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## SPEAKING OF HOMOSEXUALITY: A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE ARGUMENTS OF THE GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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### SYNOPSIS

The success of the gay rights movement can be seen in the shifting public attitude toward homosexuality. Proponents of gay rights have repeated three prohomosexual arguments, frequently and emphatically, for the past 30 years. Those arguments have formed an ideology that some of our most powerful cultural institutions support, and have even converted the thinking of some Christians on the matter of homosexuality. They have become “conventional wisdom.” The prohomosexual public not only rejects the traditional view on homosexuality, but derides it as ignorant, intolerant, and dangerous, which poses a formidable challenge to Christians. Any effort to “speak the truth in love” on this hot topic, therefore, requires Christians to respond in a reasoned, balanced way to these three criticisms. The *innateness* argument claims that homosexuality is “inborn”; therefore, it is normal and God ordained. Traditionalists can respond that although homosexual *orientation* may not be chosen, homosexual acts clearly are chosen, making the person who chooses them morally responsible. Human nature, further, is tainted by original sin; therefore, as likely inborn but immoral tendencies such as alcoholism demonstrate, “inborn” does not necessarily mean “normal” or “God ordained.” The *insignificance* argument states that most homosexuals are decent people; therefore, their homosexuality is insignificant. Traditionalists can respond that the Bible asserts, and human experience confirms, that homosexuality is a significant sin that has negative consequences. We observe those negative consequences in homosexual individuals, in children raised by same-sex parents, and in societies that accept homosexual behavior as normal. The *intolerance* argument maintains that the traditional viewpoint is ignorant and dangerous; therefore, it must be silenced. Traditionalists can respond that we fully recognize the worth of homosexuals as persons, and reject the irrational belief that to disagree with someone’s behavior is somehow to dehumanize or “bash” him or her.

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In 1991, comedienne turned talk show host Joan Rivers invited me on her show to offer a Christian perspective on homosexuality. Rivers and her New York studio audience warmly received the gay couple who preceded me as they explained how they were born gay and, therefore, couldn’t change, and yet loved God and conducted their lives with integrity. Voicing its approval through cheers and applause, the audience accepted each point without question. When I was invited on stage with the opposing view, however, clearly, “the villain” had arrived.

Rivers was incredulous. “How can you say homosexuality is wrong,” she demanded, “when God gave those feelings to gays?”

“Yes, and we’re Christians just like Joe,” the gay men chimed in, “so we reject *his* version of the Bible.”

My response was cut short and I was turned over to the studio audience, which made no attempt to hide its hostility, grilling me with sarcastic questions and scolding me with accusations. For the next half hour, the *Joan Rivers Show* became a classroom where the professors—the host, a gay couple, and a socially liberal audience—tried in vain to correct my “outdated” ideas.

Fifteen years later, similar lectures from some of the most influential secular institutions—education, mental health, media, and entertainment—reveal that they have come not only to adopt the prohomosexual viewpoint but to promote it aggressively. The resulting change in society’s attitude towards homosexuality testifies to the astonishing success of gay activists and their allies, and to the challenge this success poses to the church.

There is a widening chasm regarding homosexuality between *traditionalists* (those who believe the moral standard is heterosexuality) and *revisionists* (those who believe the moral standard should be revised to legitimize homosexuality). Traditionalists are, as of this writing, a slim majority (e.g., 55 percent of Americans polled by the Pew Research Center in June 2006 oppose gay marriage<sup>1</sup>) but many of them feel as ostracized as I did during that 1991 interview. That is because those who hold the microphones (reporters, actors, talk show hosts, and university professors) unapologetically tend to be revisionist. They teach the same lecture on homosexuality I heard in New York, often with great passion and style. The lecture usually features at least one of the following three arguments:

Innateness: Homosexuality is inborn and unchangeable; therefore, it is normal and God ordained.

Insignificance: Most homosexuals are decent, respectable citizens who happen to be gay; therefore, their sexual behavior is insignificant.

Intolerance: The traditional view of homosexuality is ignorant and promotes anti-gay sentiment, which gives birth to prejudice and violence; therefore, it is unacceptable.

