

Email to Dr. Diana Swoope

From: Martin Norris ([REDACTED])

To: KP [REDACTED]; so [REDACTED]

Date: Monday, June 24, 2019, 5:47 PM EDT

Hi, Karen and Peter,

I sent this email to Dr. Swoope on May 31, expressing my concerns about the current resolutions on homosexuality passed by the General Assembly of the Church of God. I would appreciate it if you would read it carefully. If you wish to write her about what I have written, or if you wish to let her know of any additional concerns or suggestions you may have, her email address is: [REDACTED]

In my email to Dr. Swoope I mention several documents I have written through the years and included them in the email. They added many pages, so to keep my message to you much shorter, I am sending only one topic I referred to in her letter: **Second Hurdle**. If you do want to see all the documents, just let me know, and I will send them to you. You may also wish to read the 1979 resolution, "**Stand Against Homosexuality**," a copy of which appears below. Read as much or as little as you wish!

I sincerely hope and pray that the current position of the church regarding homosexuality will be given serious, prayerful consideration. It would be great if we could reach consensus! Whatever the outcome may be, however, may we continue to have the utmost respect and genuine love for one another.

Blessings,
Vern

Rev. Dr. Diana Swoope, Chair
Ministries Council of the Church of God

Dear Diana,

In your October 11, 2017, email to me you said that "a paper that was commissioned to be brought forth as a result of the Roundtable on Sexual Ethics and Human Sexuality that was conducted in Portland, Oregon last April" would likely be available by early 2018. Thus far I have not been informed about the paper having been written.

As the Ministries Council of the Church of God continues its discussion about homosexuality, I would appreciate it if you would consider my response to two of the conclusions you say were reached by the Ministries Council and to a few questions I raise.

Conclusion 1: "The Council affirms that the General Assembly has already spoken, through the voice of its membership, the position of the Church of God on the issue of homosexuality." The current position of the Church of God and reasons given for that position as stated in the resolutions approved by the General Assembly is what many of us are so deeply concerned about. A number of

persons in leadership positions within the church, even at the national level, were strongly opposed to the 1979 resolution. An even larger number, in our resolution presented to the 1993 General Assembly by Rev. Bill Soetenga, asked that the 1979 resolution be repealed. Several of us, in our June 15, 2017, email to the Ministries Council requested that a task force be appointed for making an in-depth study of homosexuality, giving serious consideration to the knowledge we now have. Our reasons for opposing the resolutions by the General Assembly were clearly stated in our June 15 email.

Conclusion 3: "Finally, the Council recognizes that the position of the Church of God is quite counter to the culture of the day." True. A Gallup poll in 2018 revealed that 67% of Americans now approve same-sex marriage. The position of the Church of God as stated in its 1979 resolution, however, was very much in keeping with the traditional fears and the negative beliefs and attitudes still held by many persons within our society at that time. This was particularly true for persons not directly involved in the study of mental illness and of marriage and family relationships. It was not until the late 1950s that scientific research began to reveal that homosexuality is not a mental illness and that persons with a homosexual orientation are just as intelligent, knowledgeable, competent, physically fit, mentally and emotionally stable, and loyal as persons with a heterosexual orientation. Thus, according to the knowledge we now have, the only significant difference between persons with a homosexual orientation and those with a heterosexual orientation, with but one exception, is their sexual orientation. This represented a reversal of what most professional persons (medical doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, social workers, and marriage and family therapists) and most other persons in our society believed to be true at that time. Additional research confirmed these findings, and in 1973 the American Psychiatric Association removed "homosexuality" from their official manual that lists mental and emotional disorders. Soon thereafter most other national and state professional organizations took a similar stance. (For more detail on this, see my response to the Supreme Court decision on same-sex marriage: *Gay and Lesbian Couples Need Our Approval, Our Love, Our Support*—copy below. See particularly the "Second Hurdle," I recommend the reading of the entire document.)

As you consider the changing attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality it may be helpful to consider the changing attitudes and beliefs through the centuries about left-handedness and the severe behaviors often inflicted upon persons, particularly children, who were left-handed. For centuries left-handedness was considered as evil.

This leads to **Question 1**: *Is it possible that the resolutions on homosexuality passed by the General Assembly of the Church of God, in some ways at least, border upon "bearing false witness?"* I am very fearful that they may do so. It is likely that the person(s) writing the 1979 resolution, *Stand Against Homosexuality*, and those who voted for it in the General Assembly did not know at that time what scientific research had revealed to us about persons with a homosexual orientation. Note that it was not until 1973 that sexual attraction between persons of the same sex was no longer considered to be an emotional illness.

The one exception referred to above as the only significant difference between persons with a homosexual orientation and those with a heterosexual orientation is that young people with a homosexual orientation are much more likely than those with a heterosexual orientation to consider taking their own lives and are about five times more likely to actually do so. Seriously, **Question 2**: *Does the current position on homosexuality taken by the Church of God contribute to that*

difference? I am very fearful that it may do so. (If you haven't read Mel White's *Stranger at the Gate*, I recommend that you do so.)

I think it is safe to say: "**Homosexuality is here to stay.**" We know that homosexual behavior has existed for many centuries. It was not until the late 1940s (Kinsey studies) that we began thinking of sexual attraction as existing on a continuum with persons at one extreme being attracted only to persons of their own sex, those at the middle being equally attracted to persons of both sexes, and persons at the other extreme being sexually attracted to persons of the other sex. I think it was not until the 1980s that we began using the term "sexual orientation." We have no way of knowing how long human beings have had different sexual orientations, yet it is likely they have existed for many centuries. Nor do we have any way of knowing if the percentage of persons having a homosexual orientation is more or less than it was centuries ago. As has likely been true for many centuries, heterosexual couples (many of whom are Christians) will continue to give birth to persons who have or will soon have a homosexual orientation. Our sexual orientation is a given; it is not a choice we make. It is just as normal for persons with a homosexual orientation to be sexually attracted to persons of their own sex as it is for persons with a heterosexual orientation to be sexually attracted to persons of the other sex.

Thus, in reference to the 1979 resolution on homosexuality, I would say that no "**Stand Against Homosexuality**" will be strong enough to eliminate homosexual orientations. I also think it is safe to say that no stand against homosexuality will be strong enough to reduce the proportion of either males or females in our population who have a homosexual orientation. Nor will any stand against homosexuality be strong enough to eliminate homosexual behavior. It is possible of course that some persons, even those who are exclusively homosexual, may choose to remain single and not engage in any form of homosexual behavior. It is likely, however, that a large majority of both gays and lesbians, even those who believe themselves to be Christian, rather than remaining single and chaste, will become legally married. Yes, homosexuality is a reality of life on planet earth; *it is here to stay.*

A further point I wish to emphasize is that: **Our sexuality is much more than sex** (a term most people are likely to think of as sexual behavior or whether one is male or female). During my 43 years of teaching (1951-1992), I taught one or more courses in marriage and family relations nearly every semester. In each of these courses we had open discussions about our sexuality and the expression of our sexual feelings in a loving, caring, committed relationship. I emphasized that our sexuality is a perfectly normal, natural part of our being, created within us by God, that it is nothing for us to be ashamed of or afraid of. At some point in my teaching I began to say that our sexuality, rather than being only a biological drive, is a dynamic part of all four dimensions of human nature: the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions as well as the physical or biological dimension.

In 1971 I began teaching a course in Human Sexuality. It quickly became one of the most favorite elective courses on campus, and I taught it every semester and often during the summer. On the first day of each class I discussed the above points and strongly emphasized the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects of our sexuality as well as the physical/biological. I did let my students know that our spiritual nature has never been scientifically proven, yet I believed (and continue to believe) very strongly that there is a **spiritual dimension** within each of us calling us into a meaningful, fulfilling relationship with God, with one another, and even with the total universe. In a loving, caring, committed relationship two persons relate to each other as total persons, including the needs we have

in each of the four dimensions of human nature (many other needs as well as sexual fulfillment). I am fully convinced that it is just as normal for persons with a homosexual orientation to be sexually attracted to persons of their own sex and to seek the fulfillment of those needs with a person of their own sex as it is for persons with a heterosexual orientation to be attracted to persons of the other sex. **Question 4:** *Are gays and lesbians to be urged to not love a person of their own sex and denied the right to seek the fulfillment of their intellectual, emotional, physical/biological, and spiritual needs in a loving, caring, committed relationship?*

We must keep in mind that persons with a homosexual orientation are our neighbors.

Thus, **Question 5:** *What does it mean for us to love our homosexual neighbors as ourselves? Does it not stand to reason that for the well-being of all of us and for society as a whole, we must end the prejudice and discrimination directed toward persons with a homosexual orientation and to actually be supportive of them as they enter into loving, caring, committed, legally sanctioned same-sex marriages?*

I trust that serious attention will be given to my comments about Conclusions 1 and 3 and to the questions I have raised. I also hope that once again serious attention will be given to the June 15, 2017, email that many of us sent to members of the Ministries Council.

Sincerely,
Vern Norris

P. S. Please note that my email address is now: [REDACTED]@gmail.com. My computer was hacked, and I thought it best to change my email address. If you have recently sent an email to me at my old address, I have not received it. Please send it again to my new address.

Copies to: Rev. Jim Lyon, Pastor David Markle, Dr. John Pistole, Members of the Ministries Council for whom I have an email address, and many friends.

Gay and Lesbian Couples Need Our Approval, Our Love, Our Support

Martin L. Norris

As an exclusively heterosexual male, I am deeply grateful for having had the privilege of being very happily married to the most wonderful woman on planet earth for almost 69 years. *(It would be great if every married person believed he or she was married to the most wonderful person on planet earth!)* Fran and I had hoped to celebrate our 75th wedding anniversary. To my deep regret, however, she died February 1, 2012. She and I met at church during our first year of college, and after dating for three years, I came to the conclusion that I loved her far more than any other person I knew. It was evident that she had come to the same conclusion about me when she readily said "Yes" the evening I asked her to marry me. We were legally married in church a month later with the full approval and loving support of our families, our friends, our neighbors, and everyone in the church we attended. That support continued throughout the many years we were married and was significantly meaningful to us in our growth and development as individuals, in our relationship as a married couple, and in our relationships with others.

