

A STUDY DOCUMENT  
BASED ON THE PROPOSED RITE

"The Celebration and Blessing of a Covenant in Love"

Prepared by

The Bishop's Theology Group  
Episcopal Diocese of California

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The composition of the Theology Group reflects a wide diversity of opinion both theological and social. The document that we present to the Bishop and the Diocese is aimed at providing a basis for discussion and decision-making. The Theology Group, so widely constituted, could not come to a unified agreement on certain vital issues. What we are able to provide through a series of papers are reasoned statements that are pro and con: that the blessing of same sex relationships in a "Convent of Love" are advisable or inadvisable.

There is a strength in our diversity both in the Group and our identity as Anglicans. We hope the Church can benefit from the discussions in this document. Our model for discussion is the well-known Anglican method of exploring the poles of scripture, tradition and reason. Mindful of the variety of interpretations of scripture, for example, we adopted two approaches to scripture. The first approach, a literal or text approach, is demonstrated in "Scripture - A Review." In that section we show that the literal approach to biblical passages referring to human sexuality does not produce a singular conclusion. The second approach is the historical-critical study of pertinent texts with the view that the whole witness of scripture is the background as the church reflects on its lived experience in Christ. Implied in the second approach is that tradition and reason along with the canon of Holy Scripture constitute a three-fold authority for arriving at a position on the question under study.

The second position is embodied in the remainder of the document. Included here is a review and commentary on the history of the Church's teaching on the morality of homosexuality, papers that draw on psychological and sociological understandings (reason) of marriage and same sex relationships, and a review of current research in the area of homosexuality. This section provides a concise and well-documented challenge to the Church's tradition on homosexuality and same sex couples. It indicates a growing body of factual evidence and experience contrary to commonly held perceptions and understanding of homosexuality. It challenges the myths and stereotypes that are wedded to tradition.

The final section includes a theological statement based on the document "A Celebration and Blessing of a Covenant in Love" and a critical response to that rite. Recommendations on the advisability or inadvisability of using this rite are provided by members of the Group along with questions for further study.

To sum up the process of our inquiry, we offer a quotation from Urban T. Holmes in his book What is Anglicanism? "By implication we do not believe that God's revelation...ends with the closing of the 4th century. The Scriptures remain normative, but God continues to reveal (God's) self and (God's) will in a manner that enlarges upon what is formed in the Bible and in a way that is consistent with the Church's understanding."

The Rev. Jack Eastwood

## INTRODUCTION

In May 1985, a group of clergy and lay people were gathered by Bishop Swing to begin discussion on the theology contained in the proposed rite "The Celebration and Blessing of a Covenant in Love." The rite had been drawn up by the Diocesan Liturgical Commission in 1984. In that first meeting, and subsequent meetings as our work required, additions were made to the group's membership to provide resources for the task. Our aim was to be a widely representative group; persons who are clergy, lay, heterosexual, homosexual, conservative and liberal. The group included resources from a variety of fields; Anglican tradition and pastoral practices, counselling, biblical studies and liturgical studies. The group contained representatives from Diocesan leadership, seminary faculty and the parish setting. Bishop Swing's charge to the group was the following:

### BISHOP'S CHARGE TO THE THEOLOGY GROUP

The focus of the Theology Group will be the document entitled "The Celebration and Blessing of a Covenant in Love," prepared by the Liturgical Renewal Commission of the Diocese of California.

The purpose of the Theology Group is to explore the theological roots of the proposed liturgy and to prepare a statement concerning the advisability or inadvisability of the Church's blessing of same-sex unions.

The Theology Group will be made up of a cross section of men and women of the Diocese of California. They will honor strict confidentiality by keeping the candid statements of fellow members strictly within the limits of the Theology Group. There will be a Convenor and a Scribe. The target time of completion is late June of 1986.

The final prepared statement by the Theology Group is intended to be a vital source of counsel to the Bishop and to the Diocese in facing the issue of same-sex unions.

## STATEMENT OF THE QUESTION

We are asked by the Bishop of California to explore the "advisability or inadvisability of the Church's blessing of same sex unions." First, this question arises within the context of the pastoral mission of the Church, that is Christians in communion with each other as members of Christ, and in Christ of one another, presenting many aspects of their experience as possible vehicles for God's grace and personal growth in God. We are only raising it from within the discipline of the Episcopal Church which in 1979 and again in 1985 at General Convention stated that gay and lesbian persons are to be considered fully members of this church. We do not raise the question as a response to various movements, either pro or con, inside or outside the Church; neither is it raised as a pastoral response to the AIDS epidemic, with all its implications; or is it merely because the issue will not go away.

Second, the question arises within the context of human relationships: humans seeking and discovering themselves called to responsible forms of interpersonal companionship and desiring to invoke the blessing of their God upon these risky and fruitful ways of transcending selfish individualism and radical alienation. Marriage and celibacy are two forms of interpersonal commitment with blessings which have already found favor and form in society and the Church, intended to lead toward the ever fuller and more complete experience of personhood and union with God within the human community.

Comes now responsible relationships between Christians of the same gender: life commitments to one another and for one another, which create an arena in which individual and selfish goals can be transcended and the signal and sign of the mystery of love at work can be seen....These come to the Church to ask why such unions of Christian men and women cannot be dedicated, recognized and set apart as exemplary models of positive human relationships in which the signs of God's grace can be discerned; in which the fuller human potential can be lived; and the mystery of growth and transformation in Christ Jesus can be celebrated before God?

Moreover this question must be raised in the larger context of the Holy Spirit's leading the Church into all truth. Can the question be a part of God's plan to recall us all to faithfulness to the Gospel?

The Rev. Rollie Jones  
The Rev. Jerry Brown

## I. SCRIPTURE - A REVIEW

### A. A SUMMARY STATEMENT ON HOLY SCRIPTURE AND HOMOSEXUALITY

The following is a summary statement concerning passages of Scripture reviewed by the Bishop's Theology Group from September, 1985 to February, 1986. It is written from the standpoint of "Position A: Scripture is authoritative over the Church," and, as such, reflects my own bias more than the group consensus.

The first discussion of homosexuality appears in the Genesis account of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis chapters 18 and 19. God clearly condemns the sin of Sodom; in 18:20, "the Lord said, 'the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave.'" The committee discussed whether the "sin" (if indeed, it was only one type of sin) was homosexual sex per se assaultive sex (rape), sex with angels, or inhospitality. We agreed that the fact that the visitors were angels "appears secondary" to the fact that they were males, guests in Lot's house, and unwilling to participate. That Lot offers his virgin daughters (as a substitute for the male guests) to satisfy the crowd's lust might indicate that it was not the assaultive nature of the sexual activity that was as offensive as the same-sex nature of the act. We are left to believe that it is either homosexuality or inhospitality (or both) which God considers great sin.

Chronologically, the next reference to homosexual practices comes in the Levitical Holiness texts of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Both passages call the act of a man lying with a man as he would lie with a female an ABOMINATION. Many of the committee chose to disregard these passages, as the New Testament writers freed us from adherence to many of the other Levitical prohibitions (e.g. dietary laws). There are those of us on the committee who cannot disregard this prohibition as irrelevant for today, because of its apparent reinforcement, rather than contradiction, in the New Testament. Furthermore, the language used in designating this act "an abomination" is very strong, and instead of requiring repentance, ritual sacrifice, restitution, temporary uncleanness, or being cut off from among their people as means of restoring right relationship with God after this abomination, God requires that "they shall surely be put to death."