These arguments often are presented as though they have been proven or are self-evidently true, which makes anyone who challenges them homophobic and intolerant. Many Christians shy away from discussing the subject for these reasons alone. There are times, however, when Christians must be controversial for the sake of the truth. We have received a divine mandate from Christ not just to *evangelize* the world (Matt. 28:16–20), but to *influence* it as well (Matt. 5:13–16). Jesus preached the gospel, but also made public statements on social issues such as racism and sexism (John 4:4–11), religious hypocrisy (Matt. 6:1–2, 5–6), and the abuse of power (Matt. 20:25–26).

Paul instructed the Ephesians not only to separate themselves from immorality but to reprove it openly (Eph. 5:11). We likewise are required to engage the culture by clearly articulating biblical positions on controversial issues that are relevant to our contemporary society. Sexual issues are not exempt from this mandate. To refuse this challenge is to refuse our calling to be both salt and light to those who are perishing.

Western culture—indeed, the world at large—is showing unprecedented opposition to any engagement on homosexuality from a traditional perspective, whether in public forums, in academic circles, or even in our own churches and homes. For example:

- In 2004, a Colorado woman converted to Christianity and subsequently withdrew from a lesbian relationship. When she and her former partner went to court to determine custody arrangements for the daughter they had raised together, the court ordered her to refrain from exposing her daughter to religious material that is critical of homosexuality.<sup>2</sup>
- In Washington, D.C., a circuit court judge stated in her ruling that the Catholic Church had committed “terrible violence” towards a gay man to whom it refused communion because of his open homosexuality.<sup>3</sup>
- In Canada, public statements “inciting hatred” towards homosexuals have been declared illegal, even if made from the pulpit, although what constitutes “inciting hatred” remains unclear.<sup>4</sup>
- In Sweden in 2005, a pastor was sentenced to jail time for violating Swedish hate-crime laws by preaching to his congregation against homosexuality.<sup>5</sup>

Revisionists have challenged the right to teach the traditional view on homosexuality, requiring proponents of that view to explain why they reject the revisionist position. "Churches in the future," columnist Chuck Colson recently observed, "will be trying to keep the state from encroaching on matters of faith and morals."<sup>6</sup> An editorial in *Christianity Today* magazine notes, "This is becoming an inescapable conflict for every church that dares to teach Scripture's clear message on sex."<sup>7</sup>

Speaking of homosexuality, then, is inescapable. Some of us have loved ones, coworkers, or relatives who are gay or who embrace the gay ideology with whom we desire to dialogue; others belong to denominations that are splitting over the issue. Some of us work in industries heavily influenced by the gay lobby; others are simply concerned citizens. All of us are affected by the issue, however, and it is not unlikely that each of us, at some time, will be required either to convert to the revisionist position or to explain our reasons for maintaining the traditional one. In the interest of being better equipped to meet this challenge, this article will offer a response to the three fundamental arguments of the revisionist camp.

### INNATENESS

The claim that some individuals are "born gay" settles the issue for many simply because it makes people feel better about their sexual orientation, or the sexual orientation of someone they care about. It can comfort family members, because, as one mother of a homosexual declared, "A genetic component says this is not a fault; this is not your fault."<sup>8</sup> The notion can relieve gays themselves; it "made me feel good about myself," and "less [like] a sinner," one gay man remarked.<sup>9</sup> It can even convert a traditionalist such as William Cheshire, conservative editor for the *Arizona Republic*, into a revisionist. Cheshire stated in 1993 that his "feelings about gays and lesbians were dominated by religious beliefs." After reviewing studies that suggest that homosexuality is inborn, however, his attitude "did a complete reversal," leading him to support gay rights.<sup>10</sup>

No wonder, then, the alleged innateness of homosexuality is bedrock to revisionists. If homosexuality is inborn, it can be viewed like race or gender, putting homosexuals in the same minority status as African Americans or women. Linking gay rights to civil rights grants to homosexuals the nobility of being an oppressed yet determined class struggling for dignity and fair treatment. It also portrays traditionalists as being in the same oppressive class as those who opposed civil rights.

That is a winning strategy. In the Pew Research Center poll cited earlier, a direct correlation was found between the belief that homosexuality is inborn and support for same-sex marriage. Among respondents who believed homosexuality was "innate," 58 percent also supported a redefinition of marriage to include same-sex couples, but among those who believed homosexuality was acquired after birth, over 70 percent opposed this redefinition.<sup>11</sup> The link between belief in the innateness of homosexuality and acceptance of homosexuality, therefore, is strong. If homosexuality is innate, revisionists say, it is unchangeable, and, therefore, God must have created it.