Opponents of same-sex marriage often speak of marriage between a man and a woman as the ideal

form of marriage. I, too, regard it as the ideal . . . for persons with a heterosexual orientation. It is not, however, the ideal marriage for persons with a homosexual orientation. Years ago, Fran and I, along with a few other heterosexual couples, were closely involved in a support group with several gays and lesbians, listening to their concerns and providing as much support and encouragement for them as possible. When the gays and lesbians in the support group were old enough to marry, societal and family expectations and the teachings of their church were such that most of them had entered into heterosexual marriages and given birth to children. In large part because of their homosexual orientation, however, they were not happily married, their heterosexual spouses were not happily married, and they were divorced after only a few years of marriage. Some "mixed marriages" in regard to sexual orientation may last a lifetime. Such marriages, however, are a very risky venture. Although persons with a heterosexual orientation may find it difficult to understand, a person with a homosexual orientation loves a person of her or his own gender more than any other. As is true for two persons of different sex, the love relationship between two persons of the same sex is much more than their sexual attraction for each other and can be just as strong, meaningful, and enduring as the relationship between two persons with a heterosexual orientation. Thus the "ideal marriage" for persons with a homosexual orientation is to marry someone of their own gender. Should they have the legal right to do so? Yes!

The opening statement of the *United States Declaration of Independence* reads: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." This means to me that persons with a homosexual orientation are "created equal" to those with a heterosexual orientation and "that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." The *Constitution of the United States of America* also guarantees the same rights and privileges to all law-abiding American citizens.

I can say, without any hesitancy whatsoever, that my greatest source of happiness in life was my marriage with Fran. Fortunately for us, we had the legal right to marry the one person we loved more than any other.

Fortunately, too, for gays and lesbians in our society, on June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States declared same-sex marriage to be legal in every state. Thus gays and lesbians in all fifty states now have the *legal* right to marry the one person they love more than any other. And, yes, those who do marry also need the *approval*, the *love*, the *support* of their families, their friends, their church, those with whom they work, and the general society.

We must now face the fact that a new day is dawning in the United States of America. In all fifty states, families may now have same-sex couples as sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, parents, grandparents, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, cousins. Same-sex couples may be our close friends, our next-door neighbors, people we sit next to in church. And a given individual who is married to a person of her or his own gender may be a colleague at work, the CEO of a company, a medical doctor, a nurse, an attorney, a legislator, a university professor, a musician, an airline pilot, a governor, a Sunday School teacher, a pastor, or a person of most any vocation. Persons with a homosexual orientation, of course, have been in our families and such positions as these for many years, but often without our knowledge of their sexual orientation. Now that same-sex marriage is permissible, we will usually know whether married persons are gay or straight. Gays and lesbians who live in states that still permit discrimination in regard to employment, housing, inheritance rights, and visitation rights, however, may still endeavor to "stay in the closet." There is little doubt, however, that such discrimination will soon be illegal in all states.

The question now arises as to how ready we are to accept such a major change in our centuries-old social system. Some of us have been ready for years, some have become ready in recent years, some are perhaps in the process of working through their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs and will be ready soon. There will likely be some persons who will never be ready. The percentage of U.S. citizens who favor same-sex marriage has been increasing in recent years, particularly among younger people, and there is little doubt that the percentage will continue to grow. The current 60 percent approval rating (a recent CNN poll reported 63 percent) means that 192,726,370 persons in the United States (of the 321,210,616 total as of 4:32 p.m., July 3, 2015) approve of same-sex marriage. Assuming that the polls are representative of the proportion of Christians (70.6%) and non-Christians (29.4%) in our society, this would mean that 136,064,482 Christians favor same-sex marriage. If we were to assume that all of the persons opposing same-sex marriage are Christian (not at all likely), there are still 64,242,124 Christians approving.

As a retired sociologist, family science professor, and marriage and family therapist; as a loyal American citizen; and as a Christian, I am pleased that gays and lesbians in every state now have the legal right to marry the one person they love more than any other. Fran and I were strong advocates for the civil rights goals they were seeking in the early days of the gay rights movement. The goal of same-sex marriage was a few years later in coming, and in 1997 she and I wrote a Viewpoint Article entitled, *Let's Encourage Same-Sex Marriage* (copy attached), for publication in our local newspaper. I rejoice that a major dream of ours for many years has finally been fulfilled. Many other American citizens, including persons of the Christian faith, are as delighted as I am. Yet about forty percent of American citizens are strongly opposed to this major change currently taking place in our society. They still believe very strongly that homosexual behavior, even in a loving, caring, deeply committed, legal relationship is unnatural, immoral, sinful. They were no doubt dismayed by the Supreme Court decision, and they continue to believe that persons with a homosexual orientation should not be permitted to enter into a legal marriage relationship.

In view of these differences, it is urgent that we engage in dialogue with one another as objectively as possible, fully respecting one another as persons of supreme worth even though we are on different sides of the issue and may remain so.

How can sixty percent of American citizens, particularly those in one of our faith traditions, justify their approval of same-sex marriage? I cannot speak for others; please bear with me, however, as I express a few of my own points of view.

During my forty-two year professional career (1950-1992), three major civil rights issues surfaced in our society. First was the civil rights movement for African Americans and other minority groups, next came the women's movement, and soon thereafter was the gay rights movement. The concerns in each movement were about issues that had been brewing for years and brought to our attention by a few courageous persons who were very much aware of the prejudice and discrimination being directed toward them in our society. They were aware, too, that they were not being granted the same rights and privileges as everyone else, that they were often emotionally and physically abused, and that they were, condescendingly, looked upon as second-class citizens. The proponents for each movement grew rapidly, and although many persons in our society strongly opposed the goals being sought, they were, nevertheless, civil rights issues that had to be dealt with by our local, state, and federal governments; our faith traditions; our places of employment; our educational institutions, particularly at the university level; our local communities; and by our total society. Not at all surprising is the fact that opponents of the goals of each of the three movements used Biblical references to support their opposition. This is particularly true for persons opposed to same-sex marriage.

Although Fran and I were born and reared in the segregated south and in a highly patriarchal society,

prejudice and discrimination directed toward African Americans and the idea that women must be subservient to men were not in keeping with our Christian faith or our moral values. Nor were they in keeping with scientific data I was being taught in sociology and psychology courses I was taking. I had, at an early time in my life journey, come to believe that every human being is a person of supreme worth who deserves the same rights and privileges as everyone else—a belief I considered to be very much in keeping with what I have long regarded as two of the most meaningful teachings of Jesus in regard to our relationships with one another: “You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.” and “I came that they might have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest.” (Matthew 22:39 and John 10:10, Common English Bible). To me, these teachings affirm the supreme worth of every human being and, consequently, the right and responsibility that each person has to grow, and to help others grow, in the direction of human wholeness—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—that we may all find as much meaning and fulfillment in life as possible. These beliefs played a major role in my overall philosophy of life which I did my best to manifest in my teaching, counseling, speaking, writing, and in my personal relationships with others. In regard to all three civil rights movements, then, Fran and I were strong advocates for the goals being sought by each even before the movements actually surfaced.

All three of these movements are closely interrelated. All three were, and continue to be, significant concerns in our churches as well as within our general society. In regard to legal issues at the local, state, and national levels in the U.S., significant achievements have been accomplished by all three of the civil rights movements. Opposition still exists, however, and particularly so toward gays and lesbians.

During the earlier days of the gay rights movement, theologian and professor, James B. Nelson described four different stances that may be taken toward homosexuality: **rejecting-punitive**, **rejecting-nonpunitive**, **qualified-acceptance**, and **full-acceptance**. (See: “Homosexuality and the Church,” in *Christianity and Crisis* magazine, 1977) The traditional, historical stance of our churches (as well as that of the general society) has been, for many centuries, the **rejecting-punitive** stance which unconditionally rejects all homosexual behavior and holds a punitive attitude toward gays and lesbians. In this stance, gays and lesbians would not deserve the same rights and privileges that other persons enjoy. Although many persons still subscribe to the **rejecting-punitive** stance, others have moved to the **rejecting-nonpunitive** stance in which homosexual behavior is still viewed as inherently unnatural and is to be condemned. Yet because of God's grace, persons with a homosexual orientation must not be condemned. This position would support the civil liberties of gays and lesbians, recognizing the injustice and hypocrisy in their persecution.

Some people (as well as some church groups) have moved to the **qualified-acceptance** stance; still others have moved to **full-acceptance**. The **qualified-acceptance** stance continues to regard homosexual behavior as sin; yet, recognizing that a homosexual orientation is largely unsusceptible to change, persons with a homosexual orientation who believe they must have sexual fulfillment are encouraged to maintain fully committed relationships. The **full-acceptance** stance affirms the sexuality of persons with a homosexual orientation and views homosexual behavior in loving, caring, committed relationships the same way as sexual behavior in heterosexual marriages.

Perhaps it should be noted that in colonial America, persons guilty of engaging in homosexual behavior were to receive the death penalty. In the years following independence from Britain, the death penalty was gradually removed from the former colonial laws, and states then began enacting sodomy laws. Some of these applied to heterosexual as well as homosexual behavior and some even to certain sexual acts between married couples. Prison sentences for the violation of such laws varied from 30 days to as many as 20 years. Persons engaging in same-sex violations were much more likely to be found guilty

and sent to prison than were those engaging in unlawful heterosexual behavior. One such law for heterosexual couples was that the only lawful position for sexual intercourse was for the husband to be on top of the wife (often referred to as the "missionary position"). Sodomy laws were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of the United States in 2003.

