

CONTINUING THE DIALOGUE



A Pastoral Study Document
of the House of Bishops
to the Church as the
Church Considers
Issues of Human Sexuality

COPY: Material located in the
Archives of the Episcopal Church

10/10/2011

CONTINUING THE DIALOGUE

**A Pastoral Study Document
of the House of Bishops
to the Church as the
Church Considers
Issues of Human Sexuality**

**with discussion guide
prepared by
The Committee for Dialogue
on Human Sexuality**

**COPY: Material located in the
Archives of the Episcopal Church**

CONTENTS

FOREWORD FROM THE COMMITTEE	iii
1: THE DIALOGUE TO DATE IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH	1
Introduction	1
Background, 1976–1991	2
The 70th General Convention	10
2: DIALOGUE IN COMMUNITY	17
Communion in Faith	17
The Baptismal Covenant	19
3: THE BIBLE AND HUMAN SEXUALITY	23
Interpreting the Scriptures	24
Human Sexuality in the Scriptures	26
Homosexuality in the Scriptures	29
Conclusion	37
4: A TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE	39
The Witness of Tradition	39
The Witness of Scripture	40
Post-Apostolic Developments	48
The Teaching of the Book of Common Prayer .	50

that reality has to do with living in community today in ways that preview tomorrow's Kingdom of God.

"Let us dream of a Church," Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning said at Phoenix, "that refuses to settle its disputes and divisions by legislation, that refuses to accomplish with law what only the gospel can do." And former Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Robert Runcie, speaking at the concluding Convention Eucharist, invited the Episcopal Church to consider that the Holy Spirit "leads us into all truth, as in everything else, through relationship, by staying in discourse with those whose views may appall us, without rubbishing their spiritual integrity."

"The Spirit of Truth," he continued, "is also the Spirit of Love, the one who rescues faith from being turned into the poison of bigotry. What I long for in your Church and mine [is] that we shall presume our opponents' reasoning has something to do with his or her desire to be loyal to the same Christ we want to serve ourselves [and that] we shall recognize that what is and is not a matter of fundamental loyalty to Christ cannot always be made clear in a generation."

¹ A brief report on these dialogues will be found in the Appendix to this Pastoral Study Document.

² In fact, the ordinal for bishops enjoins them to be a wholesome example "for the entire flock of Christ" (BCP, p. 517); the ordinal for priests specifies "to your people" (BCP, p. 532); it is only the ordinal for deacons that uses the form "to all people" (BCP, p. 544).

³ A minority report dissenting from the conclusions of the majority was also filed.

2

DIALOGUE IN COMMUNITY

Communion in Faith

Since the 70th General Convention in 1991, some in our Church have participated in the dialogues on human sexuality mandated by Resolution A104sa. From the perspective of proportionality, the number of participants (approximately 18,000) was not large, but it was very significant. The survey forms filled out by the participants, while not intended to be a plebiscite or referendum on these critical issues, will contribute substantially to the ongoing conversation on human sexuality in our faith community. It is our considered opinion that the dialogues should continue, for, at this time, these are not matters which can be settled by a poll or by voting resolutions.

The Church's greatest resource in addressing the complex issues are committed communities of Christians where concerns can be addressed in open dialogue, in a setting that feels secure. Our greatest resource then is tied to the strength of our communion with each other—a communion created and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

The realization of the truth of God's revelation came to the disciples as pure gift. On the night before his death, Jesus promised the disciples that he would intercede with the Father to send "another Paraclete" who would always remain with the community. Communion with God will come as a gift of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit will bear witness to the teaching and life of Jesus. The Holy Spirit will "prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe" in Jesus

(John 16:8). The Spirit of God will be the presence of God truthfully telling the disciples of Christ; it will be the revelation of God the Father and God the Son (John 14:17; 15:26, 27; 16:13). By the power of the Holy Spirit a communion of disciples is formed, a Church is founded that will describe itself historically as "the temple of God" (1 Cor. 3:16), "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Peter 2:9), the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27).

These images of self-definition from the Apostolic period speak deeply of a holy communion with God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Anglicans understand that this communion (*koinonia*) determines theologically our relationship with one another in the Church. *Koinonia* is the property or state of having something or someone in common. What is said to be held in common is not specified by the word *koinonia*. If we are to talk about our communion with one another, we must therefore also be clear about what it is we have in common. For example, intimacy and friendship, of necessity, are about something—they are rooted in something shared, something held in common. Knowing this, the author of the First Epistle of John writes to share his experience of Christ: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship [*koinonia*] with us; and our fellowship [*koinonia*] is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). In the same way, our communion is about having something in common, sharing something in friendship and intimacy—our faith in Jesus Christ.

Communion with God and one another is both gift and divine expectation for the Church. The Church is that community in the world which is already open to receiving the love of God and to being enfolded into the orbit of God's life. Awareness of this reality moves St. Paul to address the Corinthian community, the most divided of all communities in the early Church,

in these words: "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2).

In baptism, by the gift and power of the Holy Spirit, Christians die with Christ and rise to the new life. Thus the baptized are united to God, the Holy Trinity, and brought into a relationship of holy communion with all the baptized through the ages, the Communion of Saints. The Church's response to and experience of the gift of *koinonia*, holy communion, is in fact the matter of the spiritual life.

The experience of communion is at once personal and corporate and is linked to liturgy and mission. The daily discipline and practice of liturgical and private prayer, the nurture of biblical teaching and meditation, the celebration of word and sacrament, the shared life of love and pastoral care, a passion for justice and peace, are the essential elements of the spiritual life that provide the necessary environment for the people of God to experience *koinonia*, holy communion with God and one another in the Body of Christ.

The Baptismal Covenant

Sometimes controversies over difficult issues make it easy to forget the real depth of our communion in faith. Polarization can lead us to believe that those things which might divide us are greater than what unites us, the basis of our communion. Yet, as we read in our quote from John's First Epistle, our communion is rooted by faith in the proclamation of the mystery of Christ which also unites us into the *koinonia* of the Triune God. We find this basis of our communion within the Church clearly set forth in the baptismal covenant:

Do you believe in God the Father?

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

I will, with God's help.

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

I will, with God's help.

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

I will, with God's help.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

I will, with God's help.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

I will, with God's help.