(The passage referring to the rules of hospitality are based on invoking Israel's remembrance that they, too, were once strangers. Nowhere in the Holiness Code are punishments mandated for inhospitality.)

An incident similar to the one in Sodom occurred in Gibeah centuries later, and is recorded in Judges Chapter 19. This sheds no new light on the subject, except that the man desired for homosexual intercourse was no angel.

The Old Testament passages which speak to the sin of homosexual practices (and there are many such passages) seem to refer to them purely in the

context of being a part of idolatrous (pagan) worship, and so need not be discussed here.

The most oft-quoted passage regarding homosexual practices is from the Book of Romans Chapter one. In this passage Paul discusses both male and female homosexuality. He discusses homosexual behavior, murder, strife, deceit, malice, etc. as flowing out of idolatry. (While Paul is doubtless speaking of blatant idol-worship, in a broad sense all sin can be seen as coming forth from idolatry, i.e. putting something or someone else before God.) It would be difficult to argue that any of the other sins listed in this passage should only be considered sins in the strict circumstances of obvious idolatry. Hence, I see no justification for singling out homosexuality (and not, for example, murder) as being only sinful in the context of obvious idolatry. Paul states that those who practice the listed behaviors are worthy of death.

There are two other Pauline texts, I Corinthians 6:9-10 and I Timothy 1:8-11 which specifically list homosexuals along with adulterers, fornicators, thieves, and murderers as those who are "lawless and rebellious" and who "shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

The majority of the committee believe that none of these Scripture passages condemn a marriage commitment between a loving, committed, homosexual couple (of either sex). They hold that because of the cultures in which the Old and New Testaments were written, the writers viewed all homosexuals as "perverts" rather than "inverts." Therefore, they hold that the only homosexual practices specifically condemned in these passages are those in connection with rape, gang rape, or as a part of or a result of idolatrous worship.

There is a fervent minority of two persons on the committee who hold almost the opposite view. While we agree that the writers probably had no notion of homosexuality as a primary orientation, nor could conceive of a loving, committed homosexual couple, we hold that the God who inspired all Scripture (II Timothy 3:16) DID know of persons with such orientations and intents, and STILL spoke strong condemnations of homosexual intercourse.

I believe that the strongest argument against homosexuality in Scripture comes not from the native prohibitions, but from the positive teachings in Genesis one and two (and subsequently quoted by Christ in Mark Chapter 10) regarding human sexuality and heterosexual marriage. In the Genesis passage Adam was seen to be in need of companionship. God Himself met Adam's need by creating a woman, not another man. Note that it was Adam's basic need for companionship ("It is not good for the man to be alone") NOT the need for procreation of the species which prompted God's action. Marriage then resulted, and Adam and Eve "became one flesh." Heterosexual intercourse in marriage, then, is more than a union, it is more like a reunion of two halves of a whole; the physical complementarity of male and female sex organs being a symbol of a deeper spiritual complementarity. Hence, the only "one flesh" experience intended by God as revealed in Scripture involves the union of one man and one woman, publically acknowledged (the leaving of parents), and physically consummated.

The committee has not yet had time to study this passage from Position A, to study the implications.

#### PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS:

Irregardless of other dynamics of the relationship, homosexuals seeking pastoral counseling need to be lovingly confronted with the Biblical view that homosexual behavior is sinful. Homosexuals are then placed in the same relationship with God as are all other sinners: God loves them, they are made in God's image, Christ died for their sins. In order to be obedient to God's call to loving fellowship with Himself, practicing homosexuals (like all other sinners) must lay aside their sin through repentance and confession. To continue in any sin (in this case, homosexual behavior) is to turn one's back upon God's call to "be ye perfect, for I am perfect" and "be ye holy, for I am holy." Any further lapses into sin need to be dealt with again in the same manner of repentance and confession. Paul said, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? Heaven forbid! Know you not that those who continue in sin are slaves thereto?"

Hence, homosexuals should be counseled to seek a celibate lifestyle, or seek God to change their sexual orientation to heterosexuality. The only alternative to heterosexual marriage is sexual abstinence. Sex is a good gift from God, but it is not indispensable to our humanness. As Christians, we are called not to obey our hormones, but rather make conscious choices to obey the Word of God.

Valerie Corpuz

#### B. AN ALTERNATIVE SUMMARY STATEMENT ON HOLY SCRIPTURE AND HOMOSEXUALITY

The first passage under study is the account of Sodom and Gomorrah in the eighteenth and nineteenth chapters of Genesis. In this account, a crowd of men from Sodom surround the house of Lot who has provided hospitality to the two male visitors to Sodom. The crowd asks that the two visitors be brought out that "we may know them." Lot pleads against this and, instead, offers his two daughters "who have not known man." That Lot offers his virgin daughters as a substitute for the male guests to satisfy the crowd's lust would indicate that it was not homosexuality that was so offensive but the assaultive nature towards Lot's guests. The violent sexual acts towards men who have "come under the shelter of my (Lot's) roof" is the central issue. The nature of the grave sin appears to be, or the greater offense is, inhospitality by means of assaultive sex by male citizens towards male visitors. We are left to believe that it is either assaultive homosexuality or inhospitality (or both) which God considers great sin.

The next reference to homosexual practice is in the Holiness Code (Lev. 18 and 20). Here the reference is made to the act of a man lying with a man as he would lie with a female. This is termed an "abomination." Many of the committee members viewed these passages as a set of ordinances whose purpose



was to maintain ritual cleanness and a distinct identity of the Jewish people over and against pagan influences.

Homosexual acts are a violation of this Code whose purpose is to preserve the Jewish culture in a monotheistic context against pagan influences. Furthermore, the language used in designating this act "an abomination" is very strong and death is required as punishment for this offense. Many on the committee questioned its continued applicability in light of New Testament teachings by Jesus and even Paul as well as the early Church.

By far the most difficult passage under consideration by the committee is the first chapter of Romans (vs. 24-28). The interpretation of this passage rests on an important distinction in Paul's thinking as he proclaimed the gospel to the Hellenistic culture. The distinction has to do with differentiating between what is intrinsically evil and sinful, and what is an offense against purity and cultic laws. The specific behaviors referred to by Paul are those "unnatural" sexual relations among men, and those among women. Many on the committee viewed this behavior which was part of Hellenistic culture as seen by Paul as a recompense for the error of idolatry. Further, the language used by Paul in describing homosexual acts is language relating to uncleanness with regard to purity practices rather than that which has to do with what is intrinsically evil and sinful. Further, the New Testament writers do not always equate impurity or uncleanness with sin. This passage is such an example.

There are two other Pauline texts, I Corinthians 6:9-10 and I Timothy 1:8-11 which specifically list "homosexuals" along with "adulterers, fornicators, thieves, and murderers" as those who are "lawless and rebellious" and who "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Various translations of this text were discussed and the committee discovered that later translations from the Greek ("Arsenokoitai" and "malakoi") vary in meaning from the early RSV which translated the Greek as "homosexual." To many on the committee, the early RSV appeared as an "overtranslation" and that the meaning of these passages is unclear or imprecise. Male prostitution is a possible meaning but nothing further is clear.

In summary, the committee approached these texts (and many others) from a standpoint of attempting to discover their literal meaning. Both the words and their context in the author's thought world were taken into account. Many on the committee believe that there is no clear and demonstrative warrant in the texts against homosexuality as one's primary orientation and therefore natural to the person. We discovered the sexual behaviors that were assaultive, idolatrous, and inhospitable - to use the scriptural context, were condemned or considered an offense. Moreover, the biblical view of morality in sexual relations is focussed around two concerns, namely property and purity.