Some people still believe that persons engaging in homosexual behavior should be punished (in several nations the penalty is death), yet approximately 60% of the people in the United States have moved to the **full-acceptance** stance. Many church groups today remain at the **rejecting-nonpunitive** stance and prefer to stay that way. For those who are willing to at least consider the possibility of moving to the **full-acceptance** stance, however, I suggest that they give serious consideration to a few major hurdles that may be blocking any change in their way of thinking.

First Hurdle. *What were (and continue to be) the real reasons for the goals sought by gays and lesbians being regarded as such a serious issue, both from a social and religious point of view? Were the real reasons because there are many persons with a homosexual orientation in our society? Not at all. Were thereal reasons because persons with a homosexual orientation want to enter into a marital relationship with a person of their own gender and be granted the same rights and privileges as heterosexual couples? Not at all. Of course, if there were no persons with a homosexual orientation, the issue would not exist. The fact that we do have and always have had gays and lesbians among us, however, is not the real reason for the centuries-old homosexual issue that continues to face us. Years ago, William Sloane Coffin, Jr., then senior pastor of Riverside Church, New York City, in an article entitled, *Homosexuality Revisited: Whose Problem?* said: "What I've come to recognize is that just as 'the black problem' turned out to be a problem of white racism, just as 'the woman problem' turned out to be a problem of male sexism, so 'the homosexual problem' is really the homophobia of many of us heterosexuals." (*Christianity and Crisis*, November 2, 1981, p. 302) This is also the position taken by Bruce Hilton in *Can Homophobia Be Cured?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992) I agree that homophobia—the fear of homosexuality—is one reason for the problem, yet there are other reasons, perhaps even more significant, that we need to consider. The real reasons for homosexuality being the controversial issue it has become, then, are not because there are gays and lesbians among us, nor are they because of the goals being sought by the gay rights movement. The real reasons are the strong disapproval of homosexuality, for whatever reasons, and the prejudice and discrimination still being directed toward persons with a homosexual orientation.*

Among heterosexuals, homophobia may involve a fear of persons with a homosexual orientation, a fear of homosexual behavior, a fear of possibly having homosexual tendencies oneself, or a fear that the practice of homosexuality may undermine societal and religious values. Underlying most of these fears is a perceived threat in some way to oneself or to others. Just as white citizens felt threatened by the civil rights movement of African Americans, just as males felt threatened by the movement for sexual equality, so too, many heterosexuals feel threatened by the civil rights movement of gays and lesbians. Homosexuality is often perceived to be a threat to the stability of our moral values, to our Christian values, to family stability, to our children, to our government, to our military, to our schools, to our communities, to our national economy, and to the stability of our nation. Such fears have no basis in fact. The answer to the problem, then, is not to rid the world of persons with a homosexual orientation; it is rather to develop a deeper understanding of homosexuality so as to eliminate the perceived threats that are so often feared, and then to accept, love, and affirm persons with a homosexual orientation, granting them the same rights and privileges that all other citizens enjoy.

The problem that exists is generally perceived to be one that is threatening to heterosexuals and their lifestyle; the realization that it is also a serious problem for gays and lesbians is all too often completely overlooked. It is likely that most, perhaps all, persons who become aware of the

possibility that they may have a homosexual orientation begin to experience some negative feelings about themselves. They are very much aware of the fact that many persons in our society, perhaps even their parents, siblings, other relatives, and good friends of theirs, look with disdain upon gays and lesbians. If they are Christians who attend church regularly, they know (at least in many churches) that homosexual behavior is definitely considered to be a sin. For several years, both before and after I retired, Fran and I were closely involved with gays and lesbians in support groups, PFLAG meetings, forums, Sunday School sessions, and various other settings and became very much aware of their thoughts and feelings, such as confusion, frustration, shame, guilt, insecurity, low self-esteem, fear of rejection, fear of emotional and physical abuse, and even thoughts of suicide. On several occasions, in groups where gays and lesbians were present, we were asked, "Why are you here?" With no hesitation whatsoever, our immediate response was, "Because we care." On December 6, 1995, we wrote a paper entitled: *Because We Care: Our Message to the Church about Persons with a Homosexual Orientation*. Inasmuch as it is very descriptive of many thoughts and feelings experienced by gays, lesbians, and their families, a copy is attached.

The *real reasons*, then, for the pain and suffering often experienced by many gays and lesbians, particularly when they first begin to realize that they may have a homosexual orientation, most often result, not from their sexual orientation, but rather from the prejudicial attitudes, beliefs, and discrimination directed toward them by others—our legislators, persons of faith, persons of no religious faith, and at times even by parents, brothers, sisters, other relatives, and close friends. The pain they encounter is often experienced, too, by their families. Perhaps for some parents, their pain is even deeper than that of their sons and daughters who are gay. Still another source of the pain and suffering of persons who first begin to wonder if they have a homosexual orientation is their own opposition to homosexuality. Their attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality may be just as negative as those held by others. Their fear of homosexuality and their own opposition and prejudicial attitudes, turned upon themselves, are almost certain to produce strong negative feelings. Even for these persons, however, the *real reasons* for their negative feelings still stem, not from their sexual orientation, but rather from all the negative things they were taught about homosexuality in the society into which they were born and reared.

Fortunately, most gays and lesbians, particularly those in families that love them as they always did, are able to transcend the prejudicial attitudes and discrimination directed toward them, to accept the fact that there is nothing wrong in their having a homosexual orientation, and to *know* they are normal, productive, well adjusted human beings on an equal basis with those who have a heterosexual orientation. The pain experienced by some, however, is so strong that they take their own lives.

With the increased approval of same-sex marriage, I sincerely hope the pain and suffering endured by gays, lesbians, and their families today is much less than it was in earlier years. We must still find a way, however, to enable our young people to readily accept their sexual orientation, whether gay or straight, and to do so without experiencing negative thoughts and feelings about themselves. This will likely require "going beyond" granting them the same rights and privileges as everyone else. We must also find a way to enable parents to readily accept a son's or daughter's homosexual orientation without experiencing negative thoughts and feelings toward them or toward themselves.

Second Hurdle: *Another major hurdle for many people is the need to give serious consideration to the knowledge we now have about homosexuality and homosexual relationships.* Many still hold on to attitudes and beliefs that have been proven to be incorrect during the past 55 years. As late as the 1960s, even medical doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, social workers, and marriage and family therapists believed that persons who were sexually attracted to someone of their own gender were mentally ill. One reason for this was the centuries-old belief that males were born to be

sexually attracted to females and that females were born to be sexually attracted to males. Thus, it was "unnatural" for persons to be sexually attracted to someone of their own gender. Another major reason why professional therapists believed same-sex attraction to be a mental illness was that they counseled only with persons who had come to them with serious emotional problems. Persons, then, who were attracted to someone of their own gender were thought to have a disease that could be and should be "cured."

In 1961, Fran and I attended the First North American Conference on Church and Family. The conference was sponsored by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States and the Canadian Council of Churches. It was attended by representatives from Catholic and Protestant churches and a few Jewish synagogues from throughout the United States and Canada. We had leading experts on all aspects of human sexuality, and we devoted a whole week to the study of human sexuality as it relates to the family and to the church. It was at this conference that Dr. Evelyn Hooker, a psychologist from Los Angeles, presented results of studies she had made in the late 1950s among male homosexuals in their own environment and who were not in therapy. Her research led to the discovery that most persons involved in homosexual lifestyles were emotionally stable people who were successful, valuable members of society coming from all walks of life, including members of the clergy. They were not mentally ill as psychotherapists had led us to believe. Dr. Hooker revealed the fact that at that time most therapeutic techniques being used as a "cure" for homosexuality were unsuccessful.

Five years later (1966), Fran and I were representatives at the Second North American Conference on Church and Family. Again, we met for a week and were brought up to date in regard to the latest research findings in all areas of human sexuality. By then other studies were confirming Dr. Hooker's findings, informing us that homosexuality is not a mental illness and that homosexuals are just as intelligent, knowledgeable, competent, physically fit, mentally and emotionally stable, trustworthy, and loyal as heterosexuals. These findings are very much in keeping with my own observations of gays and lesbians I have known. In fact, one of the most brilliant students I ever had (if not **the** most brilliant) was gay.

In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association removed "homosexuality" from their official manual that lists mental and emotional disorders, and in 1975 the American Psychological Association passed a resolution supporting this action. As early as 1999, the Governing Council of the American Counseling Association adopted a statement opposing the promotion of "conversion" or "reparative" therapy as a "cure" for individuals who are homosexual. In 2009, the American Psychological Association adopted a resolution condemning the practice, and the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy reported that inasmuch as homosexuality is not a disorder, there is no need for conversion therapy. The same position has been taken by most, if not all, of the professional organizations listed below under "References." With few exceptions today, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, social workers, and marriage and family therapists look with disfavor upon any attempt at conversion therapy. Rather than such therapy being helpful, we now know that it can do great harm to persons with a homosexual orientation and their families. In 2013, Alan Chambers closed Exodus International, stated that 99.9% of the people with whom they had counseled had not experienced a change in their sexual orientation, and offered his apologies to persons with a homosexual orientation and their families. A few states have passed laws forbidding conversion therapy for minors, and recently President Obama recommended that all states do so.

I may be wrong, and I hope I am, yet, it has often occurred to me that when persons opposed to same-sex marriage think of the sexual relationship between two persons of the same gender, they're thinking that the behavior is repulsive and only for the purpose of sexual pleasure. Closely related to

this is the belief that most, if not all, gay persons are promiscuous, seeking to engage in sexual relationships with any person of their same gender who is willing, including children. Such thinking is erroneous and indicative of a gross misunderstanding of the deeper meanings of our *sexual orientation*—terminology that was not in use until the mid to late 1980s. It is often my impression that persons strongly opposed to same-sex marriage fail to realize that gay and lesbian couples can love each other as deeply and as sincerely as heterosexual couples and that their sexual attraction for each other, though very important, is only one aspect of their total relationship.

