

## The Ordination of Homosexuals

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One of the most controversial issues in the religious community today concerns the ordination of gays and lesbians. With the recent cultural and social visibility of homosexuals has come the awareness of gays and lesbians in every aspect of life, including churches and seminaries. The high profile of a few outspoken individuals and groups is forcing churches of all denominations to take a firm stand on the issue. Should we ordain practicing, self-avowed homosexuals? It is my opinion that sexual orientation has little if anything to do with the qualifications for ordination, and that a minister's sexual preference should not impede his pastoral performance. Underlying this issue, however, is the reevaluation of traditional Christian views of sexuality, and thus it is difficult to find any objective writings on the subject. It is important for us, as individuals and as a church, to be firm in our beliefs and opinions, but it is equally important, when forming our views and criticizing others, to fully present both sides of an issue. Therefore, despite my opinion on the subject, I hope to present as much information from both viewpoints as argumentatively as possible.

There are many shades of gray in this debate, but for the purpose of argument I am going to concentrate on the 'black' and 'white' issues at hand. One side of the argument (what I will call the opposition, or the conservatives), feels that practicing homosexuals should not be ordained into the ministry. The churches that perpetuate this stance include, but are not limited to, the Episcopalian, the Methodist, the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran denominations. The arguments of the opposition are based on the historical stance of the Christian church, the writings in the Bible specifically directed at homosexuality, and the promiscuous sexual practices of some members of the gay community. Conservatives accept the homosexual as an individual but questions his sexual behavior. It must be noted that none of these churches have taken a direct stance against the tendency of homosexuality, but only against homosexual behavior. Most ordination requirements carry the clause stipulating that if

a homosexual is celibate he is allowed ordination. However, if the candidate is 'self-avowed and practicing,' it will be denied.

Members of the proposition, the liberals on this issue, feel that homosexuals should be ordained into the ministry as readily as heterosexuals are, and that the limits placed on them are a contemporary form of religious persecution from a hypocritical society. Those in favor of gay/lesbian ordination, both homosexual and heterosexual alike, feel that one's sexual orientation has little to do with job performance. In addition, they believe that homosexual behavior is not a sin, and that the Bible writings on the subject are outdated and culture-bound. Liberals also contend that, because new evidence suggests that sexual preference is a biological phenomenon, those who feel called to preach and teach God's Word should be allowed to do so without complication.

The most frequently used arguments against the ordination of gays and lesbians are the verses in the Bible specifically directed toward the issue of homosexuality. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), for example, considers the Scriptures definitive to their position against homosexual ordination. They took this stand on homosexuality in a statement in 1977,

"Homosexual behavior is a sin, a form of idolatry, a breaking of the natural order that unites members of the human community. Homosexual behavior is contrary to the new life in Christ and is a denial of the responsible freedom and service into which we are called through baptism. God offers the homosexual person, as every other person, a vision of the wholeness He intends, the assurance of His grace and His healing restoration for the hurting and broken" (Melton, p. 114).

Passages in Leviticus and the New Testament state that God is opposed to homosexuality, and that it is sinful. From Leviticus 18: 23, 29, the Lord said to Moses, "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. Everyone who

does any of these detestable things--such persons must be cut off from their people."

The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1: 26-28, 32,

"God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."

In addition to these specific references to same sex gender acts, there are a number of verses dealing with marriage. For example, I Corinthians 2:7 states

"It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband."

These writings do not refer to a 'spouse' or a 'partner', but specifically to opposite gender relations. The Scriptural verses, then, dealing directly and indirectly with homosexuality make it clear that Biblical authors felt homosexual practices were not only sinful, but inconsistent with the pursuit of God and righteousness. Many in the religious community today feel the same. One Lutheran minister recently declared, "Homosexual practice is a sin. That's not a pretty statement....But we feel that this is the witness of the Scripture, and we want to be a people formed by God's Word" (Maudlin, p. 13).

Most denominational statements declare that the inclination toward homosexuality is not wrong, and that gays are not intrinsically bad people. They do state, however, in conjunction with the Bible, that homosexual behavior is a sin. In

October 1986, the Vatican went so far as to state that a homosexual inclination tends "toward an intrinsic moral evil and must be seen as an objective disorder" (Ostling, p. 90). Conservatives feel that the Biblical word is still clear and relevant for Christians of today's generation and therefore homosexual behavior should be condemned and labeled unacceptable.

Those in favor of homosexual ordination, however, have accused the church of hypocrisy against homosexuals. Gays and lesbians within the church ask "How can one say that one accepts people regardless of sexual orientation and then not allow any possible expression of that orientation?" (Bergman, p. 17) In addition, proponents of the argument have turned the issue from one of sin and immorality to one of moral acceptance and human rights. Michael Hiller, Associate Pastor at San Francisco's St. Francis Lutheran Church said of the debate, "This is not an issue of morals. It's an issue of justice" (Ostling, p. 90). Gays and lesbians do feel that they are being unjustly persecuted by the conservative sector of the religious community. Their understanding of this issue would be, they feel, a giant step toward moral acceptance.

Many within the church believe that it's position on homosexual ordination is wrong. Roughly one half of America's Catholics favor the legalization of homosexual relations despite their church's public statement that homosexuality is a sin, and that gay sex is an evil. (McLaughlin, p. 64). Gay activists insist that homosexuality is a perfectly moral alternate lifestyle and that Christianity has unjustly repressed homosexuals, thus intercepting God's free-flowing grace and forgiveness. Who else in society, they ask, is still trying to be accepted by the church? All but homosexuals are welcome. Ministers attend prisons and mental hospitals to gain converts. If the church can accept criminals and other harmful social deviants, why is it so difficult for them to accept someone of a different sexual preference?