Here traditionalists are tempted to one of two errors. The first is a knee-jerk reaction that attacks the integrity of researchers who link homosexuality with biology and accuses them of political motives. It is valid to question such studies, but it is wrong to dismiss them outright; each study should be given a fair hearing without resorting to ad hominem arguments. Rob Schenck, co-founder of the Washington, D.C.-based evangelical policy group Faith and Action, states, "If it's inevitable that this scientific evidence is coming, we have to be prepared with a loving response. If we don't have one, evangelicals won't have any credibility."<sup>12</sup>

Such a response questions whether the studies have been authenticated and accepted by peer researchers. It further affirms any results that seem unassailable. In so doing, it concedes no ground to revisionists because these studies only address homosexuality's *origins*; they do not prove its *normality* or *morality*.

This leads to a second common error. Traditionalists often assume that we have to disprove "born gay" theories to maintain the biblical position that homosexuality is immoral: either homosexuality is innate and thus not immoral or it is immoral and thus not innate. Traditionalists, thereby, often trap themselves in long, ineffective debates that miss the point: a condition *may* have genetic or biological origin, yet still

be unhealthy and immoral. In other words, the premise that homosexuality is innate *may* be true, but even if it is, the conclusion that homosexuality must therefore be moral does not follow.

Many experts make the claim that alcoholism, obesity, and violence are partially or completely influenced by genes. Experts also regard these behaviors as unchangeable, ongoing inclinations that have to be managed and resisted for a lifetime.<sup>13</sup> No one is arguing the moral legitimacy of these conditions, however, just because they may be innate. The consensus among professionals and laity is that “inborn” does not necessarily mean “good,” nor does “unchangeable” necessarily warrant normalizing a condition. Homosexuality is not exempt from this common-sense consensus.

### A Christian Response

The “born gay” argument gains its strength from the belief that what we *are* is what we were *intended* to be. Experience tells us otherwise; birth defects and early inclinations toward antisocial behavior are not the work of a loving Creator. We are imperfect from birth; we are imperfect for life. This testifies to the fact that our human natures are fallen (i.e., sinful), a foundational concept in Christianity.

David laments that he was born in sin (Ps. 51:5) and Paul confirms both the inborn nature of sin and our ongoing struggle with it (Rom. 6–7). The first human tragedy we see in Scripture speaks to this, as God informs Adam that sin’s impact on him and his race will be both spiritual and physical (Gen. 3:17–19; see also Rom. 5:12–20). The sin nature manifests itself from birth and we wrestle with it until death.

Traditionalists view homosexual *orientation* or *attraction* as one of many manifestations of fallen nature, and homosexual *behavior* as a deliberate, immoral response to such attraction. We may concede that orientation is involuntary; people do not choose to be attracted to the same sex any more than people choose to be born with a sin nature, but the bulk of evidence regarding the origin of homosexuality still points to a combination of biological, psychological, and environmental factors as its root.<sup>14</sup> Given the interplay of such factors, it seems likely that homosexual orientation originates in the course of a person’s developmental process, rather than being determined at birth, sort of as a path of least resistance. Whatever its cause, though, homosexual orientation is usually discovered, not chosen.

Once a person discovers his or her homosexual orientation, that person can choose whether to act on that orientation, as each member of Adam’s race chooses whether to act on his or her sinful nature. This is where moral culpability comes into play: *conditions* may be involuntary, but *acts* are chosen. It is difficult to resist acting on deeply ingrained sinful feelings, but that is the challenge every fallen human faces.

The same logic applies to feelings that seem unchangeable. I have found, in my own life and among men I have ministered to since 1987, that when a previously entrenched sexual behavior is abandoned, temptations toward it continue, but they diminish with time. This confirms the traditionalist view. The fall impacted us body and soul, and Paul speaks to the struggle between flesh and spirit (Rom. 7:14–25; Gal. 5:17), a struggle to which any honest believer will attest.