The concern of property relates to family rights and resources. At least three sexual offenses in the New Testament indicate this: adultery, prostitution, and incest. They are seen as a waste of family resources or a violation of family rights.

The purity concerns in the Old Testament (the requirement of circumcision, for example) carry on in the New Testament in Paul and Jesus in a metaphorical sense regarding ethical motives. In Paul, the literal physical purity is of no consequence for salvation, for example, in the Jewish-Gentile controversies. It is not what you eat, nor is it whether you are circumcised that matters as to salvation. The real "purity" comes from what is inside a person, according to Jesus' teaching, that is one's motives, and not from without.

What follows from this summary is a statement of the pastoral implications for the Church based on this understanding of Scripture.

### Pastoral Implications

The question which the committee poses is that in view of this understanding of the texts what are the pastoral implications for the church or a priest who might counsel persons about their faith and sexuality? There are two considerations which provide guidelines or give a direction in formulating a sexual ethic based on Scripture.

One guide arises from the Old Testament story of Lot (Genesis 18 and 19). Sexual practices that are assaultive and inhospitable are clearly condemned in these passages. Carrying this meaning literally into contemporary culture, mutual consent between two persons is an important part of a sexual ethic. Clearly, rape is immoral as well as illegal, whether the experience is heterosexual or homosexual. Inhospitable sexuality would mean sex practices that are in any way coercive, done on the basis of a perceived threat from the other, or in any way demanding. Hospitable sexuality, on the other hand, includes the desire to freely give oneself to another in sexual intercourse. A beginning point then is that sexual practice, whether it be homosexual or heterosexual, must be in the bounds of mutual consent and mutual freedom.

Another guide is in the approach the New Testament takes to the purity and property concerns which formed the basis for sexual ethics in the Old Testament. In St. Paul and in the Gospels we find that the purity and property concerns are subordinated to the Kingdom and reign of God. Former things have passed away and the new reality of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ become the guide that is relevant for human relationships and sexual practice.

In making a decision about sexual practices, a person can consider certain options as exemplifying God's love in his or her life. Those options or "vocations" include virginity, celibacy, marriage, or a "covenant in love" in which the highest expression of the gift of sexuality may show forth. In the kingdom of God's reign, these vocations are formed not out of societal pressure but out of God's call to a person in how she or he may use the gift of sexuality.

In the writings of Paul, in Peter's speeches in Acts, and in Jesus' teaching the new commandment of love means that innate qualities of a person such as race, ethnic group, gender, and so on...and by implication, one's primary

sexual orientation and practice, or physical or emotional handicaps, etc. are not in themselves determinants in ethical practice. The new commandment of love as an ethic is the determinant call, calling us to exemplary standards of freedom and responsibility in relationships under God.

The Rev'd. Jack Eastwood

## II. Tradition and Reason

### A. History

It is the assumption of the majority of Western Christians that the Church's teaching on the morality of homosexuality has changed little, if at all, over the two millenia of the Church's history. This assumption is only partly true. Until recent times, the Church's position on this issue has been fairly static only since the late thirteenth century. Prior to that time, there was considerable variance of opinion from time to time and from place to place. To a large extent, this variation followed the prevailing societal attitude as much as sound theological reasoning.

John Boswell, in his ferociously learned Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality, has shown that during much of the first twelve centuries of the Church's life, homosexual activity was not a source of serious moral concern. Where it was censured, it was dealt with as a failing of the same gravity as heterosexual fornication, rather than as an enormity in violation of nature. Indeed, during the High Middle Ages, homosexual relationships were very much tolerated in the Church. Men who were subsequently canonized (e.g., Sts. Anselm and Aethelred) wrote love poems to members of their own sex.

What most Western Christians take as the traditional posture of the Church in regard to homosexuality was not formulated until the rise of Scholasticism in the later Middle Ages. The classic arguments from natural law were set forth by Thomas Aquinas, who himself drew upon the thought of Albertus Magnus.

Thomas argued that homosexual unions were "against natural law" because: a) They were not open to procreation, b) They did not occur among animals, and c) They upset the natural order of nature relating to the dominion of male over female.

Because these arguments have dominated the Christian discussion of homosexuality for so many centuries, it is important to examine them critically. The argument from procreation is not in itself conclusive, as Thomas recognizes, since infertile couples and those past the age of child-bearing can contract valid marriages and do not sin in having sexual relations.

The argument based upon animal activities has two major flaws. First, it is, on the face of it, untrue. Homosexual activity among animals has been well documented by zoological science. Second, even if it were true, it would be irrelevant. The vast majority of human activity is not replicated by animals. Animals do not engage in ritual worship, raise vegetables or send birthday cards to their grandchildren. Are these activities, therefore, contrary to nature? Even in the strictly sexual arena, animals do not engage in frontal intercourse. It seems that the scholastics had some other unstated criteria for determining what they would judge to be in accord with nature.

The third argument, deriving from the perceived superior dignity of the male of the species, is very telling in this age when patriarchy is clearly under

siege; but it has no moral weight unless one is willing to assert that women are inherently inferior to men. While Thomas and the Christians of his day believed that women were actually defective males, in modern times the Church has come to a much clearer understanding of biology and defends the equality of men and women before God.

As has been noted, this position against homosexuality has seen little development in the Christian community since the Middle Ages, and has been carried over into the various segments of the Church after the Reformation. In the Episcopal Church, this issue has received much renewed attention in the past decade or so, as a result of the gay liberation movement in secular society and the demands of gays and lesbians within the ranks of the Church itself for recognition of their dignity as human persons.

In 1976, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church passed a resolution stating that "homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church." It is of interest that the convention voted down an amendment that would have added the word "forgiveness" to the list of things gays and lesbians might expect from the Church.

In 1979, General Convention considered the issue of the ordination of homosexuals. The resolution passed noted that the question of sexual orientation should not, of itself, be a bar to ordination, but that "it is not appropriate for this Church to ordain a practicing homosexual, or any person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside marriage." Twenty-one Bishops and a number of lay delegates subsequently signed a statement of conscience stating that they could not abide by the recommendation to exclude homosexuals from the sacrament of Holy Orders. On the questions of gay/lesbian relationships, this statement said, in part, "...in the relationships of many of them (i.e., homosexuals), maintained in the face of social hostility and against great odds, we have seen a redeeming quality which in its way and according to its mode is no less a sign to the world of God's love than is the more usual sign of Christian marriage. From such relationships we cannot believe God to be absent."

The pastoral approach to the issue homosexuality apparent in the above mentioned actions of General Convention is in marked contrast to the far harsher judgement cast by the Roman Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its Oct. 1, 1986 letter to R.C. bishops, entitled "The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons." This document unequivocally condemns all homosexual activity as intrinsically evil. It goes further to state that the homosexual condition is an "objective disorder." The letter finds in this "objective disorder" the basis for justifying the denial of civil rights to gay and lesbian people, and goes so far as to offer excuses for the violent attacks and lynchings to which homosexuals have been subject. The document also implies that gay men are primarily responsible for the spread of AIDS, in spite of the fact that in Africa, where AIDS is most widespread, it is an overwhelmingly heterosexual affliction.

