group discussions, and role playing.

Central to our class discussion is the Bible itself. I have found that kids really want to know what is right. They want answers. Together we search for the answers in the Bible. Using a concordance to find relevant chapters from Old and New Testaments, we take turns reading aloud what we have found. The open forum discussions that follow can get spirited and interesting. For example, on the subject of homosexuality students will typically ask questions like "If all people are God's creation and some are born as homosexuals, why is it wrong to act on their natural inclinations?" Others suggest that what two mature adults do behind closed doors is their own business as long as no one else gets hurt. Such questions and statements reflect the cultural cli-

mate in which we teach and illustrate the need for biblical guidance.

It may be a worthwhile classroom exercise to show a short portion of a vintage "Aerosmith" video from MTV or perhaps the opening credits to "Baywatch" and ask the students to respond to what they have just watched. Responses could be in writing or discussion. What is the natural, inborn inclination when viewing provocative and explicit media?

Students are titillated by this sort of display and, if honest, they say so. We then raise the question, "If it is inborn and natural for you to desire sexual gratification when confronted by the display, situation, or opportunity, then why not act on it? Then we show the homosexual argument that asks the same question and lead the discussion back to themselves and what the Bible has to say about their own sexual urges. Students will conclude that it is a sin to act on sexual impulses outside of marriage. If it is right to refrain from acting on all our natural heterosexual impulses, therefore, it follows that homosexual impulses must also be restrained. We are all "born" to sin, but such a heritage does not change the guidelines we are called to live by in Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6.

"So, must all homosexuals be denied physically intimate relationships all their lives?" asks the sympathetic student.

"Yes," I reply.

"But that's not fair if they were born that way!"

"True," I reply, "but life is not fair for the handicapped, retarded, alco-

holic, or chronically ill, either." Sex is not a life-supporting need for anyone, and it must be kept in perspective. The apostle Paul was not married, and he writes about serving God better as a result.

The discussion leads to more questions about the difference between a healthy sex drive and inappropriate lust. Students need to know that the physical and emotional feelings they experience do not make them weird, just human.

It is also important to include class time to expose another more subtle sin related to human sexuality, that of prejudice and hate. Teenagers

can be cruel in their treatment of anyone who is not like themselves. When it comes to homosexuals, many choose to hate the sinner and the sin. Such attitudes cannot be tolerated in the classroom or anywhere else. We must remember that there are students in the room who may be struggling with their own sexuality or gender identification, and so we must maintain an atmosphere of love and sensitivity. Jesus' encounter with the adulteress in John 8 provides an illustration of appropriate compassion and wisdom when some in our midst would prefer casting stones.

As Christian educators, we have the privilege of sharing openly and

frankly the insights and guidelines for sex that only the Bible can give. For those students whom God will bless with a loving spouse one day, they have the intimacy, joy, and fulfillment of sex to look forward to.

God wants us to experience his gift of sex according to his plan, not our own. Sex is not a dirty word when practiced as our Creator intended. But when, all around us, sex is practiced, condoned, or even tolerated as anything less, Christian teachers have the unique opportunity and responsibility to teach students God's intention for them. ■

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Christian Educators Journal December 1996

Teachers!

by Joy D. McCullough

Managers, Models, and Mentors

Joy D. McCullough is Director of Teacher Education at Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia.

In an age where foundations have been eroded, and even Christian teachers seem forced to “build on sand,” we need to understand and apply a biblical perspective to our roles as teachers that will remind us of the firm foundation on which we will build. Biblical principles indicate that those in authority are to be managers, models, and mentors.

Managers

Managers are people who handle the movement or behavior of; those who have charge of; persons who direct or conduct. Managers can be seen as people having authority.

Authority is seen as negative these days, probably because there has been abuse of authority in the past. Therefore, the trend is to get rid of all authority. Following authority is a sign of weakness to many people in today's society. People are encouraged to do their own thing, to be their own bosses. In many schools across North America students are strongly encouraged to call the shots, while teachers are being told that their role is simply to be facilitators of student learning. Signs of “structure” and “control” in a classroom are things to be avoided.

We need to take back the biblical concept of authority and walk in its truth. Authority is desirable if our students are to grow into men and women who serve and honor God. Fennema speaks much about a biblical perspective of authority. The

nature of this authority is based on two seemingly paradoxical concepts, which stand in tension with each other: *dominion*—those in authority are in charge, are responsible for what is going on, take the initiative, give leadership and guidance, are direction-givers, and vision-setters (that's why we must know what we are doing and where we are going); and *service*—we are to “serve” children in the sense that the welfare of children is the goal; all authority has been given for the sake of service to others, never for the sake of personal prestige. If we have only dominion without service, we tend to be selfish and dictatorial. If we only have service without dominion, we will fail to provide the leadership and direction God requires of those placed in authority (Fennema 1977).

Among other things, having a biblical view of authority will affect (a) our relationships with students—not being a bosom-buddy pal with them and not doing things in the classroom just to make students like us; (b) our organization of our classroom—the degree to which it is structured and goal-oriented; (c) how we evaluate students—the degree to which we provide feedback that encourages growth in our students and say things that they need to hear; and (d) how we discipline students—the degree to which we do what is best for students, not what is easiest for us.

