

STATEMENT ON HOMOSEXUALITY  
For the Commission on Social Concerns  
by Val Clear

What is a homosexual?

Perhaps the best way is to start with H. M. Riggie's approach: "What It Is Not." A homosexual is not a child molester (95% of child molesters are heterosexual), a sexual athlete, an effeminate male or a masculine female. What a homosexual is, is a person who finds (for reasons not yet clear to scholars) that his/her interests are in members of their own sex. As with heterosexuals, this may or may not involve physical sexual relations. As with heterosexuals, some live upright, wholesome lives above reproach. As with heterosexuals, some are grossly immoral.

Sociological Background.

The present debate regarding homosexuality recalls other rather similar debates in the history of the Christian Church. Some of the most vitriolic statements ever made about fellow human beings were made by Christians regarding other Christians who were also abolitionists. Those who opposed slavery were cruelly attacked (verbally and physically) and frequently by a person who carried a Bible in his hand and quoted Scripture. It is not difficult for a partisan to prove to his own satisfaction that slavery is a New Testament doctrine. About 50 years later the Women's Suffrage Movement encountered the same kind of opposition from somewhat the same people and also on a New Testament basis. It is not difficult for an anti-feminist to prove to his own satisfaction that the Apostle Paul taught masculine superiority.

In my own time I have lived through a period when gold frames on eye glasses or gold cases for watches were forbidden in the Church of God. When I came to Anderson College the catalogue carried the stipulation that students would not be permitted to attend moving picture shows. I have listened to a minister in the Church of God pulpit preach against bobbed hair many times. My pastor's wife (Mrs. Estel E. Perry at the time he was President of the Anderson College Board of Trustees) did not get a wedding ring until her 25th wedding anniversary in 1940. D. S. Warner provided the saints with moving diatribes against the use of coffee and tea, linking them rhetorically with cocaine and other hard drugs. And one of the most inviolable proscriptions in the Church of God during the first fifth of this century was divorce.

The Establishment invariably resists change. This is as it should be. The function of an institution in our society is to preserve the values of the past. But the Church that Jesus founded ought to assume leadership in cutting through what is old. It ought to produce new insights into the will of God. It should be a growing, unfolding, expanding fellowship of those who respond to new light as God reveals it to them. The function of the Church in our time is to manifest God's creative grace. It should be our task to re-interpret the New Testament and its principles as basic understandings by which the grace of God is mediated to mankind in a changing world. Let me illustrate: The institution of slavery in the New Testament is not explicitly forbidden, but the principles laid out in Eph. 6:5-9 and Col. 3:22-4:1 sew the seeds of death of that institution. Slavery could not survive if the principles of the New Testament were manifested; when committed and courageous Christians took up the issue, slavery fell.

The great religious and social issues are always fought by indirection and by camouflage. Euphemisms, evasions, and rationalizations are the language of controversy. School bussing is opposed as if out of sympathy for a child required to spend an hour on the bus each morning rather than because of an objection to white females being in classrooms with black males. We always find good reasons for doing ungood things.

What ought to be the Christian position on homosexuality?

The following appears to me to be sound and operational principles for a Christian community.

- (1) All human beings are sexual human beings. Some are heterosexual, some bisexual, some homosexual.
- (2) Each Christian is expected to handle his/her sexuality in a responsible and fulfilling manner. All Christians, whether hetero-, bi-, or homosexual are required to lead morally upright lives.
- (3) Social patterns change and the Church must speak to each new generation's needs.
- (4) New Testament statements should be handled with great care because they may be dealing with a setting different from our day, just as we use great care in recasting Paul's stringent statements about women and about divorce. The phenomenon of homosexual life styles as seen today is distinct from the male temple prostitution of Paul's day.
- (5) We do not understand what causes a brother or sister to be bisexual or homosexual. It appears not to be genuinely volitional. But whatever the cause we must respect his/her right and obligation to seek God's will as God leads, and we should avoid becoming an obstacle to that free pursuit. In Christ there should be freedom to respond to Christ's leadings. Nor should any one of us circumscribe a radius within which Christ is required to lead.
- (6) In short, we should apply to all persons the same moral and ethical standards, the same tests of fellowship. Sexual orientation in itself is not a barrier to God's grace in the heart and it should not be a factor in fellowship. The Church of God is composed of all who have found Jesus Christ as Savior. That one is heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual seems not in itself to be relevant. A chaste, responsible person living in response to God's leadings has every right to full fellowship among the saints. Anything less is evidence that it is not the church that Jesus founded.