Human sexuality is to be the focus of the next General Convention of the Church in 1988. Because the Episcopal Church has not closed the door on

continuing discussion with its gay and lesbian communicants, there is hope that the Church may be able to work toward an understanding of human sexuality that takes into account the experience of those whose sexuality does not conform to the general norm, but who like all Christians, attempt to be a sign to the world of the all-inclusive love of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

Chris Butler

## B. MARRIAGE AS AN ARENA FOR REDEMPTION

What is it about marriage that offers a unique potential for redemption? This paper is an attempt to describe the qualities that appear to enable redemption in the mystical union between man and wife.

I will consider marriage for our purposes as a state freely chosen and entered into by the partners. At some point in their relationship their love for each other leads them to make a choice. They desire to commit wholeheartedly to one another. Tentativeness is left behind and their intentions become purposeful. They look toward the potential they can build and share together in physical, psychological and spiritual ways.

It seems that it is the lastingness of marriage that sets the stage for redemption. In spite of the inevitable differences and conflicts there is an intention for the marriage to endure. The everyday ongoing reality of work and play, of shared responsibility of hopes, joys, frustration and compromises, failures and successes forge the bonds of genuineness and enduringness. This process develops esteem, sense of adequacy and one's sense of being able to influence one's life that are so important to the human being. Each partner is called to discover not only their strengths but their weaknesses and defenses. They must come to know themselves better, to transcend where they find themselves. Here is the redemption, with each transcending himself, herself, for self and for the other. Together they come to understanding, acceptance and forgivenesses. Each becomes more authentically who God created them to be and their relationship resembles more closely the relationship between God and man.

In all this process, the passion of early love is replaced by agape, a deeper love and appreciation of the specialness and uniqueness of the other. The desire for the other's happiness and well being becomes as important as one's own. When two people love in this way, fidelity is unquestioned, for we know we belong with this partner.

There are sobering considerations in such a concentration of commitment. It may not be appropriate or possible for all persons. Our culture offers the choice of such a multiplicity of ways to live and experience that many question whether marriage may be too confining. In addition, there is a strong drive toward individual autonomy and independence. But these qualities must be present in married life too. However, for those entering marriage, it seems essential that there be from the beginning an intention of long lasting commitment, rather than tentativeness, in order that the redemption process may follow.

A healthy marriage can provide the stability, the safe container for these remarkable changes to occur. Continuity allows our sameness over time as well as the unfolding growth of each in their Godgiven uniqueness. If there are children the arena for redemption is greatly expanded.

Kay Hayes Langsen

C. IMPLICATIONS IN FAVOR OF THE BLESSING OF GAY UNIONS  
FROM THE POSITION OF REASON AND EXPERIENCE

In discussing gay unions just as in heterosexual relationships, we are talking about an act of intention and commitment of two people because of their love for one another. We make the natural assumption that the goal is not just for the sanctity of sex between these two persons, but is something far greater. It is for sharing and companionship over time. It becomes the redemption of their individual selves as they come to know themselves and each other in the process of working through the inevitable differences, compromises and willing sacrifices that such a bonded relationship implies. There is a deepening love and appreciation of the specialness and uniqueness of the other. The other's happiness and well-being becomes as important as one's own. Such transcendence of self for the other resembles God's love for us. (Please see attached paper "Marriage as an Arena for Redemption")

Couples committed in this way desire a union that is recognized and acknowledged. They desire a ritual, in other words, a spiritual blessing of their union.

The argument immediately arises: marriage is right and good for men and women who come together as opposite sexes to complete a whole, but what possible meaning can it have for people of the same sex? Somehow we persist in believing that gay men and women could happily marry someone of the opposite sex if only they could get over their "hang-ups" and marry someone of the opposite sex. If not, they should lead celibate lives.

Yet in thinking this way are we losing sight of the possibility for redemption in these unions quite apart from any consideration of sexuality or procreation of children? And how true is it that homosexual persons can change their ways and relate intimately to the opposite sex? While it is true that many bisexual persons may have relationships with same sex and opposite sex persons, this is not a viable option for the homosexually oriented person. Why is this so?

Many studies have been conducted in an effort to understand why some men and women are sexually oriented to the same sex. One such study was the Bell, Weinberg, Hammersmith study done in 1969-1970. They used personal interviews with 979 homosexual and 477 heterosexual men and women living in the San Francisco bay area. The purpose of this study was to chart the development of homosexual and heterosexual orientation. The authors wished also to test heretofore accepted notions about homosexuality. The study was very thorough using a large number of independent variable in the path analysis to explore how the variables interrelated and ultimately had direct influence on adult

sexual preference. Only a careful reading of this study can do it justice but I'd like to share some of the conclusions:

By the time children reach adolescence sexual preference is likely to be determined, whether homosexual or heterosexual. There is a powerful link between childhood gender non-conformity and later adult homosexual preference. The authors state: "What we seem to have identified...is a pattern of feelings and reactions within the child that cannot be traced back to a single social or psychological root." "...indeed homosexuality may arise from a biological precursor that parents cannot control." "Neither homosexuals nor heterosexuals are what they are by design. Homosexuals in particular, cannot be dismissed as persons who simply refuse to conform." (p.222)

"Our findings suggest that homosexuality is as deeply ingrained as heterosexuality."

It is important to consider then, that gay persons have a genuine attraction and orientation to one another sexually, rather than to the opposite sex. For them it is unnatural to want to bond with someone of the opposite sex in an intimate way. Experience tells us that many homosexual persons do in fact bond seriously with a partner of the same sex. And here their experience is the same as that of the heterosexual person. Their relationship with a certain special person ceases to be tentative and becomes one of absolute intention and commitment to live out their lives together. The choice is made, forsaking all others. Heterosexual persons feel this yearning and the Church sanctifies their intention with the marriage sacrament.

What are the pastoral implications here? Should the Church turn away from the need of those gay couples who deeply yearn for and need the sanctity of a blessed union? Is there any reason committed homosexual pairs in their life together cannot be "a sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken world, that their unity cannot "overcome estrangement," their "forgiveness heal guilt," and their "joy conquer despair," as we say in the Book of Common Prayer during the marriage service?

Kay Hayes Langsen

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SEXUAL PREFERENCE, Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith,  
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#### D. HUMAN SEXUALITY AND HUMAN COMMITMENT

Despite the high rate of divorce we have a high rate of re-marriage among heterosexual pairs. Men and women continue to have a strong, innate desire pair. Sexual expression is one reason but certainly not the most important. Needs for continuity, stability, even familiarity and perhaps, most of all, o



partly conscious push toward wholeness lead us into unions which we hope will be long-lasting.

Many homosexual pairs as well, form unions that last for many years and often for a lifetime. (1.) These unions are very similar to heterosexual marriage having the same problems and virtues, and even going through the same relationship stages that heterosexual relationships evolve through if they last over time.

Research shows that these homosexual unions are based on preference (2.). The romantic and sexual attraction for these men and women is for the same sex. This orientation is already apparent in the teen years. Further research has shown that their sexual inclination is already signalled in early childhood through gender non-conformity.

Clearly, it is unnatural for homosexual persons to bond with persons of the opposite sex for romantic or sexual expression.

There are many forms and expressions of love, but perhaps we can say that the love that most closely resembles God's love for us is found in committed, healthy unions over time, first in families then in mature paired relationships (marriages). Here the spiritual qualities become manifest: forbearance, patience, forgiveness, toleration of differentness, compassion selflessness, and sacrifice for the love of the other person. Fleeting, more casual and tentative unions, though all right in and of themselves, do not bear the fruit as readily. Agape, the highest form of love, love for the other person as the other person, with no thought of self, seems best learned in committed relationships.