Because the ELCA is against the ordination of homosexuals, it is therefore

ironic that they should publish a statement, such as theirs on homosexuality from 1977, unknowingly, it seems, advancing the liberal argument:

"We recognize the cries of our homosexual brothers and sisters for justice in the arena of civil affairs. We cannot endorse their call for legalizing homosexual marriage. Nor can we endorse their conviction that homosexual behavior is simply another form of acceptable expression of natural erotic or libidinous drives. We can, however, endorse their position that their sexual orientation in and of itself should not be a cause for denying them their civil liberties. They as well as we uphold standards of public decency, protection of the young, the weak and the dependent, and efforts to end entrapment, exploitation and oppression. They, too need recognition and acceptance of themselves as human beings, participating and contributing members of the community" (Melton, p. 114).

"For gay liberationists, nothing would better epitomize moral acceptance than for the churches to ordain open, practicing homosexuals as clergy" (Ostling, p. 89). It is interesting here to note that the opposing factions use the same vocabulary to call for the same thing--acceptance.

"The church has applied flexibility and nonliteral interpretation to many of the moral judgments in Scripture and clung dogmatically to literal interpretations of references to same gender sex acts" (Johnson, p. 7). To the Scripture writings that degrade homosexuality, the liberal position addresses the Bible as cultural- and time-bound. They feel that certain issues that conflict with contemporary values and situations may be disregarded. Homosexuality is one of them.

"Very obviously adultery is seen as far more destructive to family and larger social life, since both the act of adultery and even coveting a neighbor's wife are part of the Ten Commandments and homosexual acts are not" (Switzer, p. 95).

For example, in addition to listing homosexuality as an unforgivable sin, Leviticus adds sexual intercourse with a woman "during the uncleanness of her monthly

period." Today, the notion is ludicrous. Later, in the laws regulating the priesthood, Leviticus reads that priests must not cut their hair or shave their beards, and must burn their daughters if they become prostitutes. Burning anyone at the stake in this day and age is unthinkable, no matter how grievous their sin, and I don't know of many priests or ministers who refuse to cut their hair or shave their beards because doing so is a heinous sacrilege.

We as a church and as a society have decided that these particular regulations, among many others, are time-bound, and we therefore reject their literal translation. Though central to the theology of most denominations, much of the Bible has been interpreted into general meaning. Today, many choose to view the Old Testament laws of purification through the Christian teachings of love and forgiveness. They argue that specific teachings and laws of purification must be placed in the larger Biblical context of the theology of sin, judgment and grace.

Because many gays and lesbians feel rejected by the church, they often dispose of religion altogether. "The homosexual has not left the church. The church has left him" (Wysor, p. 33). They claim that religious morality has always condemned the physical acts of homosexuals without consideration of their emotional context. Many churches compromise the debate by condemning only the practice of homosexuality and stating that despite their sexual tendencies, homosexuals are persons of 'sacred worth.' For homosexuals today, that is not enough. James D. Anderson, of Presbyterians for Gay and Lesbian Concerns, aptly summed the feelings of many homosexuals within the religious sphere. "The church has got to get it right because they can't keep these people out of the church" (*Christian Century* 2-5-92, p. 119).

The United Presbyterian Church also felt that something must be done about the issue, and in 1974 it created the United Presbyterian Task Force. This group was



charged with bringing to the 1978 General Assembly recommendations concerning the ordination of homosexuals. Presbyteries from New York City and the Palisades had requested definite guidance on the matter from the General Assembly, and this in turn, led to the 200 page document of the 190th General Assembly in 1978. The majority position stated that the ordination of homosexuals should be a decision left to each Presbytery, to which the rights to ordain have always laid. The minority position, however, held that self-affirming, practicing homosexuals were to be denied ordination not only to the profession of minister (teaching elder), but to the positions of board members, lay elders, ruling elders and deacons. When the document was presented to the floor for a vote, the minority view was surprisingly victorious. Those who had voted were apparently concerned that affirmation of the majority opinion would foster a situation where the church would condone homosexual behavior through ordination.

Interestingly, a study done by the Presbyterian Panel Research Organization in 1990 found that 86 percent of the lay people, 90 percent of the elders and deacons and 83 percent of the ministers surveyed continued to oppose the ordination of practicing homosexuals (Gittings, p. 173). Yet in May, 1991, the Task Force Special Committee on Human Sexuality, created in 1987, submitted a 173 page report suggesting that the church struggle to end the prevailing 'patriarchal sexual code', to cease the condemnation of cohabitation without marriage and to ordain practicing homosexuals who are called to the ministry (Gittings, p. 170). As the 1990 poll of Presbyterian congregations suggested, most members of the United Presbyterian Church view homosexuality as a sin. Therefore, as expected, there was massive opposition to the rather liberal report. In June of 1991, the General Assembly voted to retain the proposal for further study. The document, however, was formally rejected.

Though the majority opinion in the Presbyterian hierarchy concedes that practicing homosexuals should not be ordained, it is clear that the minority position in

favor of ordination is not a small one. This is quite apparent in the Scott Anderson case of 1990. Anderson, a homosexual minister serving at Bethany Presbyterian Church in Sacramento California, was forced to resign his position after a disgruntled member of his congregation discovered he was gay and reported him to the bishop. Though the majority of Bethany's congregation wanted to retain Anderson as their minister, he was released from his position on April 3, 1990. In addition, his name removed from the rolls of the presbytery. It was clear that his congregation was unhappy with the decision. Thirty five of Bethany's 394 adult members took the day off from their jobs to stand in support with Anderson on the platform during the defrocking ceremony. An elder of the congregation, Ellen Garretson stated, "I believe it is time to look at our present ruling on homosexuality, to study, to review and re-evaluate it according to the present day and age. Hopefully, out of this tragedy will come some change in our church's position" (Roche, p. 195).

Many Presbyterian churches have been openly defying the church's ordination policy since the early eighties. They proclaimed themselves 'More Light' churches. These sects planned to reach out to the gay community, not only by ministering to them, but by openly ordaining gays and lesbians as elders and deacons in their churches. Central Presbyterian Church in Louisville, KY, ordained 'Nick' as an elder in July of 1987. Nick is very much an optimist about his church and the policies that it has towards homosexuals. Because he feels that he is making an important contribution to his religion by being a positive role model for homosexual members, he hopes that his fellow Presbyterians will soon feel the same. In contrast, Matthew, Nick's friend, holds a more pessimistic outlook. He is discouraged with the church and its policies, and says that at times he feels like a traitor to other gays and lesbians by being part of a church that discriminates against homosexuals. "I am never embarrassed about being gay. But I am sometimes embarrassed about being a

Christian" (Miller, p. 240).