In 1995, I wrote a paper entitled, "Sex, Sexuality, and Sexual Orientation," (*copy attached*) to clarify the meaning of each term, to express as explicitly as possible my own thinking about our sexuality (a wonderful gift from God—something good and beautiful within us rather than something to be ashamed of or afraid of), and to emphasize that the love lesbian and gay couples have for each other, as is true for heterosexual couples, is much more than sexual. It involves the desire for emotional, intellectual, and spiritual, as well as physical, intimacy. As is well known among persons with a homosexual orientation, same-sex couples can fulfill each other's needs for intimacy and can have a relationship that is just as deeply meaningful and enduring as that of heterosexual couples. According to the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association, numerous studies have revealed this to be true.

We also now know that same-sex couples do as good a job in parenting as heterosexual couples. The American Psychiatric Association reports that "Numerous studies have shown that the children of gay parents are as likely to be healthy and well adjusted as children raised in heterosexual households." It also says: "Children raised in gay or lesbian households do not show any greater incidence of homosexuality or gender identity issues than other children." (www.psychiatry.org/lgbt-sexual-orientation). This knowledge should help alleviate at least some of the fears often expressed by persons opposed to same-sex marriage.

The knowledge we have had for several years now about homosexual relationships has led our major medical and mental health organizations and those devoted to building strong, stable marriage and family relationships to express the need for granting gays and lesbians the same rights and privileges as heterosexuals by the approval of same-sex marriage. Most of these organizations filed briefs, individually or collectively, with the Supreme Court of the United States, presenting the knowledge we now have and urging the Justices to approve same-sex marriage in all 50 states. On the day the Supreme Court Decision was announced, the National Association of Social Workers, which had teamed up with The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, The American Medical Association, The American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, and several other organizations to present a brief, applauded The Supreme Court for its decision. The applause note included several of the benefits the decision provides for gay and lesbian couples. Several other professional organizations quickly expressed their appreciation for the Supreme Court's decision.

As we continue thinking about the knowledge we have about same-sex relationships, did you ever wonder where gays and lesbians come from? Some may be the sons and daughters of a mother and/or father who have a homosexual orientation. The majority, however, are the sons and daughters of heterosexual couples, and it is likely that 70% or more of their parents, regardless of their sexual orientation, are Christian. Perhaps, too, 70% or more of the sons and daughters with a homosexual orientation also believe themselves to be Christian. As we take a closer look at the homosexual issue, then, we must recognize that we are talking about "us," about persons who are born into and reared in "our" Christian families and who attend "our" churches regularly. Certainly we must be concerned about social justice for those outside the church as well as those within. The point I am

emphasizing here, however, is that we cannot think of gays, lesbians, and their families as "they" as though they were in some way set apart from "us." They are people we love and who love us; they are people we depend upon, trust, and have confidence in—at least until we learn that they are gay or lesbian. They are still, however, the same persons they were before we knew they were gay; why should our knowing make a difference? Some sons and daughters are bisexual, transgendered, or still questioning what their sexual orientation is. They, too, are a part of "us;" they, too, need our approval, our love, our support.

We may also wonder why some people have a homosexual orientation whereas most of us have a heterosexual orientation. It is my impression that most gays and lesbians believe they were born with a homosexual orientation, yet with all the research that has been done for many years now, we still do not know for sure what causes either orientation. Is it genetics, something that does or does not happen during pregnancy, something learned after birth, or possibly a combination of two or more of these factors? Although scientific evidence in recent years provides rather conclusive evidence that biological factors are involved, perhaps the most prevalent theory among professionals today is that our sexual orientation, through the interaction of both genetic and psychosocial factors, is most often firmly established within us before school age. Our sexual orientation, then, is not something we *choose*, and we may not become fully aware of whether we are homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual until middle childhood or early adolescence. (*A personal note: I found girls of my age very attractive when I was only 6!*)

Nor do we know how many gays and lesbians there are in our society or how many are living in a loving, caring, committed relationship with a person of their own gender. Our sexual orientation is generally regarded as being on a continuum, with persons who are *exclusively heterosexual* at one extreme and those who are *exclusively homosexual* at the other extreme. Persons between each of the two extremes and the center of the continuum are *predominantly homosexual* or *predominantly heterosexual*, whereas those at the center are *bisexual*, equally attracted to both sexes. We do not have any official data base distinguishing between heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual persons in our population. Several surveys in recent years reveal that persons who see themselves as homosexual range from about 1.6 percent to 3 or 4 percent. Perhaps one of the most reliable surveys was one made by the National Health Interview Survey, our government's premier tool for annually assessing Americans' health and behaviors. It reported in July 2014 that 1.6 percent of the adults surveyed said they were gay or lesbian, 0.7 percent considered themselves bisexual, and 1.1 percent said they were something else or that they did not know. The overwhelming majority, 96.6 percent labeled themselves as heterosexual. If we apply these percentages to our total population, this would mean that we currently have 5,139,370 persons in the United States who are gay or lesbian. It is estimated that about 1.2 million same-sex couples live together in the United States and that approximately 390,000 of those are now legally married (NHIS survey and estimates reported in the *Washington Post*: www.washingtonpost.com). Now that same-sex marriage is legal in all states, it is likely that the number of couples who are legally married will have increased dramatically by the time our 2020 Census is taken. Although such information is of interest to us, the actual numbers matter not in regard to whether gay and lesbian couples have our approval, our love, and our support.

Perhaps it should be noted at this point that *sexual orientation* refers *only* to whether a person is *homosexual*, *heterosexual*, or *bisexual*. Another concept, *sexual attraction*, although a significant part of one's sexual orientation, is a different concept, referring to persons, animals, or behaviors that one finds sexually attractive. Some persons who are strongly opposed to granting

gays and lesbians the same rights and privileges as everyone else believe that persons with a homosexual orientation—particularly males—find children sexually attractive and are more likely to molest children sexually than are persons with a heterosexual orientation. We have no evidence whatsoever to support such fears, and of course no one has the legal right to engage in sexual behavior with persons below a certain age, an age which varies slightly from one state to another. We do have evidence that children are far more likely to be sexually abused by a family member, a relative, a friend, or an acquaintance than they are by someone unknown to them.

We now know that the only significant difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals is their sexual orientation, and we have no evidence that there is anything *wrong* in a person having a homosexual orientation. Inasmuch as our sexuality is a part of our total being, it plays a significant role in one of the strongest motivating forces in human nature: the will to relate to another human being in a meaningful and abiding relationship, one that is deeply satisfying emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually, as well as sexually. For persons with a homosexual orientation, it is just as “natural” for them to want to enter into such a relationship with a person of their own gender as it is for persons with a heterosexual orientation to want to enter into such a relationship with a person of different gender. On the basis of what we now know about homosexuality and same-sex relationships, I know of no valid reason for us to doubt that gay and lesbian couples can love each other as deeply as heterosexual couples do, that they can be as happily married, that they can be just as good parents, and that their relationship can be just as enduring as the relationship of heterosexual couples.

Third Hurdle: *A third major hurdle in moving to the full-acceptance stance is the careful, thorough, conscientious examination of what one believes the Bible does or does not say about homosexuality and homosexual behavior.* This is a major question the church has focused upon for years, and for many Christians, it is perhaps the only question that has been addressed. Perhaps no one without a thorough knowledge of Hebrew and Greek can understand clearly what the earliest manuscripts actually have to say. And even among the most proficient scholars, there is not complete agreement. It is my impression, however, that more and more biblical scholars are rejecting the traditional interpretations of the eight scriptures most often cited as “proof” that all homosexual behavior is a sin (Genesis 1:19-29; Genesis 19:1-23; Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:17-18; Romans 1:18-2:11; I Corinthians 6:9-10, and I Timothy 1:10), and are arriving at less judgmental and less punitive interpretations. Two of the most meaningful articles I have read recently about these references were written by David P. Gushee, Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics and a leading evangelical ethics scholar. The articles, published in the January 2015 issue of *Sojourners* magazine, are entitled “Tackling the Hard Questions” (A new look at what scripture teaches Bible-believing Christians about gays, lesbians, and the church) and “Disputable Matters” (Five books that are changing the evangelical LGBT discussion about LGBT Christians and the church). All five of these books (listed below under *References*) were written by evangelical Christians, three of whom (including Professor Gushee) recently changed from a conservative stance regarding the ordination of persons with a homosexual orientation to a *full-acceptance* stance.

Instead of commenting upon each of the eight references that are most often referred to as supportive evidence for the traditional teachings of the church about homosexuality I wish to make a few general observations.

1. It is evident that all verses of scripture in the Bible that are often interpreted as referring to homosexuality (with one possible exception as discussed below) refer to same-sex **behavior** and not to a homosexual **orientation**. It appears, too, that all such references are based upon the premise that all persons are born *heterosexual*. The idea that a person could have a *homosexual orientation* never existed until long after the writings included in the

Bible had been written (actually not until about 40 years ago). Thus the writers of these documents apparently assumed that persons who engaged in homosexual activities made a conscious choice to engage in behavior that was contrary to their "natural" desires. There is no recognition of the fact that some persons could have a homosexual orientation and that their "natural" desires may be for love, affection, companionship, and sexual fulfillment to be experienced with a person of their own gender.

2. Most verses of scripture that have been interpreted as referring to homosexuality are about persons believed to be heterosexual engaging in sexual behaviors such as gang rape (as could have been true in Sodom if that is what the men of Sodom had in mind), promiscuity, prostitution, pedophilia, and perhaps other forms of sexual exploitation practiced in temple worship. These are sexual behaviors that would be just as wrong in heterosexual relationships as in homosexual relationships. Perhaps it should be noted, too, that had gang rape occurred in Sodom, it would have been a homosexual act engaged in, not just by a few men who may have had a homosexual orientation, but rather by many persons with **aheterosexual** orientation. According to the story, **all** the men of the city, both young and old, came to Lot's door. And is it not likely that most of the men were married? Thus the immorality of their possible intentions goes much deeper than homosexual behavior. Furthermore, I am astonished that Lot said to the men of the city, "I've got two daughters who are virgins. Let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them whatever you wish." (Genesis 19:8, Common English Bible)

3. There are no biblical references to sexual expression in a loving, caring, committed relationship between two persons of the same gender.