We, as Christian teachers, are to be managers, leaders, walking humbly and responsibly in the authority that God has given to us. We are also to be models.

Models

Models are people who are considered as a standard of excellence to be imitated because of their excellence and worth. A model is an example, one who is presented as a sample and sets a precedent for imitation. A model is a standard, something established that can be used as a basis of comparison in judging quality.

Scripture provides guidelines to Christians for righteous living that will, if followed, make us godly and holy people, models for our students to follow. We, as Christians, are to live as children of light (Ephesians 4:17-5:21), as holy (Colossians 3:1-17) and godly people (2 Peter 1:1-11).

These Scriptures speak to specific attitudes, behaviors, emotions, thoughts, words, perspectives, goals, and knowledge that we are to embrace if we would live as Christ would have us live. It would do us well to take the time periodically to evaluate ourselves in light of the guidelines mentioned in Scripture.

Let us no longer hide behind the cop-out “that's just the way I am.” If there is something in “just the way we are” that renders us ineffective in the ministry to which God has called us, we need to let God change us!

We need to show our students a transformed life—not just a good life following a set of standards, but a transformed life characterized by a complete change which, under the power of God, will find expression in character and conduct (Romans 12:1,2). Such a change comes about by the renewing of our minds. This takes time studying Scripture, meditating on what we read, and acting

upon the truth.

Mentors

Mentors, are wise, loyal advisors—teachers or coaches—showing good judgment and being informed. Those who are wise see and respond to life situations from God's frame of reference (Prov. 9:10—The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.) Those who are loyal are faithful to the persons under their care, willing to be their advocate. Advisors (a) counsel—give advice after careful deliberation; (b) admonish—give earnest, gentle reproving advice concerning a fault or error; and (c) caution or warn—give advice that puts one on guard against possible danger or failure. Mentors, then, are advisors who can see life situations from God's perspective and share this perspective with those they have been called to support, through counseling, admonishing, and warning.

Today our mentor role seems limited to being encouragers (saying only

positive things to students). We are told not to say anything "negative" to students because it may damage their self-esteem permanently. Too many Christian teachers have bought into this lie. We need to let our students know that their worth and their view of themselves must be tied to Christ and Christ's view of them. Their worth is not dependent on how well they do, what they do, what others tell them, or how others treat them. The only correct, undistorted view of themselves has to be shaped by God's view of them. That is what matters! This is a crucial area—if we believe we can damage a student's view of himself or herself by what we say, we probably won't be a mentor that points out areas in their lives that need attention.

To take up our role as mentor we need to check our focus so that the focus is not on helping students "reach their full potential," but on moving them toward joyful and willing obedience to Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. We need to change

our vocabulary. Having high expectations for students isn't being mean, having students experience consequences for their choices isn't being inflexible, and pointing out to our students areas in which they need to improve isn't saying something negative. And we need to channel our involvement, going beyond teaching academics and getting actively involved in the full mentoring role—encouraging, counseling, admonishing, and cautioning.

We should act upon our God-given authority in our classrooms; model a transformed life that radiates a meaningful, active, growing, and exciting relationship with Jesus Christ; and actively mentor our students to become "response-able disciples of Jesus Christ" (Van Brummelen 1988). ■

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Every Course a Bible Course

by Art De Jong

Art De Jong teaches at Sheboygan County Christian High School in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

A Bible curriculum debate was heating up at B.J.'s, a local coffee shop where teachers stopped to unwind and solve the world's problems:

"We have to do something about our Bible program. Our students are trying to cope with overload on the information highway with Bible courses that were designed in the eighteenth century. We need to add courses relating the Bible to life in the twenty-first century."

"Here we go again. The first thing we want to do when we see a problem is add a course. Every course is supposed to be a "Bible" course at Christian High. . . . We need to put this idea into practice, not just pass the buck back into the Bible department."

"Who are you kidding? How often does anybody open the Bible in your English class?"

"Then we should be talking about how I can approach my English class from a Christian perspective—not about how to get me off the hook by adding courses like 'A Christian Approach to Twentieth Century Literature' in the Bible department."

"We've talked about these ideas for years. I say add Bible courses, label them Bible, put them in the Bible department; then we know that at least something biblical will get done."

"It depends on what we want to get done. We should take another approach—integrate, not compartment-

talize. . . ."

The approach that we took may sound like caffeine induced hyperbole, but it has generated lots of talk and some action; in fact, it is influencing all parts of our curriculum.

The program began with the idea that a Christian school should be helping students to acquire biblical knowledge, to exercise Christian creativity, to engage in Christian analysis, and to provide Christian service. If such things were taking place, students would have no trouble collecting a portfolio illustrating such activity. If they were unable to find evidence of such activity, we had some work to do.