In addition to being time-bound, liberals also feel that the Bible writings are culture-bound. Some interpreters of the anti-homosexual literature state that, through these laws and restrictions, the Old Testament authors were simply hoping to separate the Jews from the pagans. This is especially evident in the traditional Christian view that nonreproductive sexuality is irrational and unacceptable. Robin Scroggs writes, "Until we know what the biblical authors were against we cannot begin to reflect upon the relevance of those writings for contemporary issues" (Scroggs, p. 1). This reinforces the idea that the passages in the New Testament, specifically in Romans, were the Apostle Paul's reaction to the culture surrounding the church. Radical proponents argue that Paul was a Hellenistic ascetic, and that he therefore renounced anything physical or worldly, and upheld only spiritual matters. For Paul, any kind of sexuality didn't fit into the ideal scheme of things. One must note that he rejected marriage as well, on the grounds that it would distract him from his theological endeavors.

Clinton Jones believes the message of the Bible must be made relevant for every generation. "Jesus expects his church to change" (C. Jones, p. 33). He also points out that we do not know all of Christ's feelings about sex in general, much less his particular stance on homosexuality, as he made no direct comment on the issue. Proponents feel that if homosexuality was so terrible, Jesus Christ would have spoken out against it. (He did talk about marriage and adultery.)

Many gay men and women from religious backgrounds, especially those who feel a calling to preach the Word of God have chosen, however, to "dwell on the love of Jesus rather than the anger of Paul" (Silverstein, p. 236). Brian McNaught adds,

"As a Catholic who is also gay I gamble that the Church has totally misinterpreted the Will and Word of God...There is not now, nor has there ever been a spiritual blanket of divine truth hanging over St. Peter's in Rome

which prevents the Pope or those around him from making mistakes" (McNaught, p. 59, 62).

Another argument in favor of the opposition states that much of society classifies homosexuality as a "disorder". For instance, though psychologists removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Illness (DSM) in 1974, the decision happened under enormous amounts of pressure from gays and lesbians, and at an unprecedented speed. The psychology community was under constant pressure from an outspoken gay-rights movement, who was threatening to disrupt and destroy important research being conducted at the time by the American Psychology Association. Interestingly, four years after the decision, a survey found that 69 percent of psychiatrists believed that homosexuality "usually represented a pathological adaptation" (S. Jones, p. 26), thus proving that, though the public statements on the issue had changed, many still felt the same as they did previous to the 1974 DSM classification change.

Irving Beiber, a psychoanalyst who did clinical work and research with 1,000 homosexuals in the 1980s restated the common hypothesis that homosexuality is not a biological phenomenon, and that the tendency quite often results from a disturbance in the parent-child relationship, a theory that has been held since the time and theories of Sigmund Freud. Thus, conservatives on the issue feel not only that homosexuality is wrong, but that it is an unnatural condition that can be fixed, or solved.

Colin Cook wholeheartedly agrees with this stance. He labels himself an 'ex-homosexual', and recently published his story in *Christianity Today*. Cook says that he felt the need to tell his story in order "to confirm from personal experience that recovery and change can happen (lest) thousands of Christians yield to the despairing persuasion that homosexuality is an irreversible fate" (Cook, p. 22). In college, Cook desperately experimented with different forms of asceticism to rid himself of his 'sin'.

"Yet homosexuality still seemed like an impenetrable wall. Many times I wept before the Lord for my sins. 'How long,' my journal records, will it be till I am made clean?" (Cook, p. 22). Cook says that even after his ordination, he was lonely and sought the company of many different male partners. In 1974, he lost his pastoral ministry when his (then gay) sexual orientation was exposed. Two years later, he had to give up the homosexual healing ministry he had built over the years because of allegations that he was sleeping with his counselees. Cook loathed himself and his actions. He felt a constant guilt and fear of exposure that led directly to an extreme, impenetrable anxiety and severe depression. Cook, however, contends that, because of a Systematic Theology class he took from Hans LaRondelle at Andrews University in Michigan, he discovered that he could be and was indeed a free, forgiven heterosexual.

"Christ had broken the powers of homosexuality at the Cross. My Jesus had been too small. It was not merely a matter of keeping Christ in my heart. In Jesus I was identified as a whole, heterosexual man. I had been judging myself by how I felt, not by who I was in him. God created all humankind heterosexual in Adam. Homosexuality is an illusory, false state, primarily due to the Fall the the brokenness of human relationships that ensue. My sexual lust was being stimulated by fear of abandonment and condemnation. I had been reinforcing homosexuality for years by neurotic, whining, faithless prayer that pleaded for a deliverance that was already provided" (Cook, p. 24).

Cook had finally realized that personhood and homosexuality were not the same. He stated that his homosexual compulsions disappeared soon after he began praising God that Jesus had broken the power of homosexuality at the Cross. His saving grace was the grace of God and the power of His forgiveness. Today Cook is married, has two boys, and is writing a book on homosexual recovery.

Members of the proposition, in contrast, believe that a same gender sexual

preference is biological in nature. (It must be noted, however, that many homosexuals feel the origin of their sexuality is irrelevant. They also argue that there have been no recent studies on the origins of heterosexuality and thus these findings are unnecessary and that the tests are irrelevant.) Recent evidence does suggest such a biological disposition. If this is the case, homosexuality would be reduced to nothing different than being left-handed.

One of the most recently published studies was conducted by Simon LeVay, a neuroscientist at the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California. LeVay scanned the brains of 41 cadavers, including 19 homosexual males, and found that the area of the brain believed to control sexual activity was half the size in gay men than in heterosexual ones, thus indicating a genetic link to sexual preference. This area, the third interstitial nucleus of anterior hypothalamus (INAH 3), was more than two times as large in heterosexuals than it was in homosexuals. A major criticism of LeVay's study was that every gay man in his study group had died of AIDS. LeVay, however, responded that he had found the same pathology in a homosexual he had studied who had died of lung cancer.