The following three points, then, summarize the traditionalist’s response to the “born gay” argument: First, homosexuality, like many sexual or emotional tendencies, seems to appear early in life and remain deeply ingrained over a lifetime; however, although homosexual *orientation* may not be chosen, homosexual *behavior* clearly is chosen; thus, those who choose it are morally culpable. Second, “unchosen” and “unchangeable” do not necessarily mean “inborn.” It still is unclear what role genetic, biological, or other factors play in the formation of homosexual desires. Finally, “inborn” does not mean “normal” or “God ordained.” Many conditions are inborn, but their origin does not determine their normality or morality. Such determinations require a more substantive standard than the explanation of being “born that way.”

### INSIGNIFICANCE

The premise that most homosexuals are respectable citizens might be true, but the conclusion that their homosexual behavior must therefore be insignificant is not. When speaking on this subject, I am often approached by a well-meaning person who says, “I have a gay brother/sister/friend who is loving and

responsible. So who cares about a person's sex life if they're not hurting anyone?" For some people it is difficult to view the sexuality of someone who is likeable and of decent character as a major concern, especially when compared to the pressing issues our media-saturated culture faces daily, such as terrorist threats, global poverty, unbridled violence, and other atrocities.

It is even more problematic to hold the traditionalist view when it condemns the behavior of someone we love. We would rather get along than divide over moral issues, and that desire for unity leads many people, Christian leaders included, to minimize homosexuality's impact. Examples abound: former president Jimmy Carter,<sup>15</sup> author Brian McLaren,<sup>16</sup> gospel singer Cynthia Clawson,<sup>17</sup> and Chuck Smith, Jr., son of the highly regarded founder of the Calvary Chapel movement (see Reviews, p. 47),<sup>18</sup> have stated publicly their belief that homosexuality is at best a secondary issue, that traditionalists need to reevaluate their position on it, and that its practice should not be condemned by, or even within, the church.

Here the mixture of truth and emotions is both confused and confusing. Sexual matters between consenting adults are seen in our culture, and, increasingly, even in the church, as inconsequential—a matter of individual conscience, perhaps, like drinking alcohol or dancing, but no cause for concern. The traditionalist who sees the matter more seriously is viewed, accordingly, as legalistic, quibbling over small matters while ignoring weightier ones.

### **A Christian Response**

Sexual behavior from a biblical perspective, however, is anything but insignificant. According to the Genesis account of creation, when God looked on all He had made, including man and woman in their naked sexuality, He applauded. Later in Scripture, sexual union is afforded the highest honor, when it is used as a "type" (or example) of God's intimate, passionate commitment to His people (Isa. 54:5–6, Hos. 2:19–20; Eph. 5:22–33). Homosexuality, conversely, is never mentioned in Scripture except in a negative sense; and as a union between two of the same gender, it cannot embody the complementary mystery that a male/female union affords (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26–27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10).

That is why traditionalists view sex as something to be greatly celebrated and fiercely protected. We take the guidelines surrounding it literally and seriously, because Scripture relates in ghastly detail the confusion that follows when people abandon those guidelines.<sup>19</sup> We promote them, hoping to see our friends and neighbors spared the heartache that sexual confusion yields.

As various states, and, perhaps, eventually, the United States as a nation, consider the legalization of same-sex marriage, and thus the wholesale legitimization of homosexuality itself, this promotion of the traditional view is fueled by three convictions: traditional marriage stabilizes society; redefining traditional marriage will have a destabilizing effect on marriage and thus on the culture; and same-sex parental partnerships cannot offer the benefit to children that male-female parental partnerships can.

Evidence abounds that traditional marriage enhances an individual's life span, physical and psychological health, and financial security.<sup>20</sup> As individuals go, so goes the culture; that which stabilizes one benefits all. When considering same-sex marriage, then, the question becomes whether it will weaken the marriage institution, strengthen it, or have no impact on it or the culture that benefits from it. The evidence so far, as the following will show, points solidly toward a significant weakening effect.

A decade ago, renowned gay journalist Andrew Sullivan predicted that gay couples, once given the right to marry, would change the way heterosexual couples viewed the institution, especially as it regards monogamy. Citing "the need for extra-marital outlets," he suggested that the practice of nonmonogamy, so common among gay male couples, could open up the minds of heterosexual couples to the freedom of an "open contract" that would allow both husband and wife to enjoy multiple sexual partners.<sup>21</sup>

Sullivan's seemingly outrageous words have become, in retrospect, prophetic. The claim that legalizing gay marriage will domesticate homosexual men has not proven true. On the contrary, homosexual couples are changing marriage more than marriage is changing them.