4. We have no record of Jesus having said anything about homosexuality. He is quoted in Matthew

10:15 as having made a reference to Sodom and Gomorrah. In this passage, it is clear that he is referring to the lack of hospitality rather than to homosexual behavior. Also, in Luke 17:28-30, Jesus speaks of the destruction of Sodom with no reference to homosexuality. There is considerable evidence that homosexual behavior has existed from early human history. Certainly Jesus would have been aware of it. Is it possible that he considered persons with a homosexual orientation in much the same way that he considered eunuchs—as persons who would not be expected to enter into a heterosexual marriage relationship (Matthew 19:12)? What he had to say about eunuchs was informational and in no way judgmental.

Jesus did say, however, that the second greatest commandment was that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. Persons with a homosexual orientation **are** our neighbors. For me to love my neighbor as I love myself, means to me that I will want my neighbor to have the same rights and privileges in life that I have.

5. In Matthew 19, Jesus is quoted as having said in response to a question about divorce, "Haven't you read that at the beginning the creator made them male and female? And God said, 'Because of this a man should leave his father and mother and be joined together with his wife, and the two will be one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, humans must not pull apart what God has put together." (Matthew 19: 4-6, Common English Bible) Opponents of same sex marriage often refer to this as proof that the marriage of one

man to one woman is the only form of marriage acceptable to God. There are numerous references in the Old Testament, however, to polygyny—the marriage of one man to several wives. Although most Jews had only one wife, polygyny was a common practice among prominent men of Jewish faith and for others whose financial status was such that they could afford more than one wife. Polygyny was still practiced during Jesus' time, yet we have no record of his having said anything about such marriages not being acceptable to God. Two of Paul's letters suggest the possibility that some husbands in the early Christian church had more than one wife (1 Timothy 3:1-2 and Titus 1:5-6). His instructions were that males who were seeking certain leadership positions in the church should be the husband of one wife. He said nothing in opposition to such marriages for males who were not seeking such positions. Neither Jesus nor Paul, and to the best of my knowledge, no one else in either the Old Testament or the New Testament condemned polygamous marriages. Although the marriage of one man to one woman could well be considered the ideal form of marriage among people of Jewish faith and early Christians, the marriage of one man to two or more wives appears to have been acceptable as well.

6. As we seek to understand the meaning of scripture there are several points we need to keep in mind.

First, stories recorded in the Old Testament were passed down orally for many generations before being written; thus the likelihood of some variations occurring through the telling and retelling of those events is very strong. The story about Sodom and Gomorrah, for example, is very similar to another story recorded in Judges 19. The places, the people, and the eventual outcome differ. Are these two entirely different stories, or are they variations of the same original story? Are they actual events that occurred or were they metaphors told to emphasize a point?

Second, the Bible has gone through many different translations, and as we recognize that biblical scholars themselves do not always agree on the meanings intended by the original writers, how can we be certain that our current translations (even though they may bring to us an accurate, overall message of God's love) portray the exact meanings of every detail intended by the original texts? For example, in regard to the one possible exception to all references to homosexuality referring to homosexual behavior instead of a homosexual orientation, the Revised Standard Version of the Bible uses the word "homosexuals" (which could refer to orientation) in 1 Corinthians 6:9. This apparently combines the term "effeminate" and the phrase "abusers of themselves with mankind" which appear in the King James version. In first century Christianity, the word interpreted as "effeminate" in the King James version meant "spineless." And the phrase interpreted as "abusers of themselves with mankind" had reference to temple prostitutes. The first century meaning, then, of "temple prostitutes" had clear reference to sexual behavior and could have included both homosexual and heterosexual behavior. The use of the word "homosexuals" instead of "spineless" or "effeminate" suggests the common stereotype that all persons who are effeminate (or who are spineless) have a homosexual orientation. We now know that one's sexual orientation cannot be determined on the basis of such characteristics. It appears, then, that the use of the word "homosexuals" in 1 Corinthians 6:9 does not convey the meaning intended by the original writings. Also, the Hebrew word which in English means "to know" is used 943 times in the Old Testament and in only 10 instances is it believed to refer to sexual behavior. It is only in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah that it has been interpreted as referring to homosexual behavior. Yet, no other biblical reference to Sodom and Gomorrah lists homosexuality as one

of their sins. Did the men of Sodom, then, intend to subject Lot's guests to gang rape, or did they only want to become acquainted with them? Here again, biblical scholars are not in agreement.

Third, another important consideration for me in seeking to know what the Bible does or does not say about this topic is that Moses, Paul and other persons whose teachings appear in the Bible did not have the degree of knowledge about homosexuality that we have today. As we examine our own attitudes, values, and beliefs in this area, is it not important for us to take into serious consideration current knowledge we have rather than basing our decisions solely upon what we have been taught all our lives that a few scriptural references mean?

Fourth, as I read about the commandments given to Moses in Leviticus, it is evident that all sexual behavior was believed to be for the purpose of procreation. This is likely the main reason that homosexual behavior was so strongly forbidden. Procreation continued to be at least the major purpose of sexual behavior for persons of Jewish faith and also for Christians until relatively recent years.

Fifth, it has always been rather puzzling to me that Christians accept certain passages of scripture that we *must* obey and yet ignore others that appear to me to be just as demanding. Leviticus 18:22 in the Common English Bible, for example, reads: "You must not have sexual intercourse with a man as you would a woman; it is a detestable practice." Then Leviticus 20:13 says, "If a man has sexual intercourse with a man as he would with a woman, the two of them have done something detestable. They must be executed; their blood is on their own heads." These two scriptures are still often used by Christians as "proof" that all homosexual behavior is a sin. I sincerely hope, however, that no Christian today would adhere to the commandment that the two men who engage in homosexual behavior must be executed. Yet this, too, according to the author of Leviticus, is a commandment given to Moses by God. How do Christians who genuinely believe that these scriptures are proof that all homosexual behavior is sin justify not believing that men involved in such behavior must be executed?

There are many other commandments listed in Leviticus that we no longer adhere to today and perhaps never have. A rather significant one, just a few verses from the one quoted above, reads as follows: "If a man sleeps with a woman during her menstrual period and has sexual contact with her, he has exposed the source of her blood flow and she has uncovered the same. Both of them will be cut off from their people." (Leviticus 20:18, Common English Bible) Although the punishment for their offense was not the death penalty, they were to be ostracized. In an earlier chapter in Leviticus, a woman who is in her menstrual period is "unclean" for seven days and is not to be touched. Although in times past such behavior has been somewhat taboo, I don't recall ever having been taught in school, in church, or anywhere else that a husband and wife must not engage in any form of sexual behavior during the wife's menstrual period (nor did I ever teach it!). We have known for years, of course, that the menstrual cycle is a perfectly normal part of a woman's sexuality and that it is perfectly okay for her to be touched, hugged, kissed and to engage in sexual activity during her period if it is mutually desirable. Some women find that an orgasmic experience during their menstrual period actually eases their menstrual pain.

Yet, the teachings in Leviticus about sexual behavior being forbidden during a woman's menstrual cycle are just as emphatic as are the teachings forbidding homosexual behavior. How do Christians who genuinely believe that scriptures in Leviticus are proof that all homosexual behavior is sin justify not believing that it is sinful for a husband and wife to engage in any form of sexual behavior during the wife's menstrual cycle? One theological

premise, based upon the teachings of both Paul and Jesus, is that the followers of Jesus are no longer under the Holiness Code in a literal sense. If that is true, then scriptures in Leviticus referring to homosexual behavior should no longer be referred to as proof that all homosexual behavior is a sin.

Fourth Hurdle: Question: *Did the present intolerance of persons with a homosexual orientation and even toward homosexual behavior in a loving, caring, committed relationship between two persons with a homosexual orientation result from a conscientious application of biblical literature and religious ethics or were scriptural references interpreted in such a way as to justify the prejudice and discrimination toward gays and lesbians that already existed in the church and within the general society?*

It is my own conviction that the latter is the case. As a sociologist and as a Christian, I have been very interested for many years in the reciprocal relationship between society and the church. I have been well aware of the influence that society has had and continues to have upon beliefs and practices within the church (including biblical interpretation), and I have also been well aware of influences the church has had upon society. Although we have been taught by the church for several generations now that opposition to homosexuality is based upon scripture, it is much more likely (and there is historical evidence to suggest this) that the church's position was based upon cultural attitudes and values generated within society. As people, particularly theologians, read the Bible, they were then able, perhaps even with utmost sincerity and no conscious intent to misrepresent the true meaning of scripture, to interpret a few scriptural references to homosexuality in such a way as to lend support to the negative attitudes and values they had acquired by virtue of having been reared in a particular culture.

To illustrate the point a bit further, many societies throughout the world, including our own, have practiced slavery at one time or another. Did slavery begin because people read the Bible and found that slavery was acceptable to God? Not likely. Slavery simply became a social custom as people interacted with one another in society. And once it became generally accepted, it was considered, as is true of most such social customs, the "right" thing to do. Religion is then often used to support the custom. When our society believed in slavery, even though some people objected to it all along, some theologians interpreted certain scriptural references in such a way as to support the practice of slavery, and even after slavery was discontinued in our society, many people sought scriptural references to support their continuing prejudices and discriminatory actions toward African Americans. As a graduate student at Louisiana State University, I read a book entitled, ***The Negro: A Beast***. The book was written by a Baptist minister in 1900. The author used what he believed to be scientific evidence and Biblical evidence that Negroes were created the same time beasts were—thus before human beings were created. He believed, then, that the Negro is therefore a beast, has no soul, and that slavery and other forms of discrimination are thus justified from a Christian point of view. Not many years ago a white pastor I knew well objected to his son marrying a woman of a different nationality because, "The Bible teaches against interracial marriage." I sincerely hope that most of us in the church today believe such interpretations of scripture to be grossly inaccurate.