Frederick Williams, who has researched homosexuality in the United States, Central America and the Philippine Islands agrees with LeVay's findings. He observes, "If you look at all societies, homosexuality occurs at the same rates with the same kind of behavior. That suggests something biological going on. The biological evidence has been growing for twenty or more years" (Gelman, p. 52). If it is proven that homosexual orientation develops involuntarily, this issue would become bombarded with the notion that God would not declare as sinful tendencies that people had no part in establishing. If homosexuality is 'caused' by a genetic component, it would take the burden of guilt and condemnation off of the individual homosexual, as well as off of homosexuals as a community.

There are, of course, those who are skeptical. Francis Stevens, editor in chief of *Deneuve*, a lesbian news magazine, asked, "If the gay guy's hypothalamus is smaller, what's it like for dykes? Is it the same size as straight males'?" (Gelman, p. 48) Others have thought that the genetic component might possibly work in the opposite way, and that sexual preference and orientation lead to the brain difference. There is indeed some evidence that the brain's neural networks do reconfigure themselves in response to certain experiences. For example, in a study of seeing people who had gone blind done by the National Institute of Health, it was found that the area of the brain that controlled the finger used to read Braille grew larger than the surrounding finger nerves (Gelman, p. 50). These arguments, though relevant, are not cause to disregard the biological evidence, yet those who believe in the homosexual genetic component do not ignore that the "nurture" factor plays a part in the development of any portion of a personality. Supporters of this biological theory do believe, however, in contrast to those who reject the theory, that homosexuality is a combination of nature and nurture, and not simply one or the other.

William Carroll, a homosexual minister who has been ordained for 22 years, feels full acceptance from God, though he, in contrast to Cook, believes his sexual preference is a complete and integrated portion of his personality. For years, however, he harbored resentment towards the church and toward religion in general.

"God the Father, I was told, would help me with my problems. And yet, this same God abhorred me because I was homosexual, did not accept or welcome me in his house as I was, and told me through the Apostle Paul that I deserved to die" (Carroll, p. 255).

This contradiction in teachings quite understandably confused and angered Carroll, as for years he had been taught that God rejected him because of his homosexuality.

In January of 1991 Carroll decided to come out of the closet. As he gradually

accepted and publicly acknowledged his homosexuality, Carroll began "to recognize that my image of God as an unloving father (was) the distortion of an unloving church that claims to speak for God" (Carroll, p. 255). Carroll found solace in the words of John McNeill from his book *Taking a Chance on God*.

"Only a sadistic God would create millions of humans as gay with no choice in the matter and no hope of changing and then deny them the right to express their gayness in a loving relationship for the rest of their lives under the threat of eternal damnation" (Carroll, p. 255).

Today, William Carroll is coping with a failed marriage of 23 years, being away from and rejected by his children, and looking for a new job. He is, however, not unhappy, and feels that his faith, as well as his life, has been rejuvenated by the realization that God loves him as he is.

The conservatives, however, feel that certain standards must be created for the ministerial position. Though the Lutheran church does perpetuate the idea that all members of the church possess the capability to spread the word and ideas of God, it is generally agreed upon that standards must be set and qualifications must be met for the leaders of the church. It only makes sense that a congregation would want a theologically trained and qualified person to lead their church. The sole difference in the qualifications set by conservatives and liberals of this issue concerns the ordination of *practicing* homosexuals. Excluding that particular restriction, both factions agree on every other pastoral requirement.

In 1978, when he was bishop of the Minnesota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Herbert Chilstrom wrote his opinion on the church and the issue of homosexuality in a pastoral letter that has been widely circulated, not because it was the official church stance on the issue, but because of his position at the time it was published.

"In church we all are sinners, all are under judgment,



all are saved by grace through faith. It is by grace and through faith that we become members of the household of God where all are called to priesthood and servanthood. All are one in Christ. There is neither slave nor free, male nor female. Neither is there a distinction to be made on the basis of sexual orientation. Does this mean that ordination should be the option of any at all? By no means. The church has every right--indeed, an obligation--to set standards for acceptance into and continuation in ordained ministry. Our view is that ordained ministry is an office into which one is called. The call has two sources--from God and from God's people in the church. Unless the call from God is confirmed by a call from the church, there can be no ordination. And if in the judgment of the church one who is ordained no longer qualifies for that office, ordination can be withdrawn from the church" (Melton, p. 124-125).

Church and denominational requirements for ordination are, quite obviously, a central component of this issue. I have chosen to focus on the qualifications for ordination based specifically on the ELCA constitution. An important issue that must be considered is the feeling of calling a candidate has about this particular vocation. Lutherans feel that the Holy Spirit provides the church with the people to lead it, and that these people are not self-chosen or self-appointed. Their call to ministry is a call to servanthood and therefore their position is a "privilege granted by God through the call of the church and is not a right of the individual" (*Visions and Expectations*, p. 6).

A number of homosexuals do feel that they have been called by God to the ministry. This feeling of calling is a requirement for ordination in many denominations. To restate, Lutherans do believe that the Holy Spirit provides the church with the people to lead it. It does not claim that the Spirit provides only heterosexual people. If God specifically calls his ministers through the Spirit, how is it that homosexuals feel this call if God is opposed to their ordination?

Recently, this issue has emerged in Rochester, New York, again in the Presbyterian church. In February of 1992, the Downtown United Presbyterian Church

called Jane Adams Spahr, an open, practicing lesbian, to serve as their minister. The Genesee Valley Presbytery, made up of 76 churches, fully accepted the decision. A small group of conservatives, however, filed a complaint against the church, stating that the decision to call Spahr violated the church rules outlined in the 1978 decision banning homosexual ordination. Virginia Davidson, head of the search committee, stated that Downtown United Presbyterian Church did not call Spahr to test the laws of the Presbyterian church. Spahr's homosexuality "was not an issue for us. We called her because she was the most qualified candidate we had....Spahr is entirely and superbly qualified for the position we were seeking to fill--the most qualified candidate we interviewed" (Aquino, p. 118).