God calls us back to Him, no matter who we are. Part of the journey back to him is coming to know ourselves. Finding ourselves is an essential part of being able to find Him. To find ourselves we need an identity. We form our identities through making choices. (3.) Choices mean renouncing one thing or person for another. Choice can be the beginning of commitment. Commitment leads us to meaningfulness which is such a vital aspect of our lives. (4.)

In those mature relationships, whether heterosexual or homosexual, where a conscious choice about forming a lasting union with another person has been made, a spiritual journey has been embarked on. One writer has even described marriage not as a state of well-being, but a path to salvation. While we need always a large measure of confidence and well-being it is also true that in intimate relationship we are grappling with our salvation in that we must come to terms with things in ourselves we'd just as soon not have to see. The task of this kind of relationship is to continue to learn to love, perhaps more than we ever have, and to try to change our unhealth to health and take more responsibility for ourselves. Perhaps a long term relationship best facilitates these changes.

Clearly, this kind of relationship is not appropriate for everyone, nor does everyone have the capacity for nor the desire for such commitment. There are many ways to find God.

The Church has long encouraged and supported the holy state of matrimony, a faithful bonded pairing of men and women together. . Many homosexual pairs sh through their committed lifestyle together that they are just as capable of bringing to life the same qualities and virtues we cherish in Christian marriages.

Through all of history human beings have marked the important passages of their lives with some kind of ritual (5.). Homosexual pairs who have such a committed love and intention would benefit from a liturgy of their own in th Episcopal Church.

Kay Hayes Langsen

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#### E. A PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

##### An Invisible Minority

Gay and lesbian people, unlike women, blacks and other racial groups are by and large an invisible minority within the larger community and the church. Until the advent of the gay and lesbian rights movement, hiding and "passing has been the norm required for survival in a very homophobic society. Early attempts to apply scientific methods of inquiry into the phenomenon of homosexuality were distorted by the necessity to use unrepresentative populations from prisons, mental hospitals, and psychotherapy case studies. Since the groundbreaking publications of the Institute for Sex Research founded by Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey including the 1948 and the 1953 reports, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male and Sexual Behavior in the Human Female; a the 1978 report by Drs. Alan P. Bell and Martin S. Weinberg, Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women; and the 1981 report by Drs. Bell, Weinberg, and Sue K. Hammersmith, Sexual Preference: Its Development in Men and Women, science has been able to offer authoritative observation which disproves the many myths and stereotypes that have existed for centuries.

## Common Stereotypes and Myths

Common stereotypes and myths are well reviewed for the general reader in the 1986 book Beyond Acceptance: Parents of Lesbians and Gays Talk About Their Experiences (pp. 23-42). They include:

- MYTH #1 - Neurotic family patterns cause homosexuality
- MYTH #2 - Acting like a sissy or a tomboy causes people to be gay
- MYTH #3 - Homosexual seduction causes children to be gay
- MYTH #4 - A traumatic event with a person of the opposite sex can cause homosexuality
- MYTH #5 - Gay and lesbian people are mentally sick
- MYTH #6 - People are either heterosexual or homosexual
- MYTH #7 - Gays and lesbians are few and far between
- MYTH #8 - Gays and lesbians choose it therefore they can change it
- MYTH #9 - Gays and lesbians are easy to identify
- MYTH #10 - Gay and lesbian persons are poor parents since they do not care for family life
- MYTH #11 - All gay and lesbian people are over-sexed and indiscriminately promiscuous
- MYTH #12 - Gays and lesbians live a lonely life and contribute nothing to society

All of these stereotypes have been proven false by careful investigation and observation, but they are still commonly held by the majority of people today who are unaware of the lesbian and gay people in their families, circle of friends, and church congregations.

## A Visible Presence

The San Francisco Bay Area is the home of the most studied and visible lesbian/gay community in the world. The majority of the individuals in the community are immigrants and "exiles" from other parts of the country and the world. Lesbian and gay people have come here to escape persecution, isolation, or a secretive existence elsewhere. Many have sought after and found a spiritual home in the churches of the Diocese of California. In San Francisco several Episcopal parishes openly welcome gay and lesbian members, and in a few churches gay men make up the majority of the congregation worshipping on Sunday morning. Lesbians attend in far fewer numbers, feeling excluded by exclusively masculine language for God and male clericalism.

The five year old Parsonage ministry in the midst of the gay and lesbian community has been a pioneering effort to create a reconciling bridge between the church and the many gay and lesbian people who are alienated by religious institutions. Here, homosexual persons and heterosexual persons have been able to honestly share their personal stories and to work together to explore the relationships between sexuality and spirituality. Here in the San Francisco Bay Area, the Episcopal Church has an unusual and unique opportunity to come to know, recognize and potentially support and affirm the gay and lesbian relationships and members in the midst.

It is impossible to present all of the scientific data which refutes each every myth and stereotype, but for purposes of this theological study it is important to establish certain facts about homosexuality and homosexual relationships.

### Human Sexual Diversity

First, homosexuality appears to be a normal expression of the diversity of human sexuality. Gay and lesbian people are evident in virtually all cultures and societies that have been studied (Tripp, 1975, pp. 63-71). In America, the Kinsey study estimated that approximately "4% of males are exclusively homosexual for their entire lives," however, 37% of the total male population had at least some overt homosexual experience between adolescence and old age and 10% of the males are nearly exclusively homosexual for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55. (Kinsey, 1948, p. 650). And "sixty percent of preadolescent boys engage in homosexual activity" (Kinsey, 1948, 610). Kinsey also found that the incidence of male homosexuality hardly varied from region to region, or city to rural area (Kinsey, 1948, p. 625).

Women in Kinsey's sample reported fewer homosexual contacts than the men. Some 28% had reported homosexual arousal by age 45, but only 13% had actually reached orgasm. Less than 3% could be regarded as exclusively homosexual (Kinsey, 1952, pp. 474-475). The generally accepted estimate of the prevalence of homosexuality based upon the Kinsey data and other studies is 10% for both women and men (includes numbers 5 and 6 on the Kinsey scale which ranges from 0-6; with 0=entirely heterosexual experience, 5=largely homosexual with incidental heterosexual history, and 6=entirely homosexual

The 1981 studies of Drs. Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith, mentioned above, showed that sexual orientation is established early in life, certainly prior to adolescence. They conclude: "What we seem to have identified...is a pattern of feelings and reactions within the child that cannot be traced back to a single social or psychological root; indeed, homosexuality may arise from a biological precursor (as do left-handedness or allergies, for example)" (p. 191-192). After reviewing the literature they conclude that "a large body of convincing research appears to suggest a biological foundation for homosexuality, at least among some people" (p. 220). It may well be that the tendency to become homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual develops prenatally (Dorner and Gunter, 1976; Mondy, 1977) along with other aspects of temperament. An interesting summary of the "nature versus nurture" question of the origin of homosexuality can be found in Homosexuality: Social, Psychological, and Biological Issues (Ed. by Prue et al., 1982, pp. 197-209). In his review of the issue, Dr. James Weinrich concludes that homosexuality is just as natural as heterosexuality.

Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith conclude that homosexual persons do not "choose" to become homosexual, nor is it caused by faulty parenting or traumatic events, but that homosexual people discover their homosexuality when they find themselves attracted to members of their own sex rather than, or more than, members of the opposite sex. The only choice involved is whether or not

people are going to live their lives as a lie--denying their true sexual/affectational preferences--or are going to be honest with themselves and society.