Because of this faith covenant, we can believe that that which unites us in communion is far greater than any issue or controversy over which our membership has disagreement. We do not need to fall victim to the false belief that true unity only exists where everyone agrees on everything. We are a diverse Church with a variety of perspectives and opinions. Such diversity can be advantageous as we wrestle with complex issues. Further, our ability to live with ambiguity without being driven to settle questions prematurely is not only a sign of maturity but is also a measure of our security in faith. These are strengths, not weaknesses. These strengths and our communion in one baptism are also the means by which we can, with the leading of the Holy Spirit, find solutions to the many concerns which confront the Church. This was most clearly stated in the report of the Section on Dogmatic and Pastoral Concerns of the Lambeth Conference of 1988:

Communion with Christ also means communion with all those who belong to Christ. Through the response of faith and of baptism, Christians enter a living Body, the Church, of persons committed to relationship with one another. In the New Testament the implications

of this are spelt out realistically and concretely. It implies the task of the overcoming of divisions imposed by culture, whether of race, class or caste, or sexual discrimination (Gal. 3:28, "You are all one in Christ Jesus"). It means giving material help to those in need (Rom. 15:27). It means esteeming each and every believer for the gift which the Holy Spirit has bestowed, to be used for the benefit of the whole body (1 Cor. 12:13-30). Thus the Gospel establishes as the normative pattern of the life of the community a relationship of interdependence, a mutuality between persons.

As we move ahead in our ongoing dialogues on human sexuality let us hold fast to the communion we share. Seeking always to realize the fullest possibilities of the communion given to us in the one baptism we share, we will not allow disagreement about any issue that is not a central affirmation of our Christian faith to disrupt our communion.

Having such a rule of faith means our communities are built on the strongest foundation. Having such a rule of faith means dialogues which take place in such communities will be open and honest—and the participants will have a sense of security. It is in such settings that the Holy Spirit can lead.

3 THE BIBLE AND HUMAN SEXUALITY

The Bible is a collection of sacred scriptures composed over a 1200-year period. It is made up of a variety of types of writings. Much of it is in stories, reflections on human circumstances and conditions in which God is frequently seen to be directly or indirectly involved. Often the voices heard in the Bible indicate that they are engaged in interpretation, seeking to understand and make relevant and pertinent for their time the traditions and experiences given to them.

These traditions are often about struggle—between order and chaos, freedom and slavery, justice and injustice, life and death. Amid suffering and evil, they tell of hope and the victories of the power of God's righteousness and love, especially in the resurrection of Jesus. Above all, the Bible is about God's love and concern for God's people.

While there have always been different emphases with regard to an understanding of the inspiration of the Scriptures, the catechism of the Book of Common Prayer (p. 853) states the essential Anglican and catholic view. Scriptures are called "the Word of God because God inspired their human authors and because God still speaks to us through the Bible." On the one hand, the Bible is fully an historical book. An analogy can be made with the Incarnation. Jesus was fully a human being. "He had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect . . ." (Heb. 2:17). Yet we believe God was mysteriously and wondrously present in this circumscribed life. The Bible, then, is an historical book. Its viewpoint is regularly limited by

the understandings and even prejudices of its time. And, we also believe, God spoke through these very circumstances and continues to speak to us today. We call Scriptures the Word of God because we may hear God's Spirit speaking to us through the Bible, but the Bible functions as a kind of icon, pointing its hearers through its words to the Word of God—to the Divine—revealed particularly as the eternal, incarnate, and risen Word of God.

Interpreting the Scriptures

Anglican and catholic theology has always understood the importance and the necessity of interpreting the Scriptures. Although some passages may or may seem to speak more directly than others, there is still the task of setting them within the larger context of the entire biblical drama and revelation. In this sense, no one passage or verse can tell the whole story or be interpreted in isolation. What gives the Bible its ultimacy is its overarching narrative power for shaping our understanding of life and of God's purpose and character—its telling of how God's reign can be already present in a world which often seems inchoate and broken.

The tradition of the Church, together with human reason reflecting on experience, are the means of interpretation. Tradition is a word used several ways in the Church, with different levels of authority.¹ The Tradition (capital T) is the risen, living Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. The process of tradition is the natural mechanism through which the Spirit of God works in every place and in every age of the history of the Church, the process by which the faith is transmitted from generation to generation and from culture to culture. In recent years women and others, whose predecessors might at first not seem to have

played that great a role in the Bible or tradition, have helped bring a hearing of other voices within the Bible and tradition. They have brought new perspectives and insights. The traditions (lower case and plural) of the Church are our fallible human attempts to express the living Tradition, in response to the urgings of the Holy Spirit in our faith community, in different times and places and cultures.

Reason has provided the means by which we express and communicate God's revelation. Reason is the divinely implanted faculty for receiving the divine revelation. Reason, however, is much more than logical analysis. It is best understood as prayerful, rational reflection on the Scriptures in the light of human experience and sound learning; it is also prayerful, rational reflection on human experience and sound learning in the light of the Scriptures. Reason is one means by which the Holy Spirit works to enable us to discern the mind and will of God in our day. Reason is not a distinct source of knowledge unrelated to the Scriptures, nor is reason infallible.

The Bible may regularly be used to critique tradition and reason, but it never can be heard without them. It is not a matter of whether we will use them to be part of the conversation with the Scriptures. They are always present. The important question is whether we will use them in a conscious, mature, and prayerful way.

The biblical writings were formed in communities. While individuals can read and study the Bible for themselves, and so be edified and spiritually nourished, it is through the hearing of and reflection upon the Bible in communities of faith that the Bible has its most important role in convicting, guiding, inspiring. The Spirit takes what is of Jesus, "declaring it to you," and, indeed, brings deeper understanding of truth (John 16:12-15).

The Scriptures themselves contain many voices and perspectives. It is often pointed out that the four Gospels give us a much richer view of Jesus because of their differences. This

diversity is true of all of the Bible. Religious practices and even many beliefs vary and change from the time of a wandering desert tribe to the era of temple worship, through exile and return, with emphases on kingship, prophecy, priesthood, and wisdom teaching. Even in the New Testament, written over a much shorter period of time, we find that the church for whom the Gospel of John was written was quite different from those churches out of which the Gospel of Matthew emerged, and that the church of Corinth was clearly quite different than the one to which the Letter to the Hebrews was written.

What gives the Bible its unity throughout all these changes and variations is its constantly recurring and passionate call to worship the one and only God, the holy God who is both demanding of justice and righteousness while full of compassion and mercy. This God calls the people of God to “be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). The calling to follow the ways of God and to know God’s holiness comes for Christians to its fullness through the life, death, and risen life of Jesus.