Some conservatives compromise their stance on the issue and state that homosexuals may be called to witness only to other gays and lesbians. In conjunction, Nick, mentioned earlier, feels that he is making an important contribution to gay people in Louisville. "When you are gay and 12 years old in a small town in western Kentucky, you don't know anyone else who is gay. The only (gay) people you hear about or read about tend to be unsavory. The extent of gay life as you know it are scribbles on a bathroom wall. That tends to warp people in a lot of ways. It may not be as big an issue in Boston or New York or San Francisco, but in a place like Louisville, being a positive role model for gays is important" (Miller, p. 237). Proponents of this issue feel that Nick is correct, but that positive homosexual role models are needed not only in gay communities but in straight ones as well.

Homosexuals feel called to minister not only to gays, but to straights as well. In July, 1990, Reform Judaism became the first major United States religious body to adopt a national policy sanctioning homosexual behavior. The radical statement approved by the Jewish rabbis states that, although heterosexual relationships are ideal, "all Jews are religiously equal regardless of their sexual orientation" (*Time* 7-9-

90, p. 62). The Jewish sect stated that homosexuality was acceptable if the individual had no other conscious choice but to be gay, and asked for discretion, not celibacy from their clergy. Samuel Karff, president of Reform Judaism, said that the denomination reached its decision by weighing "not only the sacred text of the Torah, but also the knowledge of our own time and experience" (*Time* 7-9-90, p. 62).

In addition to feeling called to his vocation, the ordained minister must be a baptized Christian, as well as a member of an ELCA congregation. The church feels that the minister must have an intellectual and devotional knowledge of the Scripture and that he not only fully understand but accurately interpret the Bible. It is essential that they teach nothing that departs from these texts.

Following, the ordained are expected to continue the doctrines of the church, and evangelism is top priority, spreading the beliefs that Jesus Christ became human to bring forgiveness and salvation to all sinners. The ordained minister is expected to support the work of his congregation, to work in accord with his fellow ministers, to listen to confidential confessions and to be responsive to the needs of a changing world.

According to the handbook of expectations for ministers given to Lutheran seminary students (*Visions and Expectations*), a candidate for ordination fulfills the position by what he does and by who he is. "The church witnesses to the Gospel not only in its proclamation but also by how it lives and acts" (*Visions and Expectations*, p. 9). An ordained Lutheran must exemplify self-care as well, being responsible not only to his immediate family but to the family of God. If an ELCA minister is married, he is expected to keep his vows inviolate. The church does acknowledge, however, that because we live in a world of sin and sinners, divorce occasionally will happen. If an ordained minister does seek a divorce or to remarry, he must first ask for the counsel and guidance of the synodical bishop.

The sexual conduct of an ordained minister must also be beyond reproach. He must reject promiscuity and the abuse of his position through the manipulation of others for sexual needs. Married ordained ministers are expected to live in fidelity. Single ordained ministers are expected to be celibate. "Ordained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual relationships" (*Visions and Expectations*, p. 13). Thus, the church admits homosexuals into their seminary programs and will ordain them if and only if they agree to remain celibate. Bishop Herbert W. Chilstrom of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America stated in January, 1988, when the American Lutheran Church consolidated with the Lutheran Church in America, "Those pastors who are gay or lesbian in their sexual orientation, whether acknowledged or kept confidential, will be expected to be celibate" (*Christianity Today*, 4-22-88, p. 40).

In general, the ELCA expects the ordained minister to live and act out the Christian charge of witness to the world. The ELCA also makes this statement about the requirements placed on an ordination candidate:

"An ordained minister of this church shall be a person whose commitment to Christ, soundness of faith, aptness to preach, teach and witness, and whose educational qualifications have been examined and approved in the manner prescribed in the documents of this church: who has been properly called and ordained; who accepts and adheres to the Confession of Faith of this church; who is diligent and faithful in the exercise of the ministry and whose life and conduct are above reproach. A minister shall comply with the constitution of this church" (*Visions and Expectations*, p. 3)

It is only logical that, in order for the minister to comply with the church, the church must comply with the constitution. Some congregations in favor of homosexual ordination have challenged the constitution. On January 21, 1990, two churches in

San Francisco, St. Francis Lutheran and First United Lutheran, ordained three self-avowed, practicing homosexual ministers into their churches. Though all three candidates had the necessary theological training, they were, in the eyes of the ELCA, ineligible for ordination because clergy guidelines stipulate not only chastity before marriage, but celibacy for ordained homosexuals.

Lesbians Ruth Frost and Phyllis Zillhart, both graduates of Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary in St. Paul, were called to St. Francis Lutheran as co-pastors despite their open relationship with one another. Bishop Lyle Miller refused to ordain them unless they practiced sexual abstinence. They refused, and thus were denied ordination. The congregation, however, over half of whose members are homosexual, voted to ordain the women in spite of the synod's decision. St. Francis Lutheran has since been suspended from the ELCA.

Bishop John Spong justifies the ordination of gays and lesbians by stating that bishops in the Episcopalian church, including himself, had been quietly ordaining homosexual for years. Most often it is the case that those surrounding the homosexual minister are unaware of his sexual orientation. "Most homosexuals in the ministry, like most heterosexuals, are responsible, adult, committed, sexually mature individuals who live in a radical continuity with the Gospel they seek to proclaim and serve" (Loftus, p. 429). It is interesting that approximately five homosexuals have been ordained every year since 1977 when the Episcopalian church first ordained a gay priest. This is in direct contradiction to the church resolution passed in 1979 stating that the ordination of homosexuals was inappropriate.

Members of the Episcopalian church are not the only ones who hold a position opposite that of their church hierarchy. Over 200 professors, staff, board members and students of the interdenominational Union Theological Seminary in New York signed a petition in May of 1990 charging all denominations to change their policies on the

restriction of practicing homosexuals from the ministry. Many gays have left the church to form their own denominations that they feel are more open and accepting of all people. In addition, homosexuals have formed their own religious-based support groups. These include: Dignity (Roman Catholic), Affirmation (United Methodist), Integrity (Episcopalian), Evangelicals Concerned, Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns, and Lutherans Concerned.