It is important to note that in 1973, on the basis of new scientific evidence the American Psychiatric Association determined that homosexuality should be regarded as a psychiatric disorder, but as simply one form of sexual behavior. Many misguided efforts to "cure" homosexuals have been undertaken in the past. Such efforts lead to untold suffering and have not been shown to change sexual orientation but only on occasion to extinguish certain behaviors, usually on a temporary basis. In Weinberg's discussion on "The Case for Conversion" in Society and the Health Homosexual, he points out that the cost of suppressing homosexual feelings and impulses for the homosexual is the sacrifice of the capacity for intimacy (1972, p.66). Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith state that "there is no reason to think it would be any easier for homosexual men or women to reverse their sexual orientation than it would be for heterosexuals to become predominantly or exclusively homosexual (p.222). It is worth noting that the Kinsey researchers did not find one instance of a person whose sexual responses were altered during therapy (Tripp, 1975, p. 237).

#### Gay and Lesbian Relationships

Many lesbian and gay persons are living in committed relationships. Bell and Weinberg reported in Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women (based upon over 1,500 lengthy face-to-face interviews with homosexual and a matched sample of heterosexual people in the Bay Area) that over 60% of lesbian women, and about 40% of gay men, were living in coupled relationships (p. 322) and that they "behave much like married heterosexuals" (p. 231). Their data tends to belie the notion that homosexual relationships are apt to be inferior imitations of heterosexual's premarital or marital involvements" (p. 102). It indicated "that a relatively steady relationship with a love partner is a "very meaningful event in the life of a homosexual person" (p. 102).

Others have obtained similar results. McWhirter and Mattison in The Male Couple state that the couples they studied "form family units just as stable, dependable, and contributing to the commonwealth as any traditional nuclear family" (1984, p.286). The Mendola Report: A New Look at Gay Couples, based on a nationwide survey found gay couples living together are very similar in almost every respect to heterosexual married and common-law couples. When asked, if given a choice, if they would choose to be "married" in a formal ceremony--43% said yes--33% in a religious ceremony; 9% in a civil ceremony; and 1% in both (1980, p.44). This is consistent with the Gay Reports findings in surveying 5,000 gay men in the United States and Canada that 25% strongly favored gay "marriage" ceremony, and 21% somewhat favor a gay "marriage" ceremony (1977, p. 362).

Homosexualities amply demonstrated that relatively few gay and lesbian people conform to the stereotypes most people have of them (p. 231). It is interesting to note that almost one-quarter of the gay men in the Bell and Weinberg study were asexual, defying the stereotypical notion that all

homosexual males are interested only in the explicitly sexual aspects of their lives. The study showed that there is as much diversity in sexual patterns in the gay community as there is in the heterosexual community. In fact, gay men are more like nongay men in their sexual activity than they are like lesbian women. Conversely, lesbian women are more like nongay women in their sexual activity than like gay men.

Gay and lesbian people, who must face all of the usual challenges which heterosexual couples must face, have the additional stress of maintaining their relationships in spite of society's rejection and without the financial and legal benefits enjoyed by married couples. Heterosexual marriages, as difficult as they are to maintain in this rapidly changing world, receive tremendous amounts of affirmation, recognition, and support culturally, legally, economically, and religiously. Until legislatures change the statutory definition of marriage or until the courts recognize that prohibition against same-sex marriages violates constitutionally protected interests, two homosexual individuals cannot marry. Married couples are entitled to tax advantages, spousal receipt of social security, military and veterans benefits, and insurance coverage, as well as other legal protections for the parties in the relationship (Rivera, 1986, 1978). Berkeley, California is the first city in the country to remove some of this inequity through the passage of its Domestic Partnership law which took effect in March of 1985. A similar ordinance, introduced by Supervisor Harry Britt, was passed by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors but was vetoed by Mayor Dianne Feinstein in 1982, after local religious leaders spoke out against it. Some would argue that it is testimony to the rewards and real human value that individuals find in their gay and lesbian relationships that they survive they do without many of the conventional benefits of the married status.

### The Problem of Homophobia

In order to understand better the social context in which gay and lesbian couples are seeking the recognition and full support of the church, and also to understand better the condemning reactions of some to such a request for full acceptance, it is important to discuss the problem of homophobia in some detail.

"Homophobia" is a term which was first used in 1972 by Dr. George Weinberg in his book Society and the Healthy Homosexual (p.4). A more etymologically correct term for the phenomenon it describes would be "Homosexaphobia" (the term "homophobia" literally means fear of that which is similar) meaning the intense and irrational fear and hatred of homosexuality, and of homosexual persons. Homophobia is evident in many forms. Some of the most common forms are: the fear of being thought homosexual by others, fear of possible homosexual response in oneself, fear of "catching" homosexuality as if it were a contagious disease (this explains some of the aspects of the current hysteria around the disease AIDS), fear that children will see homosexuality as a viable alternative to heterosexual marriage and will choose a homosexual lifestyle, and so on. Because gay and lesbian children grow up in the same

homophobic society as heterosexual children, homophobia becomes a most difficult problem for gay and lesbian people to deal with. It is not only encountered as a negative social force from without, but also as a negative attitude within the self. This "homosexual homophobia" can involve deep feelings of self-rejection and self-loathing, and discomfort with, and sometimes, open hostility toward other homosexual people.

One of the manifestations of homosexual homophobia that is particularly important to mention is the ill-fated and not uncommon choice that gay and lesbian people make to enter into heterosexual marriages. The reasons often given for marrying include "a desire to conceal one's true sexual orientation to test one's heterosexual responsiveness, and to deny one's homosexuality to oneself, or more actively, to vanquish homosexual impulse" (Bell and Weinberg, 1978, p. 160-161). Bell and Weinberg found that approximately one-fifth of homosexual men (p. 162), over one-third of white lesbian women have been married at least once, and over one-half of the black lesbian women have been married at least once (p. 166). Most of these marriages break-up within three to four years, and frequently after the birth of at least one child. Lesbians may marry more frequently than gay men due to the social and economic pressures they experience as women. Bell and Weinberg also reported that many lesbians, more so than gay men, were not aware of their true sexual preferences prior to marriage (p. 167). Further more, women, unlike men, may engage in sexual relations with men without experiencing arousal. Not surprisingly the marriages in which one partner is a homosexual were found to be less happy than the heterosexual marriages, and lesbians reported more unhappiness in their marriages than the gay men (p. 170). It is not unreasonable to imagine that some of the tragedy of such marriages could be prevented if our society and the church in particular, were to accept and celebrate the naturalness of gay and lesbian people forming covenantal relationships and family life with members of their own sex.

Homophobia finds many legal and political expressions. The table of contents of Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the United States, edited by Jonathan Katz, lists several of the most severe consequences of homophobia--execution, castration, imprisonment, electroshock, hormonal and drug "treatments," and lobotomy (1976). The second largest group to die in Hitler's gas chambers, after the Jews, were our gay brothers and sisters--this is an historic fact of which many people are unaware. In the United States today in 1986, gay and lesbian people are still denied their basic civil rights. Only one state, the State of Wisconsin, currently forbids discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Only 56 cities, the most recent being New York City, and 14 counties have enacted similar legislation (Burkett, McNamara, 1987, p. 20). Twenty-five states and the District of Columbia retain statutes that judge sexual expression in private between two consenting adults of the same sex as criminal, according to the San Francisco Gay/Lesbian Rights office of the A.C.L.U. Laws forbidding certain sexual acts like the Georgia "sodomy" law recently upheld by the United States Supreme Court, often do not differentiate as to heterosexuals or homosexuals, married or unmarried persons. Many heterosexual persons, married as well as single, are subject to prosecution under these statutes, but they invariably are applied in a discriminatory way against homosexual persons.