Human Sexuality in the Scriptures

It is not, then, surprising that the biblical views about sexuality are thoroughly enmeshed in cultural and historical circumstances and describe some considerable diversity of practice. Polygamy, for example, is not only known but at times presented as quite acceptable. Women and children are virtually or actually treated as property in highly patriarchal cultures (although patriarchy seems to be viewed as the result of sin in Genesis 3:16). Sexual mores are governed or influenced by various taboos and concerns about ritual purity which are believed to be important, sometimes for health reasons, and also in order not to confuse lines of inheritance and the bloodlines

of clan and group. Procreation and the continuation of the people are, understandably, important concerns.

Numerous biblical stories reveal a quite straightforward and realistic view of sexuality. It is a powerful human drive which can lead to sin and even disaster for individuals and the community. Although the view of sexuality as bordering on the sinful, which came later to play a strong role in some Christian traditions, is not a significant part of the Bible, there is certainly the recognition that sexual practice needs to be restrained and controlled to be beneficial. Sexuality is, therefore, always a matter of concern for the community and never a matter just of individual choice or behavior or of concern only to a man and a woman. In this context the nurture and right upbringing and teaching of children are a primary interest in which both mothers and fathers are seen to have important roles.

From the beginning—from the early chapters of Genesis onward—there is also a sense of mystery and awe that “male and female God created them” (Gen.1:27). There is not only the marvel of being able to share in the process of bringing new life to the world, but the wonder of the two who are different joining together. Jesus speaks of this wonder when he says, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh” (see Mark 10:7–8 and Gen. 2:24).

Never viewed apart from human animality, sexual behavior also gains a purposefulness and character which, with all else that is human, takes on a potential for self-giving love and beauty. The Song of Songs celebrates its erotic aspects, and there develops in the New Testament a strong sense of the sanctity of marriage and its solemnity and mutuality. Although not fully emergent from its patriarchal acculturation, the view of marriage and the Christian household found in the Letter to the Ephesians (5:21—6:4) describes both a tenderness and a self-giving love that shares in Christ’s way of loving.

It is, however, Jesus himself who moves both the solemnity and mutuality of marriage to a new level in his teaching about divorce (see Mark 10:2–12; Luke 16:18; Matt. 5:31–32, 19:3–9). He is clearly critical of the earlier biblical teaching. It is “because of your hardness of heart that Moses wrote this commandment . . . allowing a man to write a certificate of dismissal and divorce his wife” (see Deut. 24:1–4). Instead Jesus emphasized that the two became one flesh. “Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.” Men, in other words, are not to divorce their wives, leaving them in many ways helpless in such male-dominated society. Whoever does this, Jesus said, commits adultery against his wife when he marries another woman, and also makes his former wife an adulteress, should she be forced to join herself to another man as the only way to find support and protection.

While it would be hard to weaken the solemnity with which Jesus evidently viewed the marriage covenant, Jesus elsewhere teaches about forgiveness and new beginnings. His remarkable (astounding for his time) acceptance of women into his company and ministry suggests that his prophetic attitude toward women and his concern with male indifference and cruelty were paramount in his teaching on divorce. Similarly his sharp saying, “. . . that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28), seems intended to challenge his male followers to control their sexuality and so not need to inhibit the lives of women in order to protect men from their own lusts.

The biblical books occasionally consider other forms of sexual behavior along with abstinence. Eunuchs, either from birth or due to castration, are heard of from time to time. Celibacy is recognized as a proper vocation for those called to it, strong friendships are exemplified, and a chaste life is held up for all. While adultery is the worse sin because of what it does to the marriage covenant and community, fornication is also

disapproved of, especially when it is linked to a general kind of licentiousness often associated with the Gentile world. It was seen to show a lack of seriousness about the community, about the vocation of marriage, and the care of progeny. Prostitution is known and particularly condemned in connection with false and idolatrous worship of other gods. A view of purity, on the other hand, is upheld—one which sees sexuality as good when it is used and enjoyed for the procreation of children, the benefit of the covenant of marriage, and the strengthening of the community.

Homosexuality in the Scriptures

We now turn to seven specific passages in Scripture which refer to homosexual practice. In doing so, we recognize the danger inherent in isolating specific texts and acknowledge that we must look to the witness of Scripture as a whole. We also acknowledge that there is significant disagreement among us as to how Scripture is to be used and interpreted as we seek to apply it to this complex subject.

Genesis 19:1-29

Interpreters will disagree about the “sin of Sodom.” Some hold that the offense of Sodom is to be understood with specific reference to sexuality, others that the offense centers on the theme of hospitality. But even if the story centers on hospitality, there are those who contend that the homosexuality issue clearly lies behind it and is not excluded by it. The force of the word “know” (*yada*) cannot be overlooked so that the sexual element is removed. The offense against hospitality is so starkly evil precisely because it involves sexual behavior which is taken for

granted to be wrong. The violent aspect of the gang-rape of guests is the issue, and Lot attempts to protect his guests by making the atrocious offer of his virgin daughters to the men of Sodom. The parallel story in Judges 19-20 tells of a Levite who was a guest in Gibeah. The men of the city wanted to have intercourse with him, so his host offers his virgin daughter and his guest's concubine as substitutes. The men of the city rape and kill the concubine. Chapter 20 recounts the vengeance taken on the men of Gibeah for their actions. In both cases, the proposed rape of the guest and the rape of the concubine is called vile—a "vile thing" (19:23, 24) and a "vile outrage" (20:6). We cannot claim it is this evil or that: it clearly is both, with the sexual fault making more blatant the wrong of inhospitality.

But many interpreters point out that the story of Sodom is of little help in our contemporary discussion of homosexuality, since the moral debate today revolves around lifelong, committed, and stable relationships between people of the same sex. The intent of the men of Sodom to humiliate Lot's guests, who were angels sent by God in the appearance of men, by gang-raping them would presumably be condemned by everyone.