Mary Anderson Williams was asked to be a chaplain to the North American Assembly of Lutherans Concerned held in summer of 1990, and said the experience was an eye opener for her. "The celebration (of these Christian homosexuals) reminded me of the stories of the slave religion in the South--how the slaves would dutifully and quietly attend the white churches on Sunday but at night steal away to Jesus deep in the woods where they proclaimed the Gospel by chanting and singing 'I am somebody!'" (Williams, p. 824). Williams believes that the traditional beliefs of the Christian community often serve to oppress its members. She was, therefore, surprised to discover that the gays and lesbians who attended this gathering held some of the strongest Christian beliefs that she had ever encountered. Persecution, though in many cases instigated by the church itself, often lends itself to such a strengthening of faith.

The traditional stance of the church on homosexuality in general has long been one of non-tolerance. This idea has stemmed not only from Biblical contexts, but from the traditional ideas of sex and marriage as well, ones that focused on procreation. One married and mated for the sole purpose of bearing children. Karl Barth agreed with these ideas of human sexuality.

"It is incontestable that for male and female both in themselves and in their relationship to each other (through love and marriage or outside this special connexion), it is a question of the actualisation of humanity, and this must take place in the realisation of the fact that

they belong indissolubly together and are necessary the one to the other for their mutual completion" (Barth, p. 208).

It is only recently that the ideas surrounding marriage and sexual contact have changed from ones concentrating on reproduction to romantic images and ideals.

Though the contemporary understanding of sexuality and marriage has considerably changed, the church today still feels correct in its stand based on the command in Genesis 28: 3. "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples." The institution of marriage that leads to the family structure unites the individual with society and gives each a role in its continuation. Homosexual unions, therefore, conflict with not only the good of society, but with its survival, as reproduction is impossible in a homosexual union.

In addition, members of the opposition cite many historical incidents of the abuse of sexuality instigated by homosexuals. The evidence of this is sufficient throughout history. During the Hellenistic period of the Apostle Paul, homosexuality was considered to be an accepted form of recreation. The Roman bath houses, most specializing in homosexuality, greatly outnumbered the churches of the day. The prostitution rings of Ancient Greece consisted mostly of boys soliciting to men. Homosexual pedophilia was recognized and even regulated by the Greek legislature. Later, during the Renaissance era, a return to accepted homosexual practices was so feared that consorting with courtesans was not only encouraged but expected of the married man to prove his heterosexuality.

In recent years, homosexuality has become more of a personal statement than a simple sexual preference. Many lesbians have expressed that their choice of homosexuality was as much a feminist statement as a sexual preference (Gelman, p. 48). Many overstep the bounds of monogamy that lead directly to promiscuous actions

and lifestyles. In addition, same gender sex often holds elements of vengeance and rebellion. Bell and Weinberg conducted a study in the mid 1970s concerning the conjugal promiscuity of gays and lesbians, and the results were astonishing. Of the homosexuals surveyed, 28 percent reported having had sex with 1,000 or more partners. Only 17 percent reported having had fewer than 50 sexual partners. An amazing 79 percent of the population sample reported that more than half of their partners were strangers ( S. Jones, p. 27). Granted, these statistics were gathered in the mid 1970s and are considerably different today because of the AIDS epidemic and the attention now paid to 'safe sex.' They do, nevertheless, make a statement about the sexual activities of portions of the homosexual community.

Statistics show this promiscuity among homosexual lay people and clergy as well. A.W. Sipe, a former Benedictine priest, published his findings in 1990 after 25 years (1965-1990) of interviewing 1,000 priests. He concluded that at least 20 percent of Roman Catholic priests in the United States are homosexual, and half of those are sexually active. A disturbing 4 percent are sexually attracted to adolescents and 2 percent are attracted to children under 13 years of age (Sipe, p. 34).

Despite the statistics, many clergy today continue to defy church regulations. In December of 1989, Bishop John Spong defied Episcopalian rule and ordained Robert Williams, 34, in Newark, NJ. Williams was a practicing homosexual and had been involved in relationship with a man for over four years. The Episcopal bishops had voted, during the 1989 annual meeting in Washington D.C., 80 to 76 in favor of a statement declaring the ordination of noncelibate homosexuals inappropriate. Spong, nevertheless, approved Williams after he had undergone the standard two year screening process. The screening committee had found Williams not only qualified for the ministry, but also able to teach and practice monogamy. He was the first Episcopalian man to be ordained into the priesthood while he was openly involved in



a homosexual relationship.

Six weeks later, however, Spong's 'progressive' actions blew up in his face when Williams stood in the pulpit of his new church and stated, "Monogamy is as unnatural as celibacy. It is crazy to hold up this ideal and pretend it's what we're doing and we're not" (*Time*, Feb. 12, 1990, p. 55). A member of the church then asked Williams if he thought that Mother Teresa of Calcutta would be a better person if she were sexually active. To this Williams replied that Mother Teresa would indeed be healthier and happier if she were noncelibate. Later, Williams apologized for belittling Mother Teresa, but stood by his anti-monogamy stand. In February of 1990, Williams resigned at Spong's urging. In addition, the bishop humbly ordered a review of the screening process that governed Williams' evaluation. Conservative Episcopalians are now planning to file charges against Bishop Spong for defying the church and ordaining an active gay.

Bill Dorn, a Roman Catholic priest, served a parish in Florida for a time, and was similarly ousted from his position in part because of his promiscuous sexual activities. In 1982 he was abducted at gunpoint by two men from the parking lot of a gay bar. He lied to the press and to his superiors to cover up where he had been, but the public eventually discovered the actual turn of events. As a result, Dorn was barred from serving as a priest in the Orlando diocese. He then returned, in 1984, to his native Minnesota where he was appointed co-pastor of the Christ Church Newman Center at St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, MN. In addition, he served as advisor--warned to advocate and teach only celibacy-- to the gay and lesbian group on campus. Trouble came knocking again, when in 1986 he was asked to write a piece for the *St. Cloud Visitor*.