Gay and lesbian aliens have been denied visas, deported, and refused naturalization on the basis of their homosexuality (Rivera, 1981, p.343). Thousands of individuals every year receive dishonorable discharges from the military simply due to the discovery that they are gay or lesbian (Rivera, 1979, p. 840). Furthermore, gay and lesbian parents are often denied custody of their children. If awarded custody (frequently after a long, expensive emotionally costly battle in the courts) many are not allowed to live with their partners, and the children can be forbidden from meeting other gay people when with their parents (Rivera, 1986, p. 329). As law professor Rita Rivera summarizes: "homosexual individuals are penalized in all aspects of their lives because of their sexual preference. They lose their jobs, their children, and numerous other precious rights" (1979, p. 947). While changes in the law are happening, they are taking place very slowly and at great and discriminating cost to gay and lesbian litigants.

Until recently, the problem of violence against lesbian and gay people has gone largely unstudied. An historic step was taken in October of this year, when the first congressional hearings ever on the problem of violence perpetrated against lesbians and gay men because of their sexual orientation were held in Washington, D.C. Testimony of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force on the basis of an eight-city study revealed the incredible pervasiveness of the problem: "more than one in five gay men and nearly one in ten lesbians had been physically assaulted; more than 40% had been threatened with violence; more than 90% had been victimized in some way because of their sexual orientation." They estimated that 80% of incidents unreported in any official way. Part of the reason is that lesbians and gay men are often "re-victimized" by unresponsive and uncaring police, criminal justice systems, and social service agencies (National NOW Times, Oct./Nov. 1986). Diana Christiansen, Executive Director of San Francisco's Community United Against Violence--the oldest and largest direct service program for victims of anti-gay violence in the United States--testified that there had been a 50% increase in the number of incidents of anti-gay violence from 1980 to 1985. Although, she said, it cannot be proved that public hysteria over AIDS causes anti-gay violence she reported on an example of graffiti observed in San Francisco to put the issue of AIDS and anti-gay violence in perspective: "AIDS Salvation: Murder Homosexuality." She went on to say that she believed that "AIDS and homosexuality have become synonymous in the American mind. For the homophobic mind, AIDS is simply another justification for violence."

No discussion of the problem of homophobia and the violence against gay and lesbian people would be complete without reference to the homophobia of the institutional church (see Barrett, "Legal Homophobia and the Christian Church," Hastings Law Journal. 30:4, March, 1979). The gay and lesbian community is acutely aware of the role that the church has played in the oppression of homosexual people--and many have turned their backs on organized religion as a result. The issue surfaced during the recent Congressional hearings on anti-gay violence when Diana Christiansen made reference to the "burnings of lesbians and 'faggots' at the stake" (p.14) during the Inquisition, and Kevin Berrill, Director of the Violence Project of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, spoke of the inflammatory preaching of



evangelist Jimmy Swaggert, and the direct mail issue by The Rev. Jerry Falwell of a pamphlet to "Stop homosexuals dead in their tracks." He went on to say however, that "what is more disturbing, in a way, than the rhetoric coming from the religious right, is the silence coming from the mainstream churches (p. 49-50). That silence has since been broken by the Roman Catholic Church with the pronouncement from the Vatican entitled "A Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Unfortunately, rather than countering the inflammatory rhetoric of the fundamentalist right, this document only provides further rationalization for physical and political violence against gay and lesbian people (Dignity/SF, "Offering Prophetic Christian Witness" in B.A.R. Dec. 4, 1986, p. 6).

As Weinberg and Williams in their 1974 Institute for Sex Research publication Male Homosexuals: Their Problems and Adaptations point out "religious dogma has played a large part in initiating and sustaining negative definitions of homosexuality in the Western world...many of our customs and moralities are implicitly based upon religious codes (p.283). These "negative definitions" continue to be used by individuals and institutions to justify discriminatory condemnation, and violence against gay and lesbian people -- just as religious teaching has been used in centuries past to justify racism and slavery, as well as sexism and the subordination of women. While some individuals sincerely believe that the teaching of the Bible is incompatible with the affirmation of gay/lesbian love, many would argue, as does William Sloane Coffin, that "Clearly, it is not Scripture that creates hostility to homosexuality, but rather hostility to homosexuality prompts certain Christians to retain a few passages of an otherwise discarded law code" (1980).

Certainly not all Christians take an openly condemning attitude toward homosexuality, and there is a spectrum of theological stances toward homosexuality in the Episcopal Church today. James B. Nelson, a professor of Christian ethics, has described four different positions: 1) a rejecting punitive position--easily identified in the rhetoric of the fundamentalists; 2) a rejecting non-punitive position--taken by those who see homosexuality as a disease in need of "treatment;" 3) a conditional acceptance--evidenced by those who support civil rights for gay and lesbian people but do not feel that homosexuality is really on a par with heterosexuality. "Liberal" individuals who hold this position often express concern about the "promiscuity" of some gay men. Coffin notes that "just as blacks used to be labeled shiftless by whites who made sure there would be no reward for their diligence, so straights call gays promiscuous while denying support for overtly gay stable relationships" (1980). The fourth position which Nelson describes is that of unconditional and full acceptance--gay and lesbian persons are a natural expression of the sexual diversity of God's creation, and their covenantal relationships are the theological equivalent of heterosexual covenantal relationships (1979). It is this stance which is consistent with reasonable scientific inquiry and study, and with the overwhelming evidence of human experience. Only the fourth stance represents a position which is free of homophobia.

Confronting and dealing with homophobia in the church is no easy matter. but the most naive are aware of the fact that considerable numbers of male clergy, and in the Episcopal Church, female clergy are closeted homosexuals. John McNeill points out in "Homosexuality, Lesbianism and the Future: The Creative Role of the Gay Community in Building a More Humane Society" that "homosexuals have always played a hidden leadership role in humanity's religious life. The shaman, the medicine man, the monk and the nun, and frequently, the priest and the minister, have been gay" (A Challenge to Love p. 62-3). John Boswell in his book Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality, documents the leadership role of gay men in the monastic tradition (1980. pp. 218-41). Kevin Gordon, lay theologian, and director of the Consultation on Homosexuality, Social Justice and Roman Catholic Theology himself a gay man and former religious, estimates that approximately 40-50% clergy and religious in the Roman Catholic Church are gay or lesbian (unpublished lecture, 1985). Estimates of the numbers in Episcopal orders may not be quite so high--but are still considerable--and this reality is very rarely openly acknowledged in discussions of the church's stance toward homosexual people.

The church has long been a haven for gay people, who may, as C.G.Jung observed, be "endowed with a wealth of religious feelings which help them to bring the ecclesia spiritualis into reality, and a spiritual receptivity which makes them responsive to revelation" (1959, p. 86-87). But the price that has been exacted for the "privilege" of following one's vocation has been the denial or rejection of one's true sexual identity, or at least the duplicitous cooperation with an institutional ethic which rewards hiding and "discretion" and punishes honesty. Many gay clergy are afraid to speak out for fear of losing their jobs or positions; others are themselves so homophobic that they are often the most vociferous in publicly condemning the "sinfulness" of homosexual activity (Heward, 1986). There are many others in the church, gay and straight, who refuse to deal with the issue simply because they see it as a threat to the "peace" of the church. Such political homophobia is willing to let the unity of the church and the maintenance of the institutional "status quo" take precedence over the needs and spiritual longings of homosexual people.