We decided to require seven projects each year with at least one in each of the areas of service, analysis, knowledge, and creativity. The service requirement required students to write an essay reflecting on twenty hours of community service each year, broadly defined to encourage students to become more active in their homes and churches. We were not trying to eclipse the church and home. The criteria for determining precisely which projects were to qualify as "analysis" and which were to qualify as "knowledge" remained vague, as did the exact definition of "Christian creativity," but a consensus was forming. Since each project needed the approval of the assigning teacher to be included in the student portfolio, the final call was left up to individual teachers in consultation with the student.

The mechanics of administration were kept rather simple. Because each teacher in our school had been

assigned a group of students for academic counseling, each teacher would keep track of the portfolios of these students. To encourage students to take the program seriously, we determined that the seven projects would carry half a Bible credit each year on a pass/fail basis and would be required for graduation. A portfolio committee representing teachers, students, parents, and board members would deal with policy problems that might arise.

The first year went surprisingly well. Most parents supported the program, although some contended that giving "points" for serving others really misses the point of service. Most students, however, were not so positive, for they assumed that they would be writing more papers, developing more projects, and in some cases providing more service than before. They immediately saw that the half credit per year was no gift, since the graduation requirement had been raised by two credits. More student representation in the planning stages of the program would have helped improve student attitude in the early stages.

Student attitude toward the program began to change in that first year, however. Most students found that they already had been doing twenty hours of volunteer work each year, especially those belonging to churches with active youth programs. Others found themselves volunteering to serve in new areas, doing everything from "candy striping" at local hospitals to painting their elderly neighbor's house. Their project reports, reflecting on these experi-

The service component, however, was only one part of the program. Students needed six more projects to illustrate analysis, creativity, and knowledge. To enable each student to find enough projects, we teachers found that we sometimes had to refocus our assignments along more biblical lines. For example, instead of

We soon discovered that students had no trouble finding examples of Christian analysis, but examples of creativity and biblical knowledge were harder to find, drawing attention to a weakness in our cur-

Bible teachers needed to develop meaningful projects to illustrate biblical knowledge. All teachers began to fill the gap, suggesting and in some cases requiring projects to illustrate creativity and biblical knowledge in their areas. The portfolio requirement encouraged all of us to address problems in our curriculum from the bottom up rather than top down.

nature. When it became apparent that we were serious about the program, students began to look for appropriate projects and to ask teachers to help them find ways to direct assignments in a biblical direction. All students were able to meet the requirement, although some seniors tested our resolve right up to graduation. To encourage freshmen, sophomores, and juniors to keep their portfolios up to

Sheboygan County Christian High

Bible Portfolio Exhibit

Last year the portfolio requirement became a part of the routine, serving as a nagging reminder to teachers and students alike that “all courses are to be Bible courses.” The program articulates no comprehensive theory of Christian thought but assumes that Christian thought is comprehensive because all of life is meaningful and purposeful. The program itself merely provides a structure that encourages teachers and students to explore and articulate how God’s purposes are reflected in all parts of his creation. The Bible curriculum committee, however, continues to meet to discuss the effectiveness of our Bible courses. After all, students still have trouble finding a “knowledge” exhibit for their portfolios. ■

[illegible]

merely discussing Golding's view of human nature in *The Lord of the Flies*, students found themselves comparing or contrasting Golding's view to the biblical view. Instead of merely examining Francis Bacon's impact on the formation of the scientific method, they could get portfolio credit if they also addressed the impact of the method on Christian faith. Sometimes the interpretation became rather con-

Teach Us To Pray

by Jerilyn Tyner

Jerilyn Tyner teaches English and Spanish at a Christian high school in Arlington, Washington.

Do you know that a centurion is “a Samaritan who lived a hundred years”? that’s what I learned one year when I taught a fifth grade Bible class in a Christian school. Many times that year, I felt more like the learner than the teacher.

My favorite part of the class was prayer time. Student requests were shared solemnly: “Pray that my uncle will go in the Navy,” one child said. “He’s thirty years old, and he’s still living at home, and my grandma is getting sick and tired of him.”

Although occasionally a hand would be raised by someone having “an unmentionable request,” nothing was seen as unworthy of God’s attention. Broken down vehicles, vacations, and especially animals were high on the list of requests. One tousel-haired boy made a lasting impression on me. Owlishly peering from behind his glasses, Mark announced his requests daily. One week, I wrote down his intriguing petitions:

Monday: “Pray for my dog. She went to the vet for an operation so she can’t have puppies, and now she’s tearing at the stitches.”

Tuesday: “Pray for my dog. The neighbor is mad because the dog dug up her flowers and tipped over the garbage.”

Wednesday: “Pray for my dog. My parents are mad because the dog chewed up the couch.”

Thursday: “Pray for my dog. It’s my dad’s day off, and he’s taking her to the vet to be put to sleep.”

Friday: “My dad went fishing on

his day off instead of taking the dog to the vet. Pray for my mom.”

Monday: “Pray for my gerbil . . .”

Though Mark’s requests were amusing to me, both in what they said and what they left to the imagination, they caused me to think seriously about the value of prayer time in school. Far from being a meaningless ritual, praying in school is a privilege and opportunity not to be taken for granted. Teaching students to pray is an important part of discipleship in a Christian school.