In his article, Dorn took a controversial stand on homosexuality, one that conflicted with both traditional and contemporary church views. The bishop of his

diocese called Dorn's writings an "irreparable source of scandal" (Miller, p. 230). His parish defended him, though, and 150 supporters protested--to no avail--on the steps of St. Mary's Cathedral in downtown St. Cloud. Three weeks later he was fired from his position at Christ Church. A few weeks after his dismissal, Dorn publicly announced that he was gay, and he was ordered by the church to take an indefinite leave of absence from the priesthood. Soon after that, the bishop of his home diocese defrocked him and, following, Dorn permanently left the Roman Catholic Church. Today Dorn is excommunicated from the Catholic Church and has become an Episcopalian. Needless to say, he is quite bitter.

"If I had done something illegal or indiscreet, I could be repentant and ashamed and have a new job. What I did was a challenge to the process....As a result of the church's view on homosexuality, gay Roman Catholics are faced with a dilemma: they can either affirm themselves as human beings or affirm their faith within the church. They can't do both" (Miller, p. 231).

In the summer of 1987, Neill Miller found himself feeling similar emotions toward the church when he attended the trial of Methodist minister Rose Mary Denman, who was charged with being a "self-avowed, practicing homosexual." Miller noted that Denman's previous behavior contained little if any misconduct, and that no parishioner had complained. She hadn't even preached a sermon advocating homosexuality or condoning promiscuity (as Robert Williams did). Miller observes, "Her offense seems to have been forthrightness about her sexual orientation" (Miller, p. 211). Denman's bishop had learned of her homosexuality when she voluntarily wrote him a letter and informed him of it.

The position held by the United Methodist church is similar to the ELCA's, in that homosexuals can be ordained if and only if they are celibate. The Methodist church, however, has been known throughout recent history for its liberal social positions,

especially concerning the Vietnam War and the American aid to the Contras. It is no wonder, then, that many Methodist churches are eager to improve the status of homosexuals both in the church and in society in general. In September of 1991 the church delivered two versions of a 14, 000 word document to the General Council on Ministries, a 133 member body representing the church's 114 regional divisions. One version, supported by 18 of the 22 members of the specially appointed Study Committee, states that the church should no longer, "maintain the condemnation of all homosexual practice" (Frame, p. 49). At the same time, however, most Methodist lay people hold the belief that homosexuality is a sin and therefore surprisingly support the ban on the ordination of practicing gays and lesbians.

Denman wanted to put this exact Methodist policy to the test, and hoped to turn her trial proceedings into an all out debate over the church's policies on homosexuality. She stated, "What hurt me most was to see the church turn into an ugly creature. I thought that was in the past. I thought the church had grown" (Miller, p. 221). At Denman's trial, however, both the prosecution and the judge made sure that this violation was the sole issue at hand, thus squelching any hopes Denman had of reversing the focus of the trial from her sexual preference to the church policy. The prosecution contended that the continuing service of Denman would violate the Book of Discipline, the volume that governs the Methodist church. The jury's verdict, however, was not as precise or as harsh as expected. Their decision read, "We affirm the social principals of the Book of Discipline that homosexual persons, no less than heterosexual persons, are of sacred worth" (Miller, p. 221). Denman's 'sentence', therefore, was suspension from her pastoral duties, in contrast to the expected termination. It was the lightest form of punishment Denman could have received, and she claimed victory. Immediately following the trial, Denman and her lover, an ex-minister's wife, left the Methodist church. Denman is currently a Unitarian minister.

I feel quite strongly that practicing homosexuals should indeed be ordained and accepted in the church. I began this paper because I was rather indecisive and uninformed on the subject, and I was, as the church is today, feeling the need to take a stand. In choosing the liberal side of the argument I believe that homosexuality--both the tendency and the practice--is not a sin. There is nothing evil or unforgivable about it, and it is not a condition in need of a cure.

In addition, I feel that ordained is not something that someone has a "right" to be. The ministry should be a calling, not a statement. It is something that one enters because they are compelled to do so not for themselves but for God. The Lutheran handbook *Visions and Expectations* explicitly states that a candidate for ordination must feel called by God to enter the ministry. There is a certain selection process in seminary and it's not as if one jumps straight into ordination after he decides that is what he wants to do. The years of theological training and pastoral internship distinguish between those who are meant to be ordained and those who decide that the ministry isn't really for them. If God didn't want homosexuals to lead his church, why then do these people feel called by the Holy Spirit to preach and to teach the Word? And why do these people stay in a religious organization that continually persecutes them?

It is essential that the same limitations and qualifications for ordination be placed on homosexuals and heterosexuals alike. The area of dissent lies in the conflicting marriage limitations and sexual requirements. This is what we must focus on. I, therefore advocate homosexual marriages. If this were allowed, I would wholeheartedly agree with the present requirements that candidates for ordination--of both sexual persuasions--would be expected to remain celibate until married and, after marriage, to keep their vows inviolate.

In addition, the argument that gays are of a lesser sexual standing than

heterosexuals is ludicrous. True, it is a biological fact that a homosexual couple cannot bear children. But how does that make them inferior to those who choose to be in a relationship where reproduction is physically possible? What about those straight couples who make a conscious decision not to have children? Does that make them as inferior as homosexuals? Shouldn't that make them even worse people than the gay couple who want to have children but find it biologically impossible?

The sexual double standard in seminaries, churches and society in general must be destroyed. How many single heterosexual seminary students are asked if they are practicing? Statistics show that most heterosexual adolescents lose their virginity by the time they graduate from high school. Does that mean that only the 20 percent who remain virgins attend seminary and are ordained? I don't think so. It would, therefore, only be fair to question heterosexuals about their sex lives as often as the church questions homosexuals.

It must also be noted that promiscuity is not a problem exclusive to the gay community, but is prevalent in the heterosexual world as well. Sex should not be used as a tool for manipulation or as a personal means of expression. This abuse of sexuality is not limited to or appreciated by members of any community. It is important to realize that sexual preference does not create a disposition to promiscuity or sexual deviance. Granted, the statistics are high and cannot be ignored, but there is not an absolutely binding correlation between homosexuality and sexual deviance. One must consider other factors, including inferiority complexes created by societal disapproval. It is partly because of today's promiscuous attitudes--from both sexual preferences-- that I feel that seminary screening processes are an important factor in this issue.