# COLLOQUY

## CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN COMMENT

homosexuality

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# The Anita Bryant Syndrome

by Val B. Clear

In the closing minutes of the General Assembly of the Church of God in June 1977, a resolution was presented by the Business Committee that sought to give direction to the church in dealing with current developments related to homosexuals.

I thought the resolution was rather mild. It was much more cautious than I would have preferred, but, recognizing that anything that is to pass has to be reduced to a least common denominator, I was grateful that the Business Committee had come in with it even in its diluted form.

For a while it appeared that the Assembly would take rather routine action and pass the resolution. But the debate which followed was a disappointment. Given an opportunity to follow the lead of the resolution, the Assembly could have assumed a constructive posture, could have been redemptive, could have laid a firm foundation for the ministry of reconciliation that Paul commends. Instead, after several condemnatory speeches crowded with ideas wrapped in traditional cliches (the most glaring exception: realistic, helpful comments by a laywoman who had lived on military bases as a chaplain's wife much of her life), the resolution was withdrawn by the Business Committee. Under the circumstances, I thought it was the proper thing to do; nothing would have been gained by prolonging a debate where both sides are firmly convinced that God is leading them. How uncomfortable God must feel at such times!

The issue has arisen as a result of the movement in Dade County, Florida to remove certain civil protections previously accorded persons of homosexual orientation. Anita Bryant has become the symbol of the conviction that all homosexuals are less than complete human beings, are a menace to society (in particular, to small children), and that the community not merely has a right but a duty to expel them.

The real issue never surfaced in the General Assembly's debate. It is strange but true that it rarely enters discussions of the Gay Christian Movement at all. Even gays do not often introduce it. I do not understand why.

The real issue is the *manner* in which one's sexuality is handled. There is no difference in the standards of Christian conduct required of homosexuals or heterosexuals. A chaste homosexual is neither better nor worse than a chaste heterosexual. A promiscuous heterosexual is neither better nor worse than a promiscuous homosexual. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. It is also level at the pearly gates.

We are unduly influenced by stereotypes. Because we have limited person-to-person communication across lifestyle lines, we do not really see each other. The "straight" community tends to perceive the homosexual as a recognizably effeminate man who is apt to prey on small children. His driving interest is one-night stands, and public restrooms or parks are his hunting grounds. He is vulnerable to blackmail.

All of these characteristics can be illustrated readily in the homosexual group in any community. But the point is lost on most "straight" onlookers that *precisely the same statements can be made about heterosexuals*; there are effeminate males who function satisfactorily as husbands; more children are violated by heterosexual males than by homosexuals; the singles bar is a favorite weekend place of contact for casual sexual liaisons; and photographs are sold by blackmailers to husbands who wish to conceal extra-curricular activities from family and associates.

What I am saying is that the stereotype of the homosexual as a licentious individual is no more valid than the stereotypes of the merry widow or the playboy bachelor. There *are* upright, wholesome young widows and bachelors. There *are* upright, wholesome homosexuals whose moral behavior is consistent with responsible Christian standards.

That there are cruising homosexuals whose moral standard is no higher than the alley cat's I would not deny. Exactly the same can be said of heterosexuals. But just as I know heterosexuals who live clean, Christian lives, so also do I know homosexuals whose patterns are on the same high level.

How did we get into this curious misperception where we see all heterosexuals as being somehow better than any homosexual?

Our culture has drawn heavily from both the Old and New Testaments, but we have been less than scrupulous to transmit the contents faithfully. Much of our definition of any social phenomenon is influenced by cultural roots found in the writings of the Apostle Paul. Only within the last generation or so have we been able to put Paul in context so that the cultural patterns which he reflects are now recognized as perhaps appropriate for his time but less than that for ours.