In the Netherlands, for example, where same-sex marriage was first legalized, one study found that gay men in same-sex marriages had an average of eight sexual partners per year outside their marriage or

“partnered” relationship, usually with the full knowledge of their spouse.<sup>22</sup> Columnist Stanley Kurtz noted that in Sweden and Norway, the granting of marriage rights to same-sex couples has resulted in a general cultural trend away from marriage and toward “more frequent out-of-wedlock birth and skyrocketing family dissolution.”<sup>23</sup> *New York* magazine, likewise, reports, “Many straight couples struggling with (monogamy) issues look to gay male friends, for whom a more fluid notion of commitment is practically the norm.” The article describes a heterosexual husband’s desire to make his marriage “open” after hearing his gay friend describe his own sexual pursuits outside of his committed relationship.<sup>24</sup>

No one can reasonably argue that broader acceptance of adultery and its resulting domestic instability can ever be in the best interest of couples, children, or society at large. Further, no one can deny the benefits to childrearing that a heterosexual couple—with the inherent perspectives and strengths of both genders—brings in contrast to the sameness of a homosexual couple.<sup>25</sup> Some would object that marriage already is in a sorry condition and point to the high divorce rate and unconscionable levels of domestic violence and dysfunction, but this argument indicates the need to reform, not redefine, the institution. Adding more clutter to an already messy house is hardly the solution. A total housecleaning is called for, and to the culture, it is a call we respectfully and urgently make.

Among Christian believers, though, we advocate not only adoption of the traditionalist standard, but enforcement of it as well. Here we sternly part company with those who minimize the significance of homosexuality in the church, for three reasons.

First, the Bible, which is our authority for life and conduct, describes incest, adultery, bestiality, fornication, prostitution, and homosexuality in negative, prohibitive terms. We affirm, therefore, that there is such a thing as sexual sin, which carries specific and unique consequences (1 Cor. 6:18), and that homosexuality is one of many such sins.

Second, contrary to assertions that homosexuality among Christians is just a personal or secondary matter, involvement in unrepentant, ongoing sexual sin is in fact one of the few reasons Paul gave for excommunicating a church member or for distancing oneself from him or her (1 Cor. 5:1–5, 11–13). If we are commanded to withdraw from a believer who is involved in such sin, we hardly can consider it insignificant.

Third, the enforcement of these standards is necessary for the purity and health of the church at large (1 Cor. 5: 6). We recognize this as a necessity that is more critical than “getting along.”

This position hardly negates the traditionalists’ recognition of the character and qualities of many homosexuals. We can distinguish between good traits and wrong behavior without allowing one to nullify the other. We can appreciate, for example, the wit of Ellen DeGeneres, the virtuosity of Elton John, or the insights of journalist Andrew Sullivan. We likewise can value the qualities of our gay friends and loved ones, all the while maintaining and expressing a clear position on homosexuality itself.

The argument that if a homosexual’s general character is good, his sexuality is made insignificant by his goodness bypasses what Scripture and common sense teach us. Good people can do bad things, and bad things cannot be reclassified just because of the goodness of the people who do them.

Rahab the harlot, for example, played a pivotal role in Israel’s conquest of Jericho. By striking a bargain with Joshua’s spies when she gave them shelter, she saved herself and her family from the destruction brought onto Jericho’s other inhabitants (Josh. 2), and thereby gained a place in the roster of “faith heroes” (Heb. 11:31). She was, nevertheless, a harlot. Is anyone really going to suggest that because Rahab did a good thing and exhibited saving faith, prostitution thereby can be legitimized?

King David, for that matter, was designated “a man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14 NIV). Could his notorious adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah (2 Sam. 11:2–5, 6–25) be regarded as “insignificant” because of his undeniable virtue? Despite David’s ongoing place of honor in God’s kingdom, the price that was exacted on him and his family for his sin (the death of the child begotten in his adultery) was severe. There is an obvious difference, then, between good character and bad deeds, both of which can coexist in the same person.

Homosexuality is a significant sin that warrants an unwavering and comprehensive Christian response. When it is practiced in the surrounding culture, the church should respond as we would to any sin being

openly accepted and celebrated: with loving concern for the sinner, reasoned arguments against the sin, and fervent prayer that the revisionists within our culture will reconsider it. When practiced within the church, however, the church should name, rebuke, and correct the sin until the brother or sister who is practicing it repents.