Also, most societies throughout the world have believed in male superiority and have practiced male dominance. Our society is no exception, and biblical references are often used as "proof" that man is superior to woman and that God ordained that males are to be dominant over females. As noted earlier, it has only been in recent years that many of us in the church have begun to challenge the traditional interpretations of scripture that have kept woman in subjection to man. I am convinced that neither the belief that slavery was approved by God nor the belief in male superiority

and male dominance began as a result of biblical interpretation. And I am just as convinced that opposition to homosexuality did not begin as a result of biblical interpretation. In each of these situations (as well as many others), biblical interpretation has been used in support of the dominant thinking within society. And in each case, I believe the traditional interpretations of scripture to be inaccurate.

An admonition from Paul which relates directly to issues such as these is given in Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." This teaching, which I have often heard emphasized in the church, has always meant a lot to me in my work as a sociologist, particularly as I sought to confront societal attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors that were demeaning and degrading to persons. When we, as Christians, go along with the prejudices and discriminatory behaviors of the general society (which I believe the church is doing in its stance toward persons with a homosexual orientation), we are being "conformed to this world" (just as the church was conforming to this world in regard to racial prejudice and discrimination and prejudice and discrimination toward women), and we are, whether intentionally or not, lending support to attitudes and behaviors (and even to laws) that are demeaning and degrading to others. To me, "the renewal of your mind" in Paul's statement means the acquisition of further knowledge and deeper understanding that we "may prove what is the will of God."

Fifth Hurdle: *It is important for us to accept the fact that changes in our Christian beliefs and practices over a period of time, as well as changes in our social customs, are inevitable.* One underlying reason for this is that, as we engage in scientific research, we gain more knowledge about the universe in which we live; about the biological, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of being human; about human relationships; and about our relationship with our environment. As we incorporate the new findings into our daily lives both our social customs and our religious beliefs and practices do change. Many persons seem to be rather skeptical about the findings revealed to us through scientific research; others **know** that they are right and that any other way of thinking is totally inconceivable; and still others like the *status quo* so well that they are rather reluctant to make any changes. It is likely, however, that few if any adult Christians can say today that their religious beliefs are identical to those of their grandparents or even those of their parents. It is also likely that few if any Christians at age 50 can say that their religious beliefs are identical to what they were at age 25.

It is my impression that many people who are skeptical about scientific research seem to think that most (perhaps even all) scientists are non-Christian and that they are seeking to undermine our Christian beliefs. Neither point of view is true of course. For me there has never been any conflict between science and religion. I believe God to be the creator of all that is, and both science and religion are seeking to know the *truth* about what God has created. When the two do not agree, as is sometimes true, then either the scientific evidence has been misinterpreted or the religious belief is in error.

Throughout our history, religious beliefs have changed, in part at least, as a result of scientific findings. Scripture has been used to justify racial prejudice and discrimination, slavery, infanticide, patriarchal authority, the ownership of wives by their husbands, the death penalty, war, the burning of witches, the belief that women have one less rib than men, the belief that the earth is flat with four corners, and the belief that the sun rotates around the earth; it has been used to forbid divorce, the remarriage of divorced persons, the use of birth control and family planning, interracial marriage, interfaith marriage, and bodily adornment such as makeup and neckties. And, of course, scripture has been used to justify prejudice and discrimination toward persons with a homosexual

orientation. Reason, scientific evidence, a deeper understanding of scriptural references, and from my perspective, continuing revelation from God have led us to change most of these beliefs; yet some are still held dogmatically by many persons.

A good example of one significant change that has occurred during the past 45 years is our gradual acceptance of divorce and remarriage, both within our general society and within many of our churches. As late as the 1960s and 70s it was not at all unusual for ordained ministers to refuse to perform a marriage ceremony for someone who had been divorced, and there was often opposition to persons who were divorced and remarried serving in leadership positions in the church. Although these points of view may still be true in some denominations today, I venture to say that most ordained ministers are agreeable to performing marriage ceremonies for divorced persons. And there appears to be far less opposition to divorced persons who have remarried serving in leadership positions, including the role of pastor. In my many years of teaching and counseling, my major emphasis was upon helping persons I taught and those with whom I counseled to build strong, stable, and deeply satisfying marriage relationships. Yet, I was very much aware that, for various reasons, it would be almost impossible for some couples to be happily married. For their own physical, emotional, intellectual, and/or spiritual well-being one or both persons in an unhappy marital relationship during the latter part of the 20th century were feeling more free than ever before to file for divorce. It was becoming more and more evident that the qualities conducive to a successful marriage for couples in a nuclear-equalitarian relationship were very different than those emphasized in the extended-patriarchal family system prevalent during the days of Jesus.

In 1976, I wrote an article entitled, *Divorce and Remarriage*, for publication in a small journal sponsored by a few young adult Christians: *COLLOQUIUM: Contemporary Christian Comment*. In the first paragraph, I distinguished between the very rigid position that there must be no divorce for any cause other than adultery and, at the other extreme, a position that takes divorce and remarriage far too lightly. I then said, "It appears to me that neither extreme is in keeping with the basic principles of love, forgiveness, the worth of persons, the right of all persons to enjoy the abundant life, and the sacredness of the marriage relationship as emphasized by the teachings of Christ." In regard to what Jesus said about divorce in Matthew 19, I said, ". . . he is speaking of the ideal marriage relationship which God intended from the beginning of creation. But Moses, recognizing the humanness and imperfection of persons, permitted divorce. Christ does not condemn Moses' decision; he does say this was not God's original intent." Among what I considered to be justifiable grounds for divorce, I referred to the discovery of a couple soon after marriage that one person was straight, the other was gay. Although the two could be good friends and compatible in many ways, the chances of their being happily married would be very slim. I have no doubt that in a situation like this, Jesus would readily approve of their getting a divorce. In regard to my discussion in the article about remarriage, I wrote, after talking about my strong belief in the stability of marriage, "If divorce does occur, and if either or both have the opportunity of a good marriage with someone else, I really believe God would rejoice with them in their happiness rather than condemning them for their actions." What I said in the article was much the same as a presentation I made as a guest speaker in a conference on divorce and remarriage sponsored by a group of African American pastors. It was my impression that these views on divorce and remarriage were generally well received.

Our gradual acceptance of divorce and remarriage was made possible by the increased knowledge we have about human behavior and human relationships, particularly within the bonds of marriage, and by a deeper understanding of scriptural references. Is it possible that a similar approach could result in the approval of same-sex marriage?

Another significant change that, in some ways at least, relate to our beliefs about homosexuality is in regard to our beliefs, attitudes, values, and feelings about human sexuality. In most western societies sexual attitudes and values have stemmed largely from Judeo-Christian teachings. A careful reading of the Old Testament reveals that sexuality was a normal part of the daily life of the Hebrews. Its basic purpose in life was for procreation, yet sexual attraction between males and females and sexual pleasure were not condemned. There were restrictions upon sexual behavior, as is true in all societies, and there is much evidence of misinformation about sex, particularly the sexuality of women. But sex itself was not regarded as evil. This generally is true of New Testament writings as well.

From the early centuries following Jesus' death and until well into the 20th century, however, Christian teachings generally portrayed our sexuality as evil. The early church fathers, having been influenced by ancient Greek philosophers and nearby cultures where everything pertaining to the flesh was considered evil, introduced negative teachings about the nature of human sexuality into the Christian faith. Viewing sex and sexual desire as evil, they saw reproduction as the only justification for sexual intercourse. It was not considered to be an expression of love and was not to be engaged in for sexual pleasure. St. Augustine (354-430 C.E.), for example, though regarding coitus as good in that it was God's plan for procreation, considered sexual desire as evil. His reasoning then was, according to one author, "Since concupiscence was inevitably linked with human intercourse, every concrete act of intercourse was evil, and therefore every child literally had been conceived by the sin of its parents." (Vern L. Bullough, *Homosexuality: A History*, page 26) I know of nothing in the teachings of Christ that could lead to such conclusions, and I find it inconceivable that any part of one's being could be regarded as evil.

For hundreds of years, however, such negative teachings persisted in Europe. They were brought to colonial America, then reinforced during the Victorian era. Although more positive points of view toward sexuality were voiced from time to time, the negative teachings prevailed. For centuries people were programmed to be ashamed of their sexual organs and their sexual thoughts, feelings, and fantasies. Perhaps before the middle of the 20th century a more positive point of view toward human sexuality was beginning to prevail. Yet even as late as the 1940s and 1950s in the U.S., it was not at all unusual to hear women refer to men (perhaps of age 50 or above) who were still interested in sex as "dirty old men." Nor was it unusual during that time for a young woman who was engaged to be told by her mother that because of the "animal-like" nature of her husband, he would want to have sex with her and that it was her duty to let him do so. She was also told that she would not like it and might find it very painful. Even as late as 1980, someone walked into my office one morning holding up the textbook for the human sexuality course I was teaching. This person regarded the textbook as pornographic, was strongly opposed to the course being taught at all, and said that our young people did not need that kind of information until they were engaged to be married and that all they needed to know could be covered in premarital counseling. Actually, I had been teaching about human sexuality in marriage and family courses since 1951, and recognizing the need for a more in-depth coverage of the subject, I began teaching a full-semester course in human sexuality in 1971. It was a required course for students majoring in marriage and family and one of the most popular elective courses for other students. Because so many students wanted to take the course, I taught it each semester and often during the summer.

For many years now we have known that our sexuality is a perfectly normal, natural, and beautiful part of our total being; it is nothing for us to be ashamed of or afraid of. We have known, too, that this is just as true for females as it is for males. Yes, woman is just as sexual as man! We can now appreciate more fully the significance of sexual intimacy in the marriage relationship as a way of

affirming one another, as a means of expressing genuine love and affection, and as one of the deepest ways of human sharing. Is it possible that this is just as true for gay and lesbian couples as for heterosexual couples? I know of no valid reason to think otherwise.