There are those who would argue that the "sin of Sodom" is not specifically a sexual sin but a general disorder of society. Ezekiel 16:49-50 understands the evil of Sodom to be pride, greed, and neglect of the poor, as does Isaiah 1:9-31. In Isaiah 3:9 the reference is to injustice, and in Jeremiah 23:14 the prophets have become like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorra: "they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evil doers, so that no one turns from wickedness." Here as elsewhere, homosexuality is not raised as an issue. Jesus, when referring to the mistreatment of his own disciples, seems to stand in a line of interpretation which views the sin of Sodom as inhospitality (Luke 10: 10-12; Matt. 10:14-15; see Luke 17:29 and Matt. 11:23-24). However, while the disorder is a general

one, human sexuality is one of the specific manifestations of that disorder and cannot be discounted.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

The Holiness Code in Leviticus explicitly prohibits male homosexual intercourse: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Lev. 18:22). In Leviticus 20:10-16 the same act is listed as one of a series of sexual offenses—along with adultery, incest, and bestiality—that are punishable by death.

Some point out that these passages occur in a context of teaching about ritual and moral holiness, a number of which would not seem applicable to life today. Readers are told, for instance, that it is an abomination to sow fields with two kinds of seed or to put on a garment made of two different materials (Lev. 19:19). Menstruation is seen as a sickness, and if a man and a woman have intercourse during this period, both of them are to be cut off from the people (Lev. 20:18). A man maimed or deformed in any way cannot be ordained as a priest (21:18-21), and pork and seafood without fins and scales must not be eaten (Lev. 11:7, 10-11). There are those who remind us that although it is always good to pay close attention to wisdom from the past (and Christians continue to follow a number of teachings from the *torah* of the Hebrew Scriptures), many of the understandings of earlier peoples about purity, order, and sex having to do with property rights, are quite different from our own. When, led by the Holy Spirit, Paul and Peter turned from the exclusiveness of the Levitical code and accepted Gentiles into the Church, the message of Christianity took on new power and invitation.

Others put more weight on the authority of the moral codes of the Hebrew Scriptures. They point out that as Jesus criticized

food laws but upheld the Ten Commandments, mainstream Christianity has always recognized the authority of the ethical commands of the Old Testament. Thus, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion lay down that while Christians are not bound by the ceremonial, ritual, and civil laws of the Old Testament, no one is free from the commandments which are called "moral" (Article 7).

That part of Leviticus which has as its theme the necessity for Israel to be holy because the Lord who is in the midst of them is holy mixes together a wide variety of commands: dietary regulations or laws against occult practices appear alongside rules for honesty in commerce or injunctions to honor the elderly and to love as yourself even the foreigner who lives in your community. The fact is that the Old Testament does not make distinctions between moral goodness and ritual purity in the way the New Testament does. Yet portions of the Holiness Code were used in the catechetical instruction preserved in some Pauline epistles and in 1 Peter.

However, there are those who question not only the appropriateness of the ritual regulations of the Hebrew Scriptures for Christians but, since ritual and moral codes are woven into one fabric, they also question the application of some aspects of the moral code, e.g., punishing those guilty of incest, adultery, and homosexual acts by being put to death.

An anthropological argument for this biblical prohibition against homosexual activity has to do with ensuring offspring. This prohibition, especially for males, is based on the assumption among ancients that all potential human life is contained in the semen. In this view, the woman is merely the receptacle. Where the viability and continuity of the tribe is at stake, any wasting of the semen—having sex with a menstruating woman, bestiality, masturbation, or homosexual activity—which precluded procreation is forbidden.

From a theological perspective, the climactic handiwork of God was in the creation of male and female "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27). God's command and blessing is, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." Any activity on the part of males to thwart this command is seen as contrary to God's creative purposes.

Romans 1:18-32

The most significant passage is Romans 1:18-32, in which Paul views male homosexual behavior—and perhaps female as well—as more evidence of the moral depravity which has befallen Gentiles as punishment for their idolatry. Paul's warning in this passage is not that wrongful practice leads to false worship, but that false worship leads to wrongful behavior. The main concern is with wrong worship, a concern central to the whole biblical witness. Worshipping any god other than the holy God of righteousness would lead people astray. As a result, "God gave them up to dishonorable passions." There are two meanings of the Greek word for "gave up" (*paredoken*). One translation is that "God abandoned them," i.e., God stood back and let the false worshippers have their own way. As a result, freedom is not grace at all but self-imposed bondage. The other translation for *paredoken* is "God delivered them over." The consequences, the "dishonorable passions," are imposed by God as a punishment. For Paul, the fundamental human sin is the refusal to honor God and give God thanks (1:21); consequently, God's wrath takes the form of letting human idolatry run its own self-destructive course. Homosexual behavior, then, is not a *provocation* of "the wrath of God" (Rom. 1:18); rather, it is a *consequence* of God's decision either to "give up" on his rebellious creatures or to "hand them over" to their own passions.

But just as Paul has his readers reveling in indignation at

the behavior of some, he reminds them of other kinds of wickedness, evil, covetousness, and malice. There is envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, gossip, slander, insolence, God-hating, haughtiness, boastfulness, rebelliousness toward parents, foolishness, faithlessness, heartlessness, ruthlessness. And so, as the second chapter of Romans begins, he administers the final *coup de grace*: “. . . you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.” In fact, no one can boast. All are called to repentance. That is the point. “There is no one who is righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10).

Some interpreters point out that Paul focuses on women exchanging natural intercourse for unnatural (the only reference to lesbian sexual behavior in the Bible), and men giving up natural intercourse with women (Rom. 1:26-27) because it is a particularly graphic image of the way in which the fallen state of humanity distorts God’s created order. God the creator made man and woman for each other, to cleave together, to be fruitful and multiply. In Paul’s view, when human beings engage in homosexual activity they enact an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality: the rejection of the Creator’s design. They embody the spiritual condition of those who have “exchanged the truth about God for a lie.”

Others, however, hold that Paul is talking here about heterosexuals who are committing homosexual acts. While it is unlikely that Paul knew of what we today call “homosexual or heterosexual orientation” (even the term “homosexual” was not coined until the nineteenth century), we must be careful not to minimize the main point of the text, which is God’s judgment upon idolatry—and this extends to every area of human relationships.

1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10

The early Church did, in fact, consistently adopt the Old Testament’s teaching on the matters of sexual morality and on homosexual acts in particular. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10, we find persons who commit homosexual acts in lists of persons who do things unacceptable to God.

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul, exasperated with the Corinthians—some of whom apparently believe themselves to have entered a spiritually exalted state in which moral rules no longer apply—confronts them with a blunt rhetorical question: “Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?” He then gives an illustrative list of the sorts of persons he means “fornicators, idolaters, adulterers”—and for the next two words we have no precise translation—“effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind” (KJV) or “sexual perverts” (RSV) or “male prostitutes, sodomites” (NRSV). The words in the Greek original are *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, and herein is the problem and the debate.