I am sure God delighted in the childlike characteristics of Mark’s prayers. His boldness and confidence were evidences of Mark’s trusting love. He wasn’t concerned about sounding “spiritual,” but in his own language cast his troubles upon his Friend. How could I guide Mark and the others in my class into a deeper understanding of prayer without quenching their faith and spontaneity?

First, I realized that I needed to model bold faith and true worship of God in my own prayer life. Relying on the Holy Spirit to search my heart, help me with my weakness, and teach me to pray according to God’s will, I could involve my students in activities that would deepen their understanding of prayer. My students began to grow in the Lord as they learned new ways of praying. There is no correct “formula” or “curriculum” for teaching students the value of prayer. However, five ideas that we used brought positive change and new perspective to our prayer time. These ideas are adaptable for any grade level. Try one or more in your classroom and see what happens.

1. *Begin with the model of Christ.*

We often recite the words of the Lord’s prayer without considering their great implications. Leading students in a phrase-by-phrase study of Matthew 6:8-13 will help them to understand many things about true prayer. All true prayer is God-centered, focusing on his attributes and beginning with praise to him. Prayer is concerned with God’s will being done in all creation, dependence upon God for all things, confession and forgiveness as the medicine for human hurts, confidence in God’s protection from evil, and joy in the glory of God!

2. *Study examples of prayers in the Bible.* Immediately, our attention is drawn to Psalms, the great prayer book of the Bible. There we find the outpouring of the human heart before God. Students are quick to understand that there is no use trying to hide from God. He knows all about us, and we may as well be honest about our feelings. Students not only respond to reading parts of the Psalms aloud as group prayers, but they like to personalize them by putting them in their own words.

3. *Write letters to God.* The acrostic, “ACTS,” is often used to teach four elements of prayer—adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. I have found that students often do not understand the difference between thanksgiving and adoration. Help them to see that adoration is expressing delight in God for who he is, and thanksgiving is expressing gratefulness for gifts and blessings God has given us. Encourage each student to write a letter to God that includes all four elements of prayer. Give students an opportunity to share their letters with the class, but do not

insist that they do so. As the level of trust deepens in your classroom, so will the willingness to share.

4. *Develop "encouragement partners."* After Bible reading, discussion, and shared prayer requests, allow students to move to a quiet spot in the room with their chosen partner for a time of sharing and praying together. Often students will discuss special concerns with one friend with whom they feel secure, while they might be shy about praying before the group. Encouragement partners can learn other ways to be a blessing to each other, including phone calls, positive notes of praise, and the promise to pray for each other outside the school. Partners may be changed every month or so.

5. *Create a prayer bulletin board.* Prayer requests, snapshots, post cards, letters from missionaries, and pictures of national leaders can be mounted on the prayer bulletin board to keep specific needs before the class. An up-to-date board helps students remember requests and keep prayer time from becoming abstract. Adding a world

map with pictures and requests from around the world is a good way to include prayers for missionaries and

to point out places of special need beyond their own families and communities.

One of the privileges of teaching is that we can walk with our students in child-like faith in the kingdom of God.

"Song of Praise"
a psalm of Tiarra
Oh Lord, I love you with all
my heart and soul and mind!
When I am scared, I will not
fear, because you lead me.
When I sin, I will not hide,
because I know you'll forgive
me.
Oh Lord, I love you with all
my heart and soul and mind.
I will sing praise to your
name, oh Lord.
I love you with all my heart!

Teaching them the lessons of prayer, we learn faith and humility ourselves. I am encouraged every time I remember one of the prayer projects my class did that year. Each student wrote a psalm to God, and the finished prayers were illustrated, compiled, and published in a booklet. Their words, as the following psalm illustrates, express a beautiful spirit of worship:

"Song of Praise"

a psalm of Tiarra

Oh Lord, I love you with all my heart and soul and mind!

When I am scared, I will not fear, because you lead me.

When I sin, I will not hide, because I know you'll forgive me.

Oh Lord, I love you with all my heart and soul and mind.

I will sing praise to your name, oh Lord.

I love you with all my heart!

I am thankful for a God who cares about uncles, dogs, gerbils, and fifth graders. I am also thankful for children, who are often our best examples. ■

ELECTRONIC COUNTERFEIT



by Ron Sjoerdsma

Ron Sjoerdsma teaches in the education department at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Sara Voskamp plopped down in Hillendale Christian's workroom sofa. She stacked the eighth-grade science projects on the hand-me-down end table and picked up her cup of muddy coffee. The Friday afternoon Christmas assembly was over, the buses had roared away into the slushy, dusky afternoon streets, and most of the middle school faculty had followed close behind. Sara had no pressing obligations today; the family Christmas gathering at her parent's house would not begin until Monday—her siblings all had children who would be participating in Christmas pageants on Sunday evening, and then they'd make the annual trek home.

Jake Hammersmith, the long-time Hillendale custodian, stepped in to turn out the lights.

"Miss Voskamp? What are you still doing here?"

"I thought I'd get a little work done before I went home for Christmas?"

"Wisconsin?"