A candidate should be screened on the basis of the integrity of his calling, the gifts he can bring to the church, his intelligence, sensitivity and devotion to God and

his willingness to work (Spong, p. 88). I agree that the ministry is not only a job, it is a way of life, but churches should have adequate screening processes in seminary to dispose of those who are not comfortable enough with their sexuality to deal with it in a mature and responsible manner. If all candidates are screened the same way, and a practicing homosexual is found to be aptly qualified to serve the church, he should be ordained as quickly and as enthusiastically as the heterosexual who passed the same screening test. Similarly, if the candidate is found unfit to serve the ministry (for reasons other than his sexuality), he should not be ordained. I have to seriously question how much a person's sexual activities actually affect their job performance.

I do not feel that members of the opposition are ungrounded in their opinions and positions. I do, however, believe that part of their position is underscored by an uncertainty or an inhibition surrounding any sexual matter. This is not to say that they are sexually repressed, but that some of them are simply uncomfortable with discussing the issue.

"They'll tell you sex has become such a mess because it was hushed up. But for the last twenty years it has *not* been hushed up. It has been chattered about all day long. Yet it is still in a mess. If hushing it up had been the cause of the trouble, ventilation would have set it right. But it hasn't. I think it is the other way around. I think the human race originally hushed it up because it had become such a mess " (Ramsey, p. 329).

It is apparent, therefore, that the conservatives are at a distinct disadvantage to the liberals, who have become quite open about their sexuality. Another part of the problem lies in the fact that traditional Christian views of sex and sex roles have generally been glossed over, and have never truly held an absolute or concrete definition. The issues are even more clouded today because they have reached an entirely different level and are being debated by a new generation that holds an

entirely different sexual moral and ethical code than the previous one.

This is why, I believe, that there is so little written from the standpoint of those against homosexual ordination. Of the little that is written, much of it is emotionally charged and therefore is lacking a rational vocabulary with a logical connotation. I am making a call, therefore, for more writings from the conservatives. I, personally, am dying to hear more from them. I want to know more of what they are thinking and why. If there is to be a true debate on this issue, both sides must be heard. There is a plethora of information coming from the liberals. We know what they are thinking. We know their opinions and where they stand. We must now hear from the conservatives.

Today the issue has become a sort of game where the liberals try to convince the conservatives that they are wrong and that they must change their position. Admittedly, the silence coming from the conservative camp is wonderful ammunition for liberals. Many choose to view their reserve from the standpoint that they have nothing important to say that would be worthwhile to listen to; they know they are wrong and will get trounced in an argument. I do not believe this is so. The conservatives do have important and valid points that ought to be considered. In order for us to come to a rational, logical solution, both factions must be heard.

In addition, we must be patient. Because both sides of of the issue feel so strongly about their positions, the solution to this problem will not come easily, and will take time. But both sides must remain open to the other's arguments. Compromise is also imperative, as neither side of the issue could ever fully receive the exact outcomes they hoped for, at least where public litigation is concerned, and This issue is, to say the least, difficult, and a solution will not come readily or easily. The intense push for negotiation and solution may lead to a separation within the church. Who is to say that this is always a bad thing? Luther was certainly not afraid of conflict within the church and Lutherans would definitely be the last to say that a church

schism is an abhorrent occurrence. Admittedly, at least for a while, if homosexuals are ordained, there may be a type of religious sexual segregation, dividing churches into gay and straight factions. If this occurs, it will be difficult for everyone involved. But I have faith that eventually the opposing sides will work together, if anything, for the common goal of church harmony and communion.

I do agree with John Spong, however, when he states that at times this argument seems ludicrous, as the outcome will not change the way that people actually feel about homosexuals and the ordination of members of their community, but will only alter the public face of the church. That is the first step. At least the people involved will be communicating with one another.

It is sad that the religious community is associated with yet another major internal conflict, but it is not the first time this has occurred, and it will certainly not be the last. Both the church and society have survived similar situations, and they will do so again. The question lies in when and how. The solution will not be solved in 5 or 10 or 50 years, mainly because both sides of the issue feel so strongly and deeply about their convictions. Some form of compromise, however, must be reached. The church and its members cannot live like this much longer. The word and mission of God is being clouded by the troubles and differences within the church. In order to solve this conflict, again, communication must occur.

The issue of the ordination of homosexuals is not going to disappear. And it is not going to be solved by the two sides simply and repeatedly stating each of their arguments and opinions. The compromise reached must center on the issue at hand as unclouded as possible by moral and emotional arguments of sin and eternal damnation. Daniel Maguire, theologian at Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI, summed what he feels the issue has become. "In the time of Galileo, it was physics and astronomy. Today, it's pelvic theology. But the issue is the same. The issue is



power and the issue is control" (McLaughlin, p. 64). We need to move away from those issues. To solve the problem we must first and specifically focus on whether or not homosexuals are qualified for ordination. We can then work from there.

Dr. Charles Silverstein, in his book *Man to Man: Gay Couples in America* makes an interesting parallel between the church and homosexuality.

"Ironically, there are similarities between the Christian church and homosexual behavior. Both are anti-woman; the church defeats women by excluding them, while homosexual men direct their sexual energies away from them. Both have been considered to have criminal elements and have faced attacks on their morality by established religions. Both maintain that their primary interest is the development of love and sentimentality, and both claim to be uniquely different from those around them. But the most significant similarity is the fact that both the church and gay men represent homosocial institutions; the monastery and the priesthood are even more withdrawn from the influence of women than the gay ghettos of our largest cities. It is hardly surprising then that homosexuality, or at least male-to-male sexual conduct, is an obsession within the church" (Silverstein, p. 234).

Professor Philip Wogaman of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington D.C. makes a statement that both sides of the argument should heed. "The issue is sufficiently clouded to warrant a bit more humility than people have displayed" (Frame, p. 49). The capabilities are available for mature communication between the church and the homosexual. They simply need to be put into working order.

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