The word *malakoi* is not a technical term meaning “homosexuals,” for no such term existed either in Greek or Hebrew, but it appears often in Hellenistic Greek as pejorative slang to describe the “passive” partners—often young boys—in homosexual activity. In the Greek and Roman cultures it was not unusual for men to have a same-sex partner, usually a youth or an effeminate person. The word *malakoi* means “soft.” The man was not looked down upon as long as he was not the passive partner. There was abroad in first and second century society a tendency to regard women as weaker, less rational, and inferior to men. As Peter Brown points out, a man “had to learn to exclude from his character and from the poise and temper of his body all telltale traces of ‘softness’ that might betray in him the half-formed state of a woman.”²² Some suggest that what Paul

was talking about in these passages is pederasty, a common practice in the culture of his day, and in all likelihood prevalent in Corinth.

The rarely used word *arsenokoitai* may refer to a male prostitute at the service of either sex. The Hebrew word *mishkav zakur*, "lying with a male," in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 is translated in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) as *arsenos koiten*. Paul's use of the term presupposes and reaffirms the Holiness Code's condemnation of homosexual acts. Paul, as a Jew, may have found homosexuality particularly foreign because it was more widely known in the Hellenistic world and because it often involved prostitution and pederasty

Mark 10:6-8

Perhaps the most significant passage for our discussion is when Jesus addresses the fundamental meaning of sexuality by appealing to Genesis 1 and 2: "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'" (Mark 10:6-8). Thus, heterosexual love is the normative expression of sexual love according to the testimony of Scripture. Yet, Jesus' own celibate life witnesses to the fact that while intimate sexual relationship is a wonderful gift from God, it is, as Jesus is presented in the gospels, not necessary in order to be fully human.

For some Christians, the biblical verses cited above are heard in the context of the larger Christian teaching about the primacy of agape love and the radical, inclusive character of the Christian community. They remember Jesus' reaching out to those whom many religious people of the time had difficulty accepting. They know how the Bible has been used to exclude people. For others, these verses remain decisive against all

homosexual practice, or at least they raise questions of such weight that they believe Christians should not affirm even the most committed gay and lesbian relationships. They are also concerned that the authority of the Bible, as they understand it, be upheld against interpretations based on contemporary mores and understandings.

Conclusion

Throughout the Bible, sexuality is seen as an important aspect of being human and of being the people of God. Faithful living is all of a piece, and all human relations are meant to find their deepest value in the context of their response to God's love. "We love because God first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Sexuality is never to be considered apart from the call to worship the holy God of justice and compassion and to respond in community with lives of sacrificial giving, peacemaking, mercy, fairness, honesty without hypocrisy, kindness, purity, generosity, and courage. Clearly Jesus has strong expectations that those who followed him in responding to the in-breaking of God's reign would lead such disciplined and obedient lives—lives that did not just follow natural impulses, but were to be characterized by gracefulness. His disciples were and are to be a different kind of people.

¹ P. C. Rodger and Lukas Visher, eds., *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order* (New York: Association Press, 1964), pp. 50–61; "Tradition and Traditions," *Faith and Order Findings*, Faith and Order Paper No. 40 (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House).

² Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Man, Woman, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 11.

4

A TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE

It is our purpose in chapter four of this document to present the traditional teaching of the Episcopal Church on human sexuality and marriage. Since all Church doctrine must be rooted and grounded in Holy Scripture, we will seek to discern in the Bible the foundations of our understanding today. We will also examine the tradition of the Episcopal Church as it is embodied in the Declaration of Intention from Canon I.18(e) and the Exhortation at the beginning of the marriage liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer.

The Witness of Tradition

The present tradition of the Episcopal Church on human sexuality and marriage is our expression, in doctrine and worship, of the mind of Christ as we perceive it today from our understanding of Holy Scripture, from our understanding of earlier traditions of the Church, and in reasonable acceptance of the best scientific knowledge of our day. Within this process of tradition, Holy Scripture bears a special authority and status.

As we strive to interpret the Scriptures in our day, we need to take seriously the Church's various interpretations throughout history, with special attention to the early Church fathers, the creeds, and the ecumenical councils. We also need to understand both the historical context of the biblical writers and of our present cultural situation through which we perceive and experience what the Christian life of faith means. And when we

study and interpret Scriptures we need to be aware of our current situation, contemporary experience, modern biblical and theological scholarship, and the revelations of God's truth in other disciplines of human inquiry.

The Scriptures, however, do not speak plainly or unconditionally about all matters. The traditions of the Church, therefore, also supplement the Scriptures. They are alive and, therefore, always changing. These traditions are not a separate or independent source of authority, but are a record of the various and changing interpretations of Scripture and the establishment of truth in areas with which the Scriptures do not deal, so long as they are not contrary to the Scriptures. Further, they include, for Anglicans, bishops' pastorals, the actions of General Conventions and Lambeth Conferences, the canons of the Church, Catechisms, and documents such as the Articles of Religion.

Further, it includes the various editions of the Book of Common Prayer and the Church's authorized hymn books. All these are intended to inform us as we try to understand the Scriptures and to interpret their meaning for our day. But, of course, tradition is not self-evident and needs to be interpreted also. Further, while they too are always changing, traditions do provide us with the wisdom of the community over time and in continuity with the past.

The Witness of Scripture

The witness of the New Testament on human sexuality and marriage brings us the ideal of lifelong, monogamous, heterosexual union as God's intention for the development of women and men as sexual persons. Any sexual activity outside of marriage, is seen as sinful. Holy Scripture also recognizes that God calls some to celibacy for particular vocation and service.

These boundaries point toward an understanding of holiness which is fundamental to the Church's teaching on marriage and human sexuality, though some traditional boundaries are being challenged by today's realities. The present teaching of the Episcopal Church on human sexuality and marriage is our expression, in doctrine and worship, of the mind of Christ as we perceive it today from our understanding of Holy Scripture, from earlier traditions of the Church, and in reasonable expression of the scientific knowledge of this day.