Other life-dominating sins exist as well in the church. Revisionists often accuse traditionalists of focusing only on sexual sins, while hypocritically winking at others that are nonsexual, but equally grievous. This is a criticism the church should note. The church should acknowledge and correct, for example, greed, materialism, and gossip as well, when they exist among believers. Too often the church ignores them, giving some warrant to the revisionists' charge of hypocrisy.

To repeat the same mistake with homosexuality by ignoring it, however, is not the answer. The most effective and biblical response, rather, seems to be to recognize all sin as serious—requiring repentance from the practitioner, forgiveness from God, and that delicate balance of grace and discipline in the church's response.

## INTOLERANCE

In *Through the Looking Glass*, Lewis Carroll illustrated the power held by the one who decides what a word means:

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—nothing more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "who is to be master—that's all."

Who is to be master is, indeed, the question, because whoever decides the meaning of a word controls the debate, reserving the right to define words as he or she pleases. Therein lies the power of the intolerance argument.

In the past, people generally agreed on the meanings of the words *hatred*, *violence*, and *bigotry*, and that the actions they designated were immoral. When a person said "hatred" in the context of another person or group of people, both the speaker and the listener considered the term to mean a malevolent desire to damage someone in either words or deeds or both. When someone said "violence" in such a context, all parties likewise understood this to mean something literally and physically injurious. In other words, society played by the same rules: words had mutually agreed on meanings.

Like Alice, however, we today have stepped through the looking glass into a strange new world in which a common understanding of terms and definitions no longer exists. To many in our postmodern world, "belief" now means "bigotry" or "hatred," and "moral standard" means "judgmental intolerance." Almost everyone in our culture still agrees that things such as bigotry and intolerance are wrong, but we have lost our shared perception of what qualifies as bigotry or intolerance. A linguistic anarchy now prevails in which terms can be conveniently and strategically defined to mean whatever one wishes them to mean.

Nowhere has this perversion of language shown itself more plainly than in debates over homosexuality. The most vehement denunciations have come from those who slap labels such as "hatred," "bigotry," and "intolerance" on the views of traditionalists. These denunciations often come from respected leaders, and so they carry tremendous weight.

Coretta Scott King, the late wife of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., said, for example, "Homophobia is like racism and anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry in that it seeks to dehumanize a large group of people, to deny their humanity, their dignity and personhood."<sup>26</sup> Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in a similar vein, stated, "I'm glad that I believe very fervently that Jesus would not be on the side of the gay bashers."<sup>27</sup>

These two widely recognized civil rights leaders equate "homophobia" and "gay bashing" with anti-Semitism and racism, and make it clear where they think Christians should stand on this issue. At first glance, we agree with these statements. Dehumanizing a group is wrong, and bigotry and "gay bashing" are unacceptable. On these points, traditionalists and revisionists agree. The crucial question, however, is

who gets to define terms such as *homophobia*, *bigotry*, and *gay bashing*? If they are defined as “cruel words or actions aimed at homosexuals,” then no one will dispute the definition.

When, for example, two men sadistically murdered a young homosexual named Matthew Shepard in 1998, the *gay bashing* was obvious and inarguably violent. When Kansas minister Fred Phelps leads his cult-like parishioners to hold up signs declaring “God Hates Fags” at the funerals of AIDS patients, *bigotry* seems too nice a word to use. Traditionalists join revisionists not only in complete agreement with the use of these terms in these instances, but in disgust, outrage and contempt for such behavior.

If, however, these terms also are applied to beliefs and statements that simply are critical of homosexuality, then they become weapons used to silence the traditionalist view, and that silence is the ultimate goal of many activists. Cardinal John O’Connor learned this when he spoke against condom distribution and pro-gay curriculum in the New York Public School system. In December of 1989, while conducting mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, he was screamed at by activists who accused him of murder, then threw themselves into the aisles, chained themselves to pews and stomped on the communion wafer he’d just consecrated. When Colorado-based Focus on the Family took an official stand on a statewide amendment regarding homosexuality, rocks were thrown through the facility’s windows, employees were verbally assaulted in restaurants by gay activists, and dead animal parts were left on the ministry’s front door. Chuck McIlhenny, a Presbyterian minister in San Francisco who discharged his church organist for unrepentant homosexual conduct, had his residence firebombed as a result, and when a conservative speaker attempted to address an evening service at Hamilton Square Baptist Church (also in San Francisco) the church was surrounded by activists who vandalized the building and screamed, “We want your children!” throughout the service.