"Indiana."

"I knew that. You going home tomorrow? I met your dad once a few years ago. Did I tell you that story?"

"Yes, Mr. H., you did. I'm going down on Monday. I'll get the lights when I leave." Sara liked Jake, but today was not the day for a long, convoluted story.

Jake got the hint. "Say hi to your folks for me." Jake adjusted the curtains, picked up the crumpled newspaper, and hurried out.

Sara had the preChristmas weekend free except for the last minute shopping she'd left for Saturday. She saw herself as a reformed procrastinator so the science projects beside her were a reminder of her post-college commitment to never let teaching swamp her as college had—it was bad enough to be paying a significant portion of her meager salary to college debts.

Teaching science was a regular cycle of triumphs and tragedies. Sarah expected the projects beside her to be the former. Her teaching team had put much creative effort into the "Oceans" unit, and most students had seemed genuinely enthused about the varied activities. Jim Sooterma and Kate Wells had created a wonderful simulation voyage with numerous engaging encounters with history and literature. And the erudite Bill Hamilton had even come through with stimulating math activities related to how sailors determined distance on the ocean.

Marine life science had been the unifying context for the unit, and Sara was eager to see how her students had done on her final assessment—a three page paper about how marine creatures interacted with their environment.

Martin's project was on top; Martin was not her best student but not her worst either and seemed to be a pretty good writer. Sara momentari-

ly thought about looking for a sure winner to begin with, but Martin's first page looked interesting with an illustration and neat text, so she read the first paragraph:

The killer whale is a large toothed whale, *Orcinus orca*, common in Pacific and Antarctic waters but found in all other oceans. Up to 9 m long, killer whales are

Whales, toothed



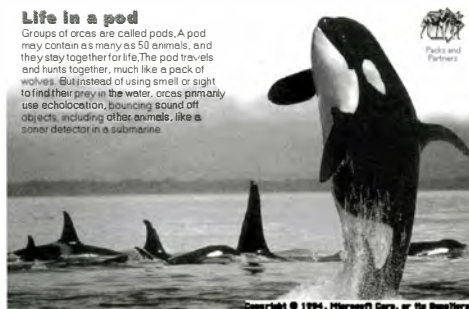
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black above and pure white beneath, with an erect dorsal fin as tall as a man. They are notorious for their voracious appetites, hunting in packs and tackling even sharks and other whales. Like other dolphins, they are intelligent and trainable in captivity.

Sara winced. The next paragraph went on with similar sophisticated vocabulary but repeated the content about the killer whale's appearance with new descriptors like "striking

white patches” and “prominent triangular dorsal fin.”

The second page was labeled “The King of the Ocean” and showed several complex graphics that Sara instantly recognized as coming from her favorite science CD-ROM “Dangerous Creatures.” Below this graphic was a picture of a gray seal with accompanying text describing the gray seals habitat—this paragraph did not mention killer whales.



“The second page showed several complex graphics that Sara instantly recognized.”

As Sara read further she realized that she was encountering Martin’s words for the first time. He had apparently known a bit more about gray seals or realized that he didn’t need all that much information about them. But as she skimmed through the remaining page of text she found more disconnected, refined paragraphs about killer whale behavior and another beautiful electronic picture of whales breaching.

At the bottom of the last page was

a sound icon with a hand written note:

*Dear Miss Vaskamp,
If you have a Mac you can hear
sounds of whales and seals. I have
them on a disk.
Martin S.*

The three-and-a-half inch disk was inside an envelope stapled to the last page.

Sara was certain that with a little help from the tags on the graphics she could track most of Martin’s words to the electronic encyclopedias found in Hillendale’s computer lab. Martin had mastered the art of cutting and pasting and using hypertext links to jump from one related concept to the next. The plagiarism bothered Sara and she didn’t relish the confrontation with Martin, but there was something else nagging at her as she laid aside his papers.

Her science education training had drummed into her the need for students to develop a thoughtful, inquiring approach to content. Martin had simply allowed a CD-ROM encyclopedia to guide his thoughts and organization. Even if he had put everything in his own words, none of it would be his own inquiry and reflection.

There had been great enthusiasm by most of her eighth-graders for the two days they spent in the computer lab using the new Grollier and Encarta electronic encyclopedias. She had spent the requisite time explaining how to use source material. Had

she failed her class by not at least requiring a concept map of their projects before they began to gather material? The class would probably have found this tedious—she remembered Kate’s frustration with story maps.

But she also remembered that Kate had said that after Christmas break she was going to try some new software on her classroom computer that helped students organize their ideas before they began writing. Maybe another technology approach would work for students like Martin who seemed to gravitate to computers. She’d have to call Kate before she headed to Indiana and get the software for her laptop although there would be little chance to play with her computer with nieces and nephew crawling all over her. She smiled at the thought as she picked up Jessica’s project and read the first sentence:

Coral reefs are ecosystems with well-defined structures that involve both photosynthetic plants and consumers.