Our more positive acceptance of our sexuality, particularly during the 1960s and 70s very likely enabled gays and lesbians to come to a deeper appreciation of their own sexuality and to become more accepting of their sexual orientation. It was during that time that they were beginning to feel more free to come "out of the closet" and to protest the prejudice and discrimination directed toward them in our society.

Additional knowledge about the universe in which we live was not needed for any of the above changes. But may we never forget that Galileo, the Italian astronomer and physicist of Catholic faith, proved that planet earth rotates around the sun (heliocentric) rather than the sun rotating around the earth (geocentric). Several Biblical references (including Psalms 93:1, 96:19, 104:5, Chronicles 16:30, and Ecclesiastes 1:5) were cited by Christians who opposed Galileo's findings. Rather than his findings being accepted by Pope Paul V, who respected Galileo and had been a good friend of his, the Catholic Church found him guilty of heresy in 1633 and sentenced him to house arrest for the last eight years of his life. In 1992, 350 years after Galileo's death, Pope John Paul II, who made more than 100 apologies for wrongdoings of the Catholic Church in years past, offered his apology to Galileo. The Catholic Church officially apologized to him in 2000.

Although Galileo's scientific research and discoveries related to the functioning of the universe in which we live, the resistance to his findings is much the same as the resistance to the scientific knowledge we now have about homosexuality.

And let us not forget Peter's vision (Acts 10-11). He and other Jewish followers of Jesus thought that the good news of Jesus Christ was only for persons of Jewish faith. At the end of Peter's vision, a voice said to him three times, "Never consider unclean what God has made pure." (Acts 10:15, Common English Bible) The day after his vision, directed by the Spirit of God, Peter went to the home of Cornelius, a Roman military commander who worshipped God and had been instructed by an angel of God to invite Peter to his house to speak to him. When he went into Cornelius' home, he found a large gathering of people—household staff, family members, and friends who also worshipped God—and said to them, "You all realize that it is forbidden for a Jew to associate or visit with outsiders. However, God has shown me that I should never call a person impure or unclean." (Acts 10:28-29, Common English Bible) Peter's vision and his experience at Cornelius' home paved the way for him and Jesus' other disciples to make a major change in their religious beliefs—they came to realize that the good news of Jesus Christ was for Gentiles, even males who were not circumcised, as well as for persons of Jewish faith.

Many gays and lesbians, including those in loving, caring, committed relationships, strongly believe that they are just as devout Christians as anyone else. For Christians who continue to believe that all homosexual behavior is sinful, is it possible that Peter's vision, particularly the concluding words, "Never consider unclean what God has made pure.", could be the catalyst needed to enable them to change their way of thinking and move to the *full-acceptance* stance?

Neither science nor religion is firmly fixed forever; both are continually changing—hopefully in the direction of greater and greater truth. We must, of course, be very cautious in making changes. Yet, the fact of change adds to rather than detracting from the validity and significance of both science and religion. I believe very strongly that our approval, our love, our support of gay and lesbian couples would enable us all to live our lives more abundantly. With the knowledge we now have about homosexuality and the changing positions of many Biblical scholars, I sincerely hope

that more and more Americans who disapprove of same-sex marriage will change their way of thinking and move to the *full-acceptance* stance.

Sixth Hurdle: *For persons who have not been in a close relationship with persons they knew to be homosexual, it would be helpful for them to become well acquainted with single persons who are gay and also with same-sex couples who are living together in a loving, caring, committed relationship.* Many parents who approve same-sex marriage today have moved to that position only after discovering that a daughter or son was gay. Perhaps at first they were devastated, yet they soon realized that their daughter or son was the same lovable kid she or he had always been. Many persons who are strongly opposed to same-sex marriages have never been in a close relationship with persons they knew to be homosexual. One very effective way, then, to reach the *full-acceptance* stance is to become personally acquainted with gays and lesbians, both those who are single and those who are either married or in committed relationships. Such acquaintances would likely lead those who are opposed to the goals being sought by gays and lesbians to carefully think through their reasons for believing the way they do and to come to realize that persons with a homosexual orientation are persons of supreme worth; that they are as normal mentally, emotionally, and spiritually as anyone else; that they have basically the same values and goals that others have; that those who believe themselves to be Christian are just as loyal and faithful in their beliefs as heterosexual Christians, and that they are as dedicated to building as strong, stable, enduring marriages as are heterosexual couples. Once they have this additional knowledge, perhaps they could accept the fact that gays and lesbians are their neighbors who are to be loved as they love themselves.

Now that we have considered these six hurdles, I have a few questions. Do not we, as Christians and as citizens of a nation based upon the concepts of freedom and the equality of all persons, have a responsibility for seeking to eliminate misunderstanding, fear, hatred, prejudice, and the many forms of discrimination directed toward **all** persons, including those with a homosexual orientation? Do not we, as Christians and as American citizens, have the responsibility of going far beyond the mere ending of prejudice and discrimination to demonstrate understanding, love, acceptance, and affirmation of the supreme worth of **all** persons, including those with a homosexual orientation? Do not we, as Christians and as American citizens, have then the responsibility of seeking to understand as much as possible about homosexuality and of seeking to discover effective ways of relating to and ministering to gays and lesbians and the families of gays and lesbians? Is it too much to ask that we give our approval, our love, our support to gay and lesbian couples?

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Yes, Fran and I were very happily married for almost 69 years. I can't imagine what my life would have been like during those years if Fran and I had not been permitted to marry the one person we loved more than any other. Nor can I imagine what our lives would have been like had we not experienced the approval, the love, and the support of our families, our friends, our church, and of the general society. I have no doubt whatsoever that gay and lesbian couples will find much joy and happiness as they build together strong, stable, meaningful marriages. The joy and happiness they experience can be even greater if they know they have our approval, our love, our support.

The Supreme Court of the United States has given persons with a homosexual orientation the legal right in every state to enter into same-sex marriages. It is now up to those of us who are Christian, as well as all other American citizens, to give gay and lesbian couples our approval, our love, our support to help them build as strong, stable, meaningful marriages as possible.

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Papers Attached:

- Martin and Fran Norris, *Let's Encourage Same-Sex Marriage*, 1997.
- Fran and Martin Norris, *Because We Care: Our Message to the Church about Persons with a Homosexual Orientation*, 1995
- Martin L. Norris, *Sex, Sexuality, and Sexual Orientation*, 1995

September 14, 2015

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Let's Encourage Same-Sex Marriages

Martin and Fran Norris

Recently we attended a wedding ceremony in which two young women pledged to love and cherish each other for life. Their commitment union was celebrated at the home of one of the women with about a hundred friends and relatives present. These young women are intelligent, delightful, responsible, emotionally mature persons with a strong system of values. Both are college graduates (one graduated this spring with a 4.0 average in two majors: Family Science and Christian Ministries), and both will pursue graduate study in preparation for professional careers. As is true of millions of persons who are gay or lesbian, they will make commendable contributions to the well-being of others and to the whole of society.

Same-sex unions occur for thousands of persons with a homosexual orientation each year. It is our conviction that such unions are to be encouraged and given the same legal status as heterosexual marriages. Our reasons?

First, **persons with a homosexual orientation deserve the same rights and privileges as everyone else.** Same-sex couples see themselves as married, yet they do not have the legal rights and privileges others have. A gay person may not be able to include the partner on her or his health insurance. If a gay person's partner is injured or becomes seriously ill, she or he may be forbidden to visit that person or to have any input as to medical treatment. If the person dies, the partner may not be welcome at the funeral or permitted any voice about the ceremony or burial. Even though the deceased person's partner may have a durable power of attorney, it may be challenged, as can a will, and be revoked by the court. These and many other denials of rights and privileges are not only possibilities; they are realities.

To deny same-sex couples *equal* rights (not *special* rights) is demeaning, reducing them to second-class citizenship. We all benefit when all responsible, law-abiding citizens are fully valued and included as respected members of our communities.

Second, **feelings of attraction to one another, loving each other, and wanting to live together in a lifetime relationship are as natural desires for gay persons as they are for heterosexual persons.** Perhaps it is difficult for many people to comprehend the fact that we differ from one another in our basic sexual orientation. Most of us are predominantly or exclusively heterosexual, while others (perhaps ten percent—the actual percentage doesn't matter) are predominantly or exclusively homosexual. Many people also fail to realize that a lesbian or gay couple can love each other as sincerely and as deeply as a heterosexual couple. Their attraction to one another, as is true of other couples, is much more than sexual. It involves the desire for emotional, intellectual, and spiritual, as well as physical intimacy. As is well known among persons who are gay, same-sex couples fulfill each other's needs for intimacy and have relationships just as meaningful and enduring as heterosexual couples have.

Third, **the acceptance and affirmation of same-sex unions affirms the value of the family and encourages family values and stability.** Persons with a homosexual orientation have the same values others have. They want to love and be loved; to have security and respect; to be responsible, productive citizens; to have caring, supportive relationships in their parental families; to have a stable, fulfilling marital relationship. Those with children want to be responsible parents. Many gay persons are strong in their religious faith. The realization that gay persons are normal, loving, caring, responsible people would bring strength and stability to millions of families now torn apart, not because a family member is gay, but *because of the traditional negative attitudes toward persons with a homosexual orientation.*

The acceptance of same-sex marriages would also strengthen our family system by eliminating many divorces. Because of society's attitudes, gay persons often feel compelled to enter into heterosexual marriages—unions that usually bring pain and disillusionment to all. Most of the 2.5 to 3.5 million single parents who are gay became single parents in the same way millions of other people do—through divorce. Of the gay friends we have, most are single parents who are divorced. Marriage was a traumatic experience for them and their spouse, and the divorce was painful, not only for them, but also for their children, parental families, and friends. Much pain could be avoided by permitting gay persons to enter into socially

sanctioned same-sex unions. Society always benefits by promoting stable, committed relationships.

As is true for some heterosexual persons, not all gay persons want to marry. It is our conviction, however, that those who want to enter into a legal marital union deserve the right to do so.