The terrorism in each of these cases was justified by the activists’ beliefs that the traditionalist view equated a form of bigotry that needed to be stopped by any means necessary.<sup>28</sup> Gay columnist Paul Varnell is explicit about this: “The chief opposition to gay equality is religious. We may conduct much of our liberation efforts in the political sphere or even the cultural sphere, but slowing our progress is the moral/religious sphere. If we could hasten the pace of change there, our overall progress would accelerate—in fact, it would be assured.”<sup>29</sup>

Like the innateness and insignificance arguments, the intolerance argument furthers the goals of the gay rights movement considerably. If revisionists cannot convert traditionalists to a prohomosexual viewpoint, then tactically there is nothing left to do but to silence them. To silence them, whether through intimidation or hate crime legislation or public contempt, one needs only to convince society that the traditionalist is hateful, bigoted, and dangerous. Read Mrs. King’s and Bishop Tutu’s remarks again and ask yourself if that convincing has not already begun. The premise that the traditional view of homosexuality is ignorant and dangerous is certainly untrue, so the conclusion that it therefore is unacceptable is equally untrue.

### **A Christian Response**

The traditionalist has some good company in Paul who also was falsely accused of intolerance (e.g., Acts 21:27–29); rather than raging against or hiding from his accusers, he met their charges head on, and we must do the same. Here, then, are some key points in defense of the traditionalists who have been charged with ignorance, hatred, and bigotry.

First, we are not ignorant on the subject of homosexuality (we do read and consider research studies that pertain to it, for example). We simply view homosexuality differently than does an ever-increasing portion of Western culture.

Second, we hold the same view that Western culture used to hold. The culture shifted, and when it asked us to shift with it, we merely said *no*. We did not initiate this fight.

Third, we hold *convictions*, not *prejudices*, which, like *all* convictions, are based on a particular worldview. We believe that the Creator has revealed His intentions for humanity in the Bible, that the Bible has specific instructions for how we should conduct our lives, including in matters of sex, and that it prohibits all forms of sexual behavior apart from heterosexual marriage.

Fourth, the guidelines spelled out in the Bible have worked historically. We now are being asked to discard them in lieu of social experiments such as same-sex marriage, and we refuse. We, as citizens in a truly diverse culture, continue to advocate that our culture consider that a return to those guidelines is a legitimate option.

Fifth, when objecting to homosexuality, we fully recognize the worth of homosexuals as persons. We reject the irrational belief that to disagree with someone's behavior is somehow to dehumanize him or her.

Sixth, our beliefs do not constitute a phobia (i.e., as in *homophobia*). A *phobia* is "an irrational dread or fear of a person or thing," and we neither fear nor dread homosexuals. We disagree with them about the morality of their sexual behavior, and the difference between disagreement and fear is clear.

Seventh, classifying traditionalists with racists is disingenuous. We unapologetically believe in the superiority of some *behaviors* over others, but we reject the notion of the superiority of any *persons* over others.

Finally, we take seriously Christ's admonition to refrain from judging *persons*, yet we recognize the need to judge *behavior*, as all people must do constantly. "Bashing" an individual is quite different from discerning that that individual's behavior is wrong or harmful and, consequently, speaking up and taking action if necessary to rectify such behavior.

The gospel of John refers to Jesus as being "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). We normally assume that we have to be one or the other—honest *or* kind—yet in Jesus, we see a perfect balance between the two. We do well to emulate this. On one hand, we are compelled to consider our own need for grace, and thus extend it whenever possible. On the other hand, we are bound to consider whether it really is kind to withhold truth from someone who is engaged in harmful error. Few issues coax the grace/truth balance from us the way homosexuality does.

Speaking about homosexuality poses a challenge we cannot avoid, especially when our words are controversial and often misconstrued. Martin Luther King, Jr., reminds us, however, "The Church is neither the master of the state, nor is it the servant of the state. Rather, it is the conscience of the state."<sup>30</sup> To which we might add: God help any culture whose conscience abdicates its role.

## NOTES

1. "Public Opinion Trends on Gay Marriage," The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, <http://pewforum.org/docs/index.php?DocID=147>.
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