Sara sighed. At that moment she remember Kate Well’s comment during their last team meeting, “You may think you’re going to get away from your classroom for a few weeks. But even while you’re opening all those well meant gifts, you’ll be planning for Monday morning.” ■

Let's Choose and Do

Idea Bank

by Lee Hill-Nelson

Lee Hill-Nelson is a free-lance writer from Waco, Texas.

Can anything be more beautiful than a child's sense of wonder? Children feel, they touch, they experiment in their awe of the world around them. Oh, that we as adults would help them maintain their natural-born curiosity!

I feel disappointed when I see all art projects in a room made exactly alike. Identical Christmas wreaths cut from construction paper, displayed in windows in December, give me the idea that the teacher did a lot of work and the children just followed a pattern.

Creativity is a gift from God. Children feel pleased when they create something of their own. A "Choose and Do Box" can help nurture that gift.

A Choose and Do Box allows children just what the words say: to choose and do. When I was introduced to one, I discovered a world of treasures in my home and a wonderful adventure began. You can do the same with your class of students.

To begin, you need a box with dividers or a muffin pan to keep supplies separated. Old wooden soft-drink boxes found at garage sales, plastic fishing tackle boxes sold at discount stores, or any low-cut box in which you can add dividers will hold the Choose and Do materials. Start with scissors, glue, and crayons and then go wild collecting art treasures.

Are drawers cluttered with old greeting cards with designs of birds, flowers, butterflies, and other beauties of nature? Help the children cut them out, using manicure scissors for those hard-to-get to places.

Look in home sewing supplies.

Moms and Grandmas have scraps of materials that can be cut into squares, triangles, and rectangles. Children love the feel of velvet, silk, and wool. I saw a child use rickrack as ocean waves in her picture. Another used scraps of lace as a fence "around my house." Buttons can be flowers or eyes of a clown. Ideas go on and on.

Are there paper bake cups on your cabinet shelf? Pasted onto paper, a bake cup can become a flower by drawing a stem and leaves onto it.

Paper doilies cut apart become snowflakes and, when pasted on blue or gray construction paper, look like a cloudy day. Bits and pieces of attractive wrapping paper and bright construction paper cut in different shapes create interest.

Encourage children to step outdoors at night with their parents to look at the stars together. Then give them stick-on stars and black paper to make night pictures. This is a good time to talk about why God made day and why he made night.

Set the Choose and Do Box in front of children with sheets of manila paper, large pieces of cardboard, or large grocery bags cut in half. Now stand back and watch creativity begin.

Soft, classical music helps set a mood for art work. Ask the children to make pictures of what the music says to them. Reading a story before beginning art work can also give them ideas to create.

Remember, what they create is theirs. "Tell me about your picture," is more positive than asking, "What is it?" Children have stories to tell about pictures they've made. Suppose they only scribble with crayons on paper. That is all right. We don't have to say, "Your picture is beautiful." We can say, "You chose interesting colors." Then talk about those colors.

Children gain self-confidence when they feel they've done something well. Using a Choose and Do Box helps children to experiment and know the ideas are their own. Let us help children develop their creativity. ■





by Marlene Dorhout

Marlene Dorhout, a language arts teacher at Denver Christian Middle School, is taking a leave of absence to work this year with community leadership. Address Query questions to:
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As the school year progresses each year, the problems increase. In order to deal with everything, it seems as if the faculty meetings get longer and longer. Many important issues never get taken care of because no one wants to bring anything more to the already lengthy agenda. How can we more efficiently deal with the necessary decisions without taking more teacher time?

I can understand your concern. Before-school meetings automatically limit the discussion length, but frustration can result when the agenda is always left unfinished. After-school meetings can bite into athletic practices, preparation time, and the dinner hour. Some schools have petitioned the boards for extra time in the day by allowing one day a month to start school later so teachers can meet before school. Working parents, however, are not always in favor of this arrangement.

Whatever arrangement is deemed the most workable for all concerned, the staff must commit to the task. As good stewards, we should make certain that the process and the outcome is worthy of the time we spend. I suspect the agenda is set up by the principal, and teachers have a deadline for adding items prior to the scheduled

meeting. That practice alone saves time.

Not all items on the agenda necessarily have to be discussed by the entire faculty, either. The administrator can encourage the staff to take more ownership of the decision making. If the agenda includes twenty items, seemingly of equal importance to the daily operation of the school or the morale of the staff and students, in two minutes each member of the group can circle his or her top five choices for discussion and/or decision making. A quick verbal tally usually reveals that most of the faculty agree on the important items. The chairperson can then assign committees to handle the other topics if more than an administrative decision is necessary. This exercise can cut substantial time that is usually spent in discussion; and since the faculty members have agreed on the essential agenda items, most likely they will tackle the task with more enthusiasm and efficiency.

Teachers should always know ahead of time what their roles will be regarding the discussions, to prevent complaints later. A typical comment that could be avoided might be, "I spent two hours talking about that stuff and he decided to do something else anyway; I'm not wasting my time on those stupid decisions again!" Before starting the meeting, the principal should inform the teachers whether their discussion leads to a faculty decision or only provides input for an administrative decision. Resentment can set in if the expectations are not clear.