Paul grew up in a home where sex was permissible only for purposes of procreation. Even literally minded fundamentalists tend to avoid that posture today. His rather striking anti-feminist pronouncements ("keep silence . . . ask your husband") are no longer regarded as binding. We have apologetically eliminated most of

# COLLOQUIUM

## CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN COMMENT

COLLOQUIUM—a publication of contemporary Christian comment for both leaders and lay members of the Church of God—seeks to relate itself and its readers to the whole spectrum of the human situation from Christian perspectives. In these pages we hope to raise questions, to provide awareness, to appraise answers, and to suggest possible alternatives. COLLOQUIUM hopes to provide and promote a many-sided discussion of issues in its articles, among its readers, and in their written responses to the articles.

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Paul's comments on sexual matters in the home. To be sure, we have been careful to do so in a manner that permits us to continue to respect the Scriptures. However, it is clear to an honest observer that we have exorcized the inconvenient passages.

But we have never given the homosexual passages this kind of intellectual analysis. There are not many passages in the Bible that deal with the phenomenon, but there are some. In I Cor. 6:9 we find the terms "soft" or "effeminate," by which we presume that Paul means male homosexuals. They shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But a more careful look at the content shows that he was setting the same penalty on alcoholics, gossips, thieves, adulterers, robbers, and Christians who sue other Christians. I have seen several critics of the Gay Christian Movement quoting the passage in condemnation of homosexuals, but never have they noted that Paul includes these critics in the same category when they take fellow Christians to court.

In Rom. 1:26 occurs the only New Testament reference to lesbian activity. Here Paul combines male and female homosexual activity with other behavior: idolatry, envy, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, haughtiness, disobedience to parents, and several other forms that he terms "improper conduct." Of them he says, "those who do such things deserve to die." One should note, though, that Paul seems to be describing homosexuality where the behavior was openly scandalous; and God rejected them for it. There is no indication here that those in the early church who were of homosexual orientation but who lived moral lives were rejected either by the church or by God.

Our cultural predisposition is to assume that any aspect of sexuality that involves other than one male and one female legally married and in the missionary position is sufficiently evil that it forfeits Christian fellowship.

The dilemma facing informed and conscientious persons in the Church of God today is this: our culture, our religious heritage, and our tradition pose an overwhelmingly powerful double standard. For heterosexuals of dubious morals we pray long and wait for time to dull the gonads. Homosexuals of dubious morals tend to get short and condemnatory prayers on their behalf and scornful ostracism by the Christian community.

This discussion does not share the futility of the medieval debate over how many angels can stand on the point of a pin. This discussion has personal and contemporary roots that go deep into the current life of the Church of God Reformation Movement.

Various scholars have offered estimates of the percentage of the population that is of homosexual orientation. One of the most generally accepted is the work of Dr. Paul H. Gebhard, director of the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University and successor to the pioneer in sex research, Dr. A. C. Kinsey. Gebhard reports that 9.13% of the total population (13.95% of males and 4.25% of females) had homosexual experiences with at least five partners or a total of at least twenty experiences over a period of at least three years.

If these figures are valid (and I have no reason to question them), and if the Church of God serves the general population unselectively, then we should have 15,699 homosexually oriented persons in Church of God pews on Sunday mornings, and they should be ministered to by 400 homosexually oriented ministers.\* If one wants to refine those figures it would be necessary to know the proportion of those attending and of ministers who are male, which probably would reduce the figure for homosexuals in the pews but would boost the figure for ministers significantly.

No matter how the statistics are handled, we are not talking about an insignificant minority. The incidence is considerable. Although only a few have been publicly identified, there are many, many more homosexual Church of God persons still in the closet.

I am deeply grateful to the Business Committee for bringing the matter to the floor of the Assembly. It is a matter of Christian responsibility that we ought no longer sweep under the carpet. We should develop an approach that is realistic, timely, and theologically sound. Do I have the package worked out for the Movement? No, but I think I can suggest some principles that are involved.

• We should insist that *there is never a moment when the love of God is not a legitimate hope for every sinner*. With the exception of that rarity, the unforgivable sin, the Scriptures consistently assert that there is grace awaiting all who turn to Christ. Sin and all, there is acceptance. The grace of God and forgiveness are not withheld until the sinner clears up his life and comes with pureness before God; filthy mind, broken promises, weakness of spirit, and carnal impulses are standard equipment carried by sinners as they approach the foot of the cross of Christ. Male or female, black or white, rich or poor, old or young--all come on the same terms. And heterosexual and homosexual. Not one iota of difference.