It is our faith as Christians that all truth comes from the one God. Facts discovered by reason are only one dimension of this truth, as science seeks to explain what happens and how it happens. By its nature, science cannot discover the meaning and purpose of life. The *facts* of human sexuality and how it functions are areas for scientific exploration. The *meaning* of our sexuality may be known only in our relationship with God, and most completely in our relationship with the self-revelation of God in Christ. The Church looks first to Holy Scripture for the standard of this revelation, then to the traditions which we have attempted to express in terms compatible with reason, logic, and the best scientific knowledge available. Scripture, reason, tradition: three ways by which truth comes to us, but all truth is one in God.

A Story of Creation

The first chapter of Genesis contains a creation story which in its present form is a product of sixth-century Judaism, the period of the Babylonian exile and return. It affirms the goodness of all creation, including human sexuality, which is emphasized in this account: "...it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Other aspects of sexuality presented here include creation in the image of God, the simultaneous creation of female and male, and the

divine command for men and women to use their reproductive powers to increase in numbers, to fill the earth and subdue it, and to dominate the rest of creation.

The image of God in which we are made is not here defined. We assume it must mean other than physical similarity, and include powers of reflective and abstract thought and communication, the gift of freedom, and the moral responsibility it entails. Perhaps when we consider it in the light of Jesus' life and personality, the image of God may best be described as our capacity to know the love of God and to respond. Man and woman are created simultaneously in this image. Equality of the sexes is clearly implied, as well as complementarity. Female and male are of equal dignity. They are interdependent, for together they are a representative of the wholeness of the divine image. Here is the foundation for the emphasis upon the companionship of sexual union.

Having made them equal and interdependent, the Creator now commands the man and woman: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it..." (Gen. 1:28a). Later we shall see that the command to procreate can be and was interpreted in ways destructive of human life and dignity and of earth's ecology. For now, however, let us explore the more positive aspects of the reproductive function of human sexuality.

Natural science has made clear to us the importance of sexual reproduction in the evolution of life on earth. Probably the Lord God could have created us in some other way. But the fact is that sexual reproduction is the way God has chosen to create all complex life-forms on earth. We are all creatures of sexual reproduction, both in our species and in our individual persons. Creation continues today, both on the biological and the personal level. The word "procreate" means literally "forth to create." Perhaps it is on the personal level that parents, through faith in God, can begin to appreciate the miracle in which they have been invited to participate. It is a miracle of the creation of

a new human person. This is an experience both humbling and exalting, to hold a newborn child and to realize that only God can make such a wonderful being, but that God, through our sexuality, permits us to share in our Creator's act of creating. "Be fruitful and multiply..." It is a blessing.

An Older Creation Story

When a group of Pharisees asked Jesus his opinion on the Mosaic law permitting divorce, Jesus responded: "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate" (Mark 10:6-9). Jesus here quotes from the older of the biblical creation stories, found in the second and third chapters of Genesis. This account was written in its present form two or three centuries before the account in Genesis 1.

In this creation story, for the man [*adam*], "there was not found a helper as his partner" (Gen. 2:20b). So God takes a rib from *adam* and from it creates woman. The man then says, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman [*ishshah*], for out of Man [*ish*] this one was taken" (Gen. 2:23). Here *adam* is humankind, man in a generic sense which includes both female and male in one. From humankind the Lord draws forth the female [*ishshah*], leaving the male [*ish*]. In this is found the biblical foundation and meaning of human sexuality and marriage in the Jewish tradition: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:24-25). Having been created from one flesh, in sexual union without shame

woman and man again become one flesh. Companionship joins procreation as a God-given purpose for sexual intercourse. Marriage is endorsed by our Creator for the mutual re-creation of the wholeness of humankind, one flesh.

Realistically, the actual working of human sexuality in this world does not always reflect the goodness intended by our Creator. We live in a fallen world where sin distorts every part of God's creation, including our sexuality. Sexual abuse, exploitation, male dominance, rape, incest, pornography, prostitution, promiscuity, pedophilia—all are facts of life. The biblical explanation for these corruptions is called "evil imagination," the misuse of our God-given creativity to imagine and do that which is contrary to the will of God. Genesis expresses it this way: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). The story of Genesis 3 is a dramatization of this doctrine of evil imagination. Because humankind turns away from God, all of God's best gifts, including human sexuality, are corrupted. The pain of childbirth is attributed to the fall, yet woman's sexual desire continues to be for the man. The dominance of men over women is blamed on the fall: "...and he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16b). These twin biblical truths, the goodness of sexuality and of all God's creation, and the corruption of sexuality and of all God's creation, are both dealt with in many ways in Jewish and Christian traditions, in the Bible, and in history.

Some Jewish Traditions

Non-theological factors drove much of the development of the Jewish traditions of sexuality and marriage. The need for increase in population to compete with the neighboring nations made procreation far more important than companionship as a

purpose for sexuality and marriage. In the early part of Israel's history, polygamy was accepted for those men able to afford more wives, so that they might produce more children. Slavery was accepted, and sexual relations between free men and female slaves were assumed and regulated. It was a male dominated society in which men alone had property rights, which included not only real property but extended to the lives and bodies of women and children as well. Divorce was a male prerogative, and female barrenness was a cause for divorce. Adultery, seduction, and rape were condemned as abrogations of the property rights of men.

The Song of Solomon is a folk song in praise of sexual love, celebrating youthful passion, with no reference to God or to marriage. Taking the form of a dialogue between a young woman and a young man in love with each other, this book probably had its origins in the early influence of the fertility cults of their neighbors upon Jewish culture and was then assumed into annual Jewish festivals and so into the Bible. It affirms that sexual love is in itself good and beautiful.

Just the opposite tendency can be seen in the later Holiness Code in Leviticus (Lev. 17-26). Here the priests of Israel were struggling to differentiate themselves from the sexually promiscuous practices of Canaanite religion. Incest, adultery, homosexual relations, sexual relations with animals, child sacrifice, resorting to mediums and wizards, sexual relations during a woman's menstrual period, and many other "abominations" are prohibited because these are the things the Canaanites do, for, "You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you" (Lev. 18:3). For Christians, such practices must be judged not by their Canaanite connections, but by our understanding of the mind of Christ.

Jesus and the New Covenant

Jesus is not a reformer of Jewish sexual ethics. He is a revolutionary. His teaching calls for a radical cleansing of temple idols and a return to the foundations of God's intentions in creation. Jesus overturned the Mosaic divorce law, rejected men's prerogative to divorce at will, and asserted the will of the Creator: "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'" (Mark 10:6-8a). Companionship seems far too weak a synonym for this doctrine of "one flesh," the primary purpose intended by God for marriage and sexual union. The purpose of procreation, which predominated in both Jewish and Christian teaching, no longer stands alone.