Faculty meetings are the source of many complaints, but until the members own the problem and confront the issue, precious time may be wasted by unnecessary discussions, attention seekers, side commentaries, boring reports and letters, lack of consensus, and the tuned-out educator in the corner correcting yesterday's task.

Perhaps "faculty meetings" should be the top priority on the next agenda's list!

I love teaching and I love the kids. They share their lives with me, but sometimes that becomes overwhelming. I come home too tired for myself and my family, but I can't seem to release my investment in those students. After all, kids today need more than just academic learning from teachers. So I pour myself into my work and then have little left over. What can I do? I don't want to neglect my private life or my professional life.

I can only respond to what I am reading in the question. Perhaps you also should talk to a trusted friend or counselor. I know that teaching demands more than just addressing the academics, but I suspect that part of your identity is tied up in your "investment." Teaching is what you are called to do, but being a teacher is not who you are. If your whole being has become enmeshed in the lives of your students, eventually you will not be able to meet anyone's needs because you haven't met your own. I think it is wonderful that you care so much for your students, but obviously your energy is zapped and you are robbing yourself and family of much

needed rest and relaxation.

You can actually better serve those students by first taking care of yourself. You want to teach them to be self-sufficient, well-balanced individuals with a healthy connectedness to their families and friends. If conflicts exist in their lives, you would do well to enable them to deal with their problems and relationships. Overinvestment in your job, even though well-meaning, may be costing you some other important relationships that would make you a good role model. Burnout doesn't come from too much work, but from all work and no play. I think if you spend more time with friends and family, simply enjoying the good gifts in your life, you will be the best gift you can give your students.

Teaching Bible seems like an awesome responsibility. I realize that most students in a Christian school also learn at home and church, yet I want to be sure that I am giving my students what they need to build their faith. Should I just trust the materials I'm given? Sometimes they seem inadequate and so do I. How can I be sure I'm not cheating the kids?

Most of the materials suggested for use in Christian schools have been professionally researched for proper sequence and developmental skills.

However, I think it always prudent to question the textbooks, especially when we are talking about the most crucial subject our students are studying. Years ago, teachers dwelt primarily on learning the stories and the facts of the Bible. Today, however, educators are becoming more aware of faith building, and students themselves verbalize a need for this emphasis as well. Interestingly, though, stories still play a very important role.

Understanding the stages of faith creates better ways to serve the students. James Fowler, an American professor of theology and human development, writes about the stages of faith development. He contends that between the ages of three and seven years, children are very imaginative and imitative; thus, these children can be greatly influenced by examples, moods, actions, and stories of the important adults in their lives. If this is the age you teach, then you recognize how much these kids love to ask questions. Your role is significant because their perception of you and the stories you tell are their reality. Yes, you have an awesome responsibility, but you also have an awesome God. What a wonderful opportunity you have to share him with your students!

If you are teaching ages seven to twelve, the students still love stories, but beliefs are appropriated with the

literal interpretations, as are moral rules and attitudes. These pre-teens are starting to be weaned from the parents, but basically they still accept their parents' faith. If you want to make faith more meaningful for them, help them verbalize their beliefs, morals, and attitudes.

Not until students reach the adolescent stage will they be able to really analyze and synthesize. Then they can and do look beyond the family. This stage is the one that scares many parents and some teachers. Understand, though, that for the first time these young people are really trying to make sense of the complex world they live in and trying to relate their faith to all of that "stuff." Exercise patience while these students struggle and test what previously seemed so obvious and easy. They are finally developing their own faith story.

Because you ask the question, you are telling me that teaching Bible is a high priority for you. Whatever age you teach, you will be able to show your students by stories, examples, and genuine love and concern how much Christ means to you. A good role model is probably more important than all the printed materials available. May God bless your efforts. ■

Superintendent of Schools Position

Holland Christian Schools, a large, growing pre-school through grade 12 Christian school system in Holland, Michigan, is seeking a superintendent beginning with the 1997-98 school year.

The person we seek must be a committed Christian and capable administrator with experience in education, good communication skills, and a vision for what it means to provide Biblically-based, quality education in a contemporary setting.

We seek a person with a demonstrated commitment to Christian education and the ability to build support for Christian education within the broader community.

Contact Dave Vanderwel, at Holland Christian Schools, 956 Ottawa Avenue, Holland, MI 49423

Reader-response and the Young Adult

by Jeff Fennema

Thinking

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Jeff Fennema teaches eighth grade language arts at Timothy Christian Middle School in Elmhurst, Illinois.

Young adults are extremely interested in themselves. This is not to imply that young adults in general are conceited, self-centered, and vain, although in some individual cases this may apply. Rather, they become quite focused upon themselves because of the natural changes they experience during this period of their lives.

Directly or indirectly, they ask questions such as these: Who am I? What do I believe? How do I fit into my environment? What is the nature of my relationships? While this time in their lives occasionally may be maddening for educators, it provides unique opportunities in the classroom that may not be quite as accessible with other age groups.