What happens afterward? Essentially the same thing happens to both homosexual and heterosexual. The impulses formerly without restraint suddenly come under rein. There is a control. Does personality change? Probably; the sinner has become a new creature. "All things are become new . . ." Well, *nearly* all, perhaps. There are still the jobs to be discharged daily, bills to pay, family relationships, and other residues. But there are profound changes in values. That is where "all things become new." From inside out there is a change. Are all homosexuals made heterosexuals? No. All are homosexuals made into new creatures? Yes. The difference is that they are Christian homosexuals. No more cruising. No more one-night stands. No more sleazy bars. The focus of existence is changed.

• *The church must be a part of this re-formation of lifestyle*. Here is where the gay Christian church becomes indispensable. The convert whose orientation is homosexual has the same needs for fellowship, for a caring community, for a sense of acceptance and belongingness that he or she ever had. This universal human need is as much a part of

\*9.13% of 171,947 members reported in the U.S.A. and of 4,382 ordained and unordained ministers and missionaries, retired and not retired. Source: 1978 Yearbook of the Church of God, p. 242.

the Christian as it is of the non-Christian, of the homosexual as of the heterosexual. And if the gay bars and cruising parks can no longer be a part of the newly converted homosexual's life, the Christian fellowship must provide a viable alternative. The gay Christian fellowship is an indispensable part of the equipment such persons need. Without the reinforcement that comes from being with those who share the homosexual experience, the chances of survival are seriously reduced. All of the pressures of society--sadly, even in the church--are concentrated attacks upon the new way of life.

I resent the necessity of distinguishing between the "straight" church and the gay church. If you can draw the line between them it proves that they are not the church that Jesus founded. But without getting into that ecclesiological issue, I would say that to the extent that there are two separate churches thus described, each depends upon the other for strength. Each ought to recognize that there are deep human needs that are to be met and that at least at this time in our development we should own each other as valid, viable expressions of the grace of God working within the human family. We did this for generations across racial and cultural lines. Recall the black congregations and black ministerial assemblies in most states and the German, Greek, Slovak, and Spanish congregations and campmeetings.

• *And we should permit each brother and sister the full right that each of us guards for himself or herself, the right (and obligation) to approach God directly and alone.* I want no one else interfering with my direct relationship with God. Nor will I interfere with another's. That is God's business, and God's alone.

Of this I am sure: the way we have approached it in the past has been terribly, terribly wrong. We have wounded sensitive souls then have destroyed them. We have broken hearts ruthlessly, with vengeance and cruelty in the name of God. We have done this with good motives, perhaps, but nonetheless destructively. May God give us a chance to correct this grave error.

As I walked across the campground on Tuesday of campmeeting I was stopped by a former student, now a popular pastor of a thriving congregation. He apologized for stopping me on the way to the service but wanted to get my reaction to a situation he was facing at home. He had a young brother-in the church who was exerting leadership ability but who had problems with sexual orientation. What should he do? His anguish as he faced the situation was obvious. His shepherd's heart was touched by the needs of the young man, but he also was sensitive to the needs of the flock.

I often wonder just how I would react were I still pastoring. I know that the local situation sometimes places a narrow circumference around a pastor's options. I am not certain what I would do, but I know what I would aspire to do. I would endeavor faithfully to assert at every opportunity that:

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.  
Heterosexual and homosexual.

All have free access to the unlimited grace of God.  
Heterosexual and homosexual.

God deals with each person on the level where God finds him or her.  
Heterosexual or homosexual.

God is capable of leading each believer into full experience of grace and into a victorious life. It is not for me to delineate the details of that relationship. It is best left up to God. The everlasting arms are all-encompassing.  
Heterosexual or homosexual.

The brother or sister in Christ who is homosexually oriented has all of the privileges and obligations that I find in the body of Christ, and I therefore should "reach my hand in fellowship" to him or her just as I would to a heterosexual brother or sister in Christ. C