Jesus rejects divorce absolutely. It may be a fact of life, but divorce can have no divine sanction in the teaching of Christ: "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate" (Mark 10:8b-9). This teaching of Jesus is a call to radical new freedom in the reign of God. It is part of a new vision which had power to survive government persecutions and to prevail as the faith of the Empire. Elaine Pagels has observed, "By subordinating the obligation to procreate, rejecting divorce, and implicitly sanctioning monogamous relationships, Jesus reverses traditional priorities, declaring, in effect, that the other obligations, including marital ones, are now more important than procreation."¹

If applied legalistically, this could be harsh, puritanical, unloving, inhuman ethic. But Jesus never uses it that way. Think, for example, of his gently dealing with the woman caught in the act of adultery, and with the Samaritan woman at the well, who had been married to five husbands and was living with one to whom she was not married. The Church, in producing the New Testament, remembered these as typical of Jesus' always

upholding the absolute standard of the will of God, while gently accepting people as they are. It is an example for the Church to follow in both ethical teaching and in pastoral application.

Jesus then offered an even more radical teaching, going beyond the Jewish tradition exalting marriage and family above all else. Jesus told his disciples, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can" (Matt. 19:11-12). Jesus does not prohibit marriage, and marriage is certainly not an impediment to entering the kingdom of heaven. Marriage and family and sexuality are all good, all gifts of God.² Jesus' own human life is our supreme example of a holy single life dedicated totally to God. Nothing in the world can be more important than that hidden treasure, that pearl of great price, the reign of God.

Paul, in those letters generally attributed to his authorship, gives practical advice to Christians which generally follows Jesus' radical teaching. In Romans 1, Paul believes homosexual conduct is the defilement of the body that God gave him, a body that is in some sense stamped with God's image. Paul felt strongly about all types of sexual sin, but regarded the homosexual lifestyle as far worse than simple fornication. This is a crucial teaching on homosexual behavior and is the basis for much of the received tradition. Homosexual behavior is one sign of creation falling away from God's intention for it. In his first letter to the Church in Corinth, Paul advises, "A man does well not to marry" (1 Cor. 7:1b). It seems better to him that everyone should follow his example and devote all his time and energy to the mission of Christ. "But because there is so much immorality, every man should have his own wife, and every woman should have her own husband" (1 Cor. 7:2). He forbids divorce on the part of Christians, but if an unbelieving spouse wishes to leave a Christian, so be it. Marriage is upheld as honorable, but

the kingdom always comes first. Therefore Paul teaches it is better not to marry, but it is also better to marry than to “burn with passion” (1 Cor. 7:9). This view was certainly conditioned by Paul’s belief in the imminent Second Coming. In contrast to the radical teachings of Jesus and Paul, the letter to the Ephesians (chapter 5) and the Pastoral Epistles return to extolling the virtues of the family, of companionship, and of procreation.

Post-Apostolic Developments

While the teachings of Jesus and Paul concerning marriage and thus human sexuality were in great measure shaped by their belief in the imminence of the kingdom of God, later generations saw the matter in a different light. For example, when the persecution of Christians came to an end at the beginning of the fourth century, and with it a virtual close to the list of martyrs, a new situation presented itself. As greater and greater numbers of people presented themselves for baptism there was a gradual lowering of Christian ideals and laxity in discipline that inevitably follows mass conversions.³ This lowering of Christian ideals brought forth a new hero to replace the martyr—the ascetic.

The rise of monasticism coincided with the increased secularization of the Church brought on by the end of persecution and the establishment of Christianity as the state religion. In this context the ascetic replaced the martyr as the hero who gave up all for the sake of the kingdom of God. At the top of the list of those things included in this spiritual martyrdom was the maintaining of virginity and the valorization of celibacy. Thus the list of virgins joined the list of martyrs as the heroes of the Church.

We see then the gradual movement toward the recognition

of those leading lives without sexual activity as somehow living a higher or more perfect kind of Christian life. True asceticism meant living without sex. This asexual asceticism was eventually to have a major influence on the doctrine of Original Sin—the Fall. The scriptural basis for the development of the theology of Original Sin is found in the Pauline teaching that “sin came into the world through one man” so that “many died through the one man’s trespass” (cf. Rom. 5:12–21).

This doctrine underwent further development in the late second century as the Church struggled against the dualistic heresies. But in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, under the influence of monastic asceticism, human sexual desire had become a primary focus of the Fall. While most writers on the subject believed that Adam and Eve had fallen from a kind of asexual “angelic” state to a lower material mode of living in the hierarchy of the created order, one theologian had a different view. Augustine of Hippo came to believe that, even without the Fall, Adam and Eve would have consummated their marriage and brought forth children. The result of the Fall for Augustine was not that men and women became sexual beings, but that “the uncontrollable elements in sexual desire revealed the working in the human person of a *concupiscentia carnis*, of a permanent flaw in the soul that tilted it irrevocably towards *the flesh*....With Adam’s Fall, the soul lost the ability to summon up all of itself, in an undivided act of will, to love and praise God in all created things.”⁴ For Augustine, sexuality was a part of creation and not the mark of an imprisoned soul. At the same time, however, sexuality was forever flawed by the sin of Adam. Sexuality, therefore, “spoke, with terrible precision, of one single, decisive event within the soul. It echoed in the body the unalterable consequence of mankind’s first sin.”⁵ It is this view of sexuality that we in the Western Church have inherited and which still informs our thinking today.

However, today we note with commendation the many Christians, both ordained and lay, who have taken vows of celibacy in order to better serve their callings as Christians. Many such persons serve with dignity and honor in our religious orders.

The Teaching of the Book of Common Prayer

The Augustinian understanding of sexuality was institutionalized in the Church. The celibate, monastic vocation was considered a higher calling than marriage. Marriage, though, was still a good as it served the ends of procreation and companionship while providing the remedy of sin. This is to say, marriage provided a context in which sexual desire, concupiscence, was properly restrained and served the human goods of the procreation of children and the companionship between husband and wife. This understanding of sexuality and marriage was first fully expressed in the Fourth Lateran Council of the Roman Catholic Church in 1214. It was, in turn, adopted in Anglicanism in the 1549 Prayer Book.