New criticism

As young adults, many of us were taught that there was a "correct" understanding or interpretation of a poem. That was the teacher's job. The teacher or one of us students would read the poem from the textbook, and we would discuss it. Tricky poems that included simile, metaphor, or personification were especially confusing. When asked what the poem meant, many of us either guessed incorrectly or did not answer at all. We knew the teacher would eventually tell us what it meant.

This type of environment resulted from a form of literary criticism

revered and practiced at our universities: the New Criticism. For a while this form of literary criticism was taught and modeled when readers encountered a literary text. Basically, theorists concluded that there was a "correct" interpretation to any literary text. The reader's main function was to discover this interpretation from the text. In the reader/text relationship, the text was most important, and the reader was merely a passive participant.

The "trickle-down effect" promoted the use of this method in the grade school classroom. Literary passages were believed to possess a correct interpretation. The teacher's manual often presented a correct understanding of the literary passage read in the classroom. Teachers' analyses of student responses such as, "No, that is not correct," or, "That's right!" were the norm in the classroom during most of this century. Student responses to literature resembled more of a hit-or-miss guessing game.

Reader-response Criticism

During the 1960s and 1970s a movement in the literary world known as Reader-response Criticism gained a great deal of attention. This theory seemed to take direct opposition to the New Criticism view of a "correct" interpretation from the text. Critics and theorists who supported Reader-response believed that the reader was very important in the reader/text relationship.

Reader-response critics and theo-

rists come from many other literary camps, among them deconstructionist, psychoanalytic, and feminist. What unites them is the belief that the reader is a key component to the understanding of a text. The reader brings his or her own experiences and ideas to the reading of a text. Because individuals are unique and different from each other, so also are their experiences and ideas. A particular interpretation of the text may be clear to one student, yet a different student may not see it in the same way. These differences occur because of different experiences and ideas brought to the reading by each student, and this is what Reader-response asserts by placing importance upon the reader rather than the text.

The authority of the reader in creating meaning poses some problems. Are wacky, far-out interpretations then acknowledged and given credence? Is it acceptable for students to interpret a literary text in a way that makes absolutely no sense? The issue of relativism divides many Reader-response critics and theorists. However, some believe that relativistic interpretation can be averted. Testing ideas and conclusions against other parts of the text can "rein in" the wild interpretations. Students can share their interpretations with others as a way of forming their own understanding. Still another method of providing boundaries lies in the students' mastery over literary conventions. If they understand and develop the tools of literature, they can competently



Jeff Fennema

respond to it.

The “trickle-down effect” also occurs in the area of Reader-response. Language arts textbooks now dedicate more attention to what the student thinks or feels about the text. They encourage student responses, not guesses. Instead of providing a “correct” interpretation, our teacher manuals now offer “possible responses.” When teachers invite their students into the community of readers, they validate student responses to literature, thus recognizing the importance of the reader.

The move away from “correct” responses to “possible” responses may prove unnerving for some teachers. This approach is often seen as another attempt to erode absolute truth, something with which Christian educators continually struggle. When matters are concretely presented as right or wrong, a greater sense of security arises, and student responses are easier to evaluate. However, when teachers allow a myriad of responses, evaluation becomes complex.

We celebrate Martin Luther’s effort at explaining why certain official church interpretations of Scripture were faulty. Many of our current denominations owe their existence to Luther and his willingness to question a “correct” interpretation of Scripture. At the time his findings were quite unpopular. He dared to question the absolute truth as seen by the church. Yet as we are now able to look back, we have bestowed great honor upon him and his efforts. While finitely cre-

ated literature and divinely inspired Scripture cannot be equated, the act of questioning “correct” interpretations seems to transcend time. Do we celebrate this process only when it serves our needs, or do we constantly encourage it from our students even when ours might be the “correct” interpretation being challenged?

The young adult reader

Young adults are extremely interested in themselves. Their egocentrism is more natural than pejorative. Yet, this trait makes them ideal readers. Literature invites subjective responses from the reader, and young adults instinctively comply. Middle school students already own vast collections of experiences although they may not be as refined or sophisticated as those of adults. Young adult readers bring these experiences to the reading of the text. If the literature does not relate to them and their experiences, they will generally reject it. However, if the reader connects with the text, he or she takes a passionate interest.

The genre of young adult literature came about because of this acknowledgement. Much like middle school facilitating the transition from elementary school to high school, young adult literature bridges the gap between children’s literature and adult literature. It is age-specific in its content. Most main characters are young adults. Conflicts and themes deal with issues that are of great interest to young adults. These readers will generally show interest in literature that

explores answers to their questions.

Teachers experience a wonderful opportunity to facilitate their students’ explorations. As with most, if not all, of learning, the discovery process promotes active ownership among students. The young adult response to literature is a natural step toward the discovery of meaning—not simply the understanding of the text, but understanding general life issues as well.

To provide a “correct” interpretation is death to active inquiry. Instead, we must maturely and patiently guide and facilitate students’ interaction with literature. We must empower students to take risks, to test their ideas, and to discover for themselves what we teachers could so easily tell them. It is simply another phase in the process of teaching students *how* to think rather than *what* to think. ■