September 28, 1997

Because We Care

Our Message to the Church about Persons with a Homosexual Orientation

Fran and Martin Norris

On several occasions during the past year, we have been asked the question: "Why are you here?" It has been asked, particularly by gays and lesbians, at gatherings of persons who are concerned about social and spiritual justice for persons with a homosexual orientation. With no hesitation whatsoever, our immediate response is, "Because we care."

We care that young people with a homosexual orientation experience such intense confusion, frustration, shame, and guilt in coming to the realization that they are gay or lesbian. We care that it is such a painful experience of facing up to the reality of who they are that many commit suicide. We care that young people are hesitant to tell their parents about their homosexual orientation, fearing that their parents will no longer love them and will reject them totally. We care that gays and lesbians feel compelled to keep their sexual orientation a secret from their friends, their relatives, co-workers, and particularly people within the church. We care that once their sexual orientation is known, gays and lesbians no longer feel welcome in the churches they have attended all their lives, knowing that they are looked upon as the vilest of all sinners. We care that young people with a homosexual orientation feel compelled to enter into a heterosexual marriage, thus bringing tremendous pain to themselves and their partner and often to children, particularly if the marriage ends in divorce, as such marriages often do. We care that gays and lesbians are led to believe by their pastors and other Christians that if they have enough faith in God, God will change their sexual orientation. The pain they experience when it doesn't happen must be almost unbearable. We care that the civil rights, particularly housing, job security, health insurance, and inheritance rights, of persons with a homosexual orientation are not protected by law. We care that persons with a homosexual orientation are subjected to tremendous emotional and physical abuse in our society. We care that, through no fault of their own, they are hurting so deeply as a result of the prejudice and discrimination directed toward them.

We care that the parents of persons with a homosexual orientation experience such pain and grief when they discover that a son or daughter is gay. They, too, have been conditioned to believe that homosexuality is one of the most despicable sins

imaginable. We care that the parents of gays and lesbians hurt so much for their son or daughter, not because they are gay, but because they know of the pain their son or daughter experiences by living in such a highly prejudiced, homophobic society. We care that parents, because of the stigma attached to homosexuality by the church and the general society, do not feel free to reveal, even to their closest friends and relatives, that a son or daughter is gay. We care that parents do not feel free to talk with their pastor about it. We care that many parents, wondering what they have done wrong, blame themselves for a son or daughter being gay. We care that some parents feel betrayed, believing that a son or daughter has *chosen* to be gay, and that this is their way of rebelling against their parents. We care that some parents believe that the only *Christian* thing for them to do is to reject, or perhaps disown, a gay son or daughter. We care that some parents insist that if a gay son or daughter has enough faith, God will *cure* their sexual orientation. We care that some parents insist that a gay son or daughter must secure therapy for the purpose of changing their sexual desires.

We care that society directs such strong prejudice and discrimination toward persons with a homosexual orientation. We care that the church's teachings about homosexuality in effect, though perhaps not intentionally, tend to affirm and support the prejudices and discriminatory behaviors of the general society. We care that the traditional teachings of the church are demeaning to persons with a homosexual orientation. We care that the church looks upon all homosexual behavior, even in loving, caring, committed relationships as the most despicable of all sins. We care that Christians are so convinced that all homosexual behavior is wrong, they are unwilling to consider the possibility that God's love and grace include gays and lesbians as they are: human beings of supreme worth who, with only the exception of their sexual orientation, are just like everyone else. We care that the traditional beliefs about homosexuality are based upon stereotypical attitudes and false information. We care that there is so little understanding of persons with a homosexual orientation and that there is so little if any desire to seek further understanding. We care that most people, including Christians, are so convinced they are right that they are unwilling to examine recent research evidence or to seek any further understanding of what it means to have a homosexual orientation.

As we express our own cares about persons with a homosexual orientation, we are very much aware that we are not alone. It is gratifying to know that a growing number of persons are caring just as deeply as we are. We are pleased that many of these are openly expressing their concerns. We care that many others, however, often for reasons known only to them, do not feel free at this time to express their support openly. The dilemma they face is much the same as that faced by gays and lesbians

who are torn between their desire to be open and their fear of what may happen if they were to be open.

December 6, 1995

SEX, SEXUALITY, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Martin L. Norris

When such concepts as *sex*, *sexuality*, and *homosexual orientation* are used, it is likely that most people think only of the biological aspects of human sexuality or of specific sexual behaviors. Although such an understanding may be appropriate for the word *sex*, it is not at all appropriate for *sexuality* and *sexual orientation*, whether *homosexual* or *heterosexual*. Human sexuality is much more than *sex*, and sexual orientation is much more than *sex*.

During my career as a sociologist, I specialized in teaching courses in marriage and family relations (now an academic discipline known as *family science*). A core course in the family science major is a course in human sexuality. I began this course each semester (I am now retired) by discussing "The Nature and Meaning of Human Sexuality." As a Christian, I have always regarded our sexuality as a wonderful gift from God. Thus I always stressed in my classes that our sexuality is something good and beautiful within us rather than something to be ashamed of or afraid of. Unfortunately, the latter point of view, with its primary focus upon *sex*--the physical aspects of our sexuality, has been the more prevalent one for several centuries. This has led to our society being referred to by some scholars as an "anti-sex" society. The negativism of society's traditional approach has hindered our search for a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of our sexuality, including knowledge about sexual orientation. The more accepting we become of our sexuality as something good and beautiful within us, the more free we are to seek to understand its nature and meaning in our lives, regardless of our sexual orientation.

My own approach to the nature and meaning of human sexuality has been to view it as a dynamic part of our total personhood. I like to think of four different dimensions of human nature: the physical/biological, the emotional, the intellectual, and the spiritual. Our sexuality is a part of our physical being, and it functions according to basic biological principles. It is a perfectly normal, natural part of our being that has been with us from the very beginning of our existence. There is nothing about the anatomical nature of our sexuality or its physiological functioning for us to be ashamed of or afraid of.

Human beings, however, are also emotional beings. We have the capacity to experience a variety of feelings such as joy, fear, anger, love, shame, guilt, compassion, happiness, sadness, frustration, confusion, and even depression. Even thoughts about sexuality may result in one or more such feelings, and fantasies about sexual behavior are almost certain to engender some feelings. It is very unlikely that one can engage in any form of sexual expression without experiencing some emotions about it. Whether such feelings are negative or positive depends upon our own background of experiences and upon our own attitudes, values, and beliefs about sexuality. Our sexuality, then, is very much a part of the emotional nature of our being. Although sexual expression may be at times and for some persons little if any more than a physical act for physical pleasure, it cannot in reality be separated from one's emotional nature.

As human beings, we also have the intellectual capacity to think, to reason, to learn, and to make decisions for ourselves. We are creatures of learning and habit, not creatures of instinct. Thus we learn about sexuality during the socialization process that begins at birth and continues throughout our lives. In this process, we acquire the feelings, attitudes, values, and beliefs about sexuality and sexual behavior passed down from one generation to another. Although much that we learn is beneficial, we also learn things that are untrue and harmful. Fortunately, as intellectual beings, we can examine carefully the things we have been taught in light of the additional knowledge we have today and formulate our own thinking about sexuality. The more knowledge we have, the more capable we become of formulating our own attitudes, values, and beliefs and of making responsible decisions about our sexual behavior. Human sexuality is very much a part of the intellectual dimension of human nature.

A fourth aspect of human nature is what I believe to be a spiritual dimension—something inherent within us that calls us into relationship with a supreme intelligence that we call God. If we think of our sexuality as having been created within us by God and of God having made possible the intense degree of love that two people can share with each other, then, in a very real sense, a sexual relationship with that person as an expression of genuine love and affection becomes a spiritual act. It can also be said that when a man and a woman engage in sexual intercourse that results in bringing new life into being, they are becoming partners with God in the continuing process of creation. This is not to say that reproduction is the only purpose or even the primary purpose of human sexuality. Our sexuality is also for the purpose of giving and receiving sexual pleasure in a loving, caring, committed, relationship. This can be meaningful and fulfilling spiritually as well as physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

Human sexuality, then, is a part of every dimension of human nature; it is a part of our total personality, our total being. This is just as true for persons with a homosexual orientation as it is for persons with a heterosexual orientation. The nature and meaning of human sexuality is essentially the same for all persons regardless of their sexual orientation.

As a part of our total personhood, our sexuality plays a significant role in one of the strongest motivating forces in human nature: the will to relate to another human being in a deeply meaningful and abiding relationship. Although this strong desire for such a relationship usually includes the desire for sexual fulfillment, it also calls for a deep degree of intimacy for every dimension of human nature. For such relationships to endure, there needs to be a deeply satisfying emotional, intellectual, and spiritual relationship as well as a fulfilling *sexual* relationship at the biological dimension. In reality, sexual fulfillment, though very important, becomes a relatively small part of the total relationship.

For most people (those with a heterosexual orientation), the desire to relate to another person in this way calls for a person of the other sex. For those of a homosexual orientation, however, the desire to relate to another person in a deeply meaningful and abiding way calls for a person of the same sex. In neither case is this desire simply to find someone who is physically attractive and with whom one can experience a satisfying sexual relationship. In each case, the desire is to find someone with whom one can relate as a total person and with whom one can experience a deeply intimate and satisfying relationship in all dimensions of one's personhood. The will to relate to another person in this way is just as strong and just as natural for a person with a homosexual orientation as for a person with a heterosexual orientation. In neither situation is the direction of one's desire a matter of choice for the individual. The more I learn about sexual orientation, the more convinced I become that genetics has far more to do with the development of a person's orientation than does the environment in which one is reared. And to the best of our knowledge, a person's sexual orientation

is not subject to change.

If we could recognize that the nature and meaning of human sexuality is essentially the same for all persons, whatever their sexual orientation, and that a homosexual orientation involves the desire for a complete union with a person of the same sex rather than simply a desire for sexual fulfillment, perhaps the fear, prejudice, and discrimination toward persons with a homosexual orientation could be eliminated.

6-13-1995