The Declaration of Intention

This understanding has since been modified. Title I, Canon 18, of the Episcopal Church requires that the priest shall ascertain that those to be married understand "...that Holy Matrimony is a physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman, entered into within the community of faith, by mutual consent of heart, mind, and will, and with intent that it be lifelong." Before being married, the woman and man are required to sign the following declaration:

We, A.B. and C.D., desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare

that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.

We believe that the union of husband and wife, in heart, body, and mind, is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.

And we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help thereto.

As we have seen, this tradition of sexuality and marriage is biblically based. It is especially grounded in the teaching of Jesus that marriage is a lifelong union. This Church has chosen to deal pastorally with those who divorce, but to be married, the intention must be lifelong union.

The canon declares that the purposes of marriage are companionship for mutual help, comfort, and joy; and for procreation and nurture of children, when God wills that the couple have children. This is the order of Genesis 2, endorsed by Jesus. It is a reversal of those Jewish traditions which considered the marriage a failure if there were no sons, and of those Christian traditions that have tended to consider sexual joy to be sinful, and procreation to be the only legitimate purpose of sex.

The Exhortation at a Marriage

The tradition of the Episcopal Church on human sexuality and marriage is embodied in the Exhortation read by the celebrant at the beginning of the liturgy. Marriage is the union of a man and a woman in a covenanted relationship established by God in creation. Although the equality of the woman and man

is assumed, the "giving away" of the bride is still present as an option which may be used. (The first option, moreover, is a "presentation" in which both the bride and the groom may be presented for marriage.) Paul's teaching that the relationship between Christ and the Church is like that between bride and groom is cited to the honor of the marriage union.

Beginning the marriage service by reading the Exhortation to the congregation makes a definitive statement as to our understanding and teaching regarding marriage. The Exhortation is based upon Scripture of the Old and New Testaments and it is rooted in our tradition. Massey Shepherd, in his commentary on the 1928 Book of Common Prayer services, says:

The Exhortation is a solemn and emphatic pronouncement of the sacredness of marriage, both as a divine institution given to humanity at its creation (Genesis 2:18, 24; *cf.* Matthew 19:5) and as a society redeemed and hallowed by Christ to be a type of that perfect love He has for His Church (Ephesians 5:22-23).

As Marion Hatchett points out in his commentary on the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, the 1549 Book of Common Prayer's Exhortation lists three reasons for the institution of marriage: (1) for the procreation of children; (2) as a remedy against sin (to avoid fornication); and (3) for mutual society, help, and comfort. The American Prayer Books did not include these purposes of marriage until the revision of 1979, and it was not until 1949 that the purpose of marriage was stated in a Declaration of Intention. Although our present Prayer Book omits "to avoid fornication" as one of the purposes of marriage, it does include as God's purposes for marriage mutual joy, help, and comfort given to one another, and the procreation of children.

The 1549 and successive English and American Prayer Books state that marriage is honored or honorable. This elevates

marriage to the same status as was held by celibacy in the sixteenth century. It should be noted that the milieu of the early Church assumed an imminent eschatological end. In this context, and along with a negative view of sexual intercourse, celibacy was honored as an especially virtuous state, and marriage was somewhat of a concession for those who were burning with passion (1 Cor. 7:9). Clearly, the Book of Common Prayer holds up the covenant of marriage as a gift of God, intended to be entered into advisedly, reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with God's purposes.

Anglican thought no longer considers the procreation of children to be the sole purpose of sexual intercourse. As long ago as 1958, the Lambeth Conference stated:

[T]he procreation of children is not the only purpose of marriage. Husbands and wives owe to each other and to the depth and stability of their families the duty to express, in sexual intercourse, the love which they bear and mean to bear to each other. Sexual intercourse is not by any means the only language of earthly love, but it is, in its full and right use, the most intimate and the most revealing; it has the depth of communication signified by the Biblical word so often used for it, "knowledge"; it is a giving and receiving in the unity of two free spirits which is in itself good (within the marriage bond) and mediates good to those who share it. Therefore it is utterly wrong to urge that, unless children are specifically desired, sexual intercourse is of the nature of sin. It is also wrong to say that such intercourse ought not to be engaged in except with the willing intention to procreate children.⁶

In fact, the one petition that may be omitted from the prayers in the marriage liturgy is, "Bestow on them, if it is your will, the gift and heritage of children..." (BCP, p. 429). Apparently, the

couple, even if not past child-bearing years, have some choice in the matter. The ready access to contraception in the twentieth century has made this choice a reality, and the Church in its official teachings has urged its members to make that choice responsibly. This is especially imperative in light of the growing crisis of overpopulation, particularly in the Third World, as it relates to the well-being of the family.

The words "one flesh" are not used in the Exhortation, but the idea is clearly stated: "The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy, for the help and comfort given one another...and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord." Christian marriage is clearly a covenanted relationship that includes not only the woman and man, but also God and the Church. This is not a private contract as might be drawn up by the individualistic secular culture in which we live. God has determined the nature of this institution, not we. Therefore the Church continues, in a changing secular world, to develop norms for life-long marital chastity and abstinence for the unmarried.

¹ Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988), p. 16.

² This teaching is reflected in the attitudes of present-day members of the Church. More than 95% (over 14,000 persons) of those participating in the human sexuality discussion questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Human Sexuality is a gift from God and it is good."

³ J. G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church*, pp. 244-245.

⁴ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 418.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶ *The Family Today* (1958), p. 13.

5

THE DISCONTINUITIES

The 70th General Convention in Resolution A104sa, while affirming the Church's traditional teaching, speaks of "the **discontinuity** between this teaching [the traditional teaching of the Church] and the experience of many members of this body."

Christian marriage, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God and the only context the Church has recognized as appropriate for sexual intercourse. As witnesses to this covenant and by promising to uphold the two persons in the marriage, the parish community makes its own covenant with them, locating both the ceremony and the marriage itself in the context of Christian community and ongoing support (in intent if not always in reality). But what of the large number of persons and couples whose experience and relational status put them outside this covenant and in the state of discontinuity referred to in Resolution A104sa? Should the Church's agenda be set entirely by Scripture and tradition? Some say "yes"; others think informed reason and experience also have a role to play.

In this chapter we will look at the experience of those who have received God's gift of sexuality but are outside the covenant of marriage and we will also examine some of the findings of those social and biological scientists and psychologists whose work has challenged the traditional stance of the Church with regard to human sexuality.

Adolescent Sexuality

Adolescence is a time of intense interest in sexuality and of emerging sexual feelings, a time of curiosity and excitement, of