#### The Psychodynamics of Homophobia

It is important to try and understand some of the psychodynamics of homophobia if we are to cope with, and eventually to overcome, this pervasive social problem. Social scientists and clinicians have found that the fear of homosexuality to be associated and linked with other fears. Many theorists suggest that homophobia, like anti-semitism, is an expression of xenophobia the fear of the "other" -- the one perceived as "different."

Some have seen in the rejection of homosexuals an expression of the fear of sex--or sexophobia. Levitt and Klassen found attitudes toward homosexuality be more negative among people in the strongly sex-negative subcultures of the Midwest and South than among people in other regions of the country (1974, p 29-43). Since the popular mind sees gay and lesbian people as

unidimensional--defined by their sexual behavior--it is not surprising that many people would project their sexual anxieties on to homosexual persons. Morton Kelsey makes this point in his book Prophetic Ministry when he says "appears that the distaste for sexuality in general has been focused on this one expression of it" (1982, p. 134). The Kinsey data showed that a majority of men and a sizeable minority of women have had homosexual feelings and experiences. Many heterosexual persons may see in homosexual persons a mirrored image of homosexual impulses they feel and fear within themselves.

Homophobia may be related to the fear of death. Homosexuality may represent a psychic threat for those people whose desire for children arises from the fear of death--a desire to achieve some measure of immortality through offspring. Since homosexual sex is non-procreative, it is generally and falsely assumed that homosexual persons are childless and have no desire for children. Any fear of death that may be associated unconsciously with homophobia, has now been given further rationalization by the current equation of the deadly disease of AIDS with homosexuality.

Public opinion polls have shown homophobia to be more common among married people (Schneider and Lewis, p. 60). Often we hear the cry that the acceptance of homosexuality is a "threat to the family." Many heterosexual married couples are experiencing discomfort and pain in their marriage relationships. Divorce rates have never been higher. In some instances the relationships may be held together not so much by love and mutual commitment but by a fear of change or the need to satisfy social conventions. Women may feel trapped by social and economic dependence upon their husbands. Men may feel they cannot get along without their wife's emotional support but are unable to provide emotional support to their wives in return. Some marriages have become joyless and stay together "for the sake of the children." It may be easy for those in unsatisfactory marriages to experience a guilt-ridden jealousy of the perceived "freedom" of homosexual persons who stand outside the traditional family pattern.

Individual personality dynamics may also play a role in homophobia. Homophobia and rigidity of personality have been found to correlate. Solomon and Levy list eight studies of the personality structure of homophobics and find such persons to be "characteristically more authoritarian, dogmatic, cognitively rigid, intolerant of ambiguity, status conscious, sexually rigid, guilty and negative about their own sexual impulses, and in general, less accepting of others" (p. 27).

A very significant handicap in dealing with the problem of homophobia is the fact that the majority of people have had no conscious contact or acquaintance with homosexual persons (Schneider and Lewis, p. 19). Many gay and lesbian friends and family members maintain secrecy about their identity out of fear of rejection or reprisals. As Prof. Bryon Shafer explained to the Presbyterian Task Force on Homosexuality (1978):

A situation in which strongly held attitudes are based largely on abstract principle rather than on concrete experience is fraught with danger. Principle can become the captive servant of unconscious (or even conscious) social and psychological fears, in which case prejudice, discrimination, and oppression come to be practiced against persons in the name of principle (in Church and Society, p. 47).

On the one hand, unfamiliarity seems to breed contempt of the homosexual person. On the other hand, social science literature has shown that familiarity -- personal contact with people who are openly homosexual -- consistently reduces homophobia (Schneider and Lewis, p. 17). The research indicates that gay rights activists like Harvey Milk have not been misguided in their cry for gay and lesbian people to "come out of the closet," for visibility and personal familiarity, more than education is what is needed to irradicate homophobia.

#### Sexism and Homophobia

Several studies have found that sexism and the belief in the "normalcy" of traditional gender roles may be at the root of homophobia. Heterosexism, or the belief that only heterosexual coupling is "natural" and acceptable, has been described as an ideology which enforces sexist patriarchal values and disguises a pervasive cultural misogyny, or hatred of women and things "feminine" (see Heyward, Harrison, Gordon, and Ruether). (By patriarchy I mean a social, economic, and political system in which some men rule over all other men, women and children. Such systems are generally very androcentric -- male values and the male person is upheld as the human "norm" -- and females are understood as a deviation from that "norm").

Morin and Wallace, in "Traditional Values, Sex-Role Stereotyping, and Attitudes toward Homosexuality," found that the best single predictor of homophobia is a belief in the traditional family ideology of dominant father, submissive mother, and obedient children. The second best predictor was found to be traditional beliefs about male and female roles. Homosexual persons are often perceived as not acting the way "real" males or females "should." "Real" women are sexually passive and relate sexually only to men. "Real" men are those who are sexually dominant and relate sexually only to women. "Real" men sexually dominate "real" women. One stigma of male homosexuality, then, is that it requires some men to act "like females" (Boswell, p.50). Sexism can be seen as the basis for the commonly held notion that homosexuality in men is the equivalent of effeminacy -- or acting "like women." Being or acting "like a woman" is to be a failed man -- and under patriarchal and misogynist values -- to be less than one ought to be -- to be an "inferior" -- like a woman. As Bell and Weinberg point out: "In a society such as ours a special loathing is reserved for any male who appears to have forfeited the privileges and responsibilities associated with upholding the conventional imagery of males" (p.221). Where masculine control is consistently valued over feminine passivity, and men valued over women,

homosexuality -- or effeminacy (the two are not mutually exclusive) -- is seen as a threat to traditional sex roles and male power. Men, who gain most from the traditional sexual arrangements, are consistently found to be more homophobic than women, and married men -- male heads of households are the most homophobic of all (Schneider and Lewis, p. 60).

Whereas George Weinberg observed that "most men who loathe (male) homosexuals have a deathly fear of abandonment in the direction of passivity" (p.3) lesbianism, viewed as a particular sexual activity, by in large, arouses less vehement negative homophobic feelings. It may be described as a "pity" or a "waste" or as a titillating fantasy by men, and as "incomprehensible" or "disgusting" by women, rather than as a "threat to the family" or an "abomination." Often times it is simply not recognized or suspected. Close relationships between women fit the "feminine" norm, and sexist stereotypes hold that women are "naturally" less interested in sexual expression, so that two women living together may often avoid suspicion. These sexual stereotypes, coupled with a misogynist devaluing of women in society, makes "what women do together" in sexual relationships not as deeply threatening, as "what men do together" in sexual relationships.

Lesbianism is, however, experienced as a threat when lesbians appear to be behaving "outside the sex role assigned to them, and...trying to 'take on' in some sense the male role (that is, being independent, strong, and so on)...trying to take on the male prerogative." Then, lesbians may be seen as "more of a threat than gay men, who are 'downwardly mobile'" relative to the male power system (Mitchell, p. 145). Lesbianism is also seen as a threat when it occurs in the context of organized feminist culture and action which articulates a critique of patriarchal and sexist values. In fact, the accusation of lesbianism, or "dyke-baiting," as it is sometimes called, is consistently used as a means to discourage and discredit feminist organizing by women of all sexual orientations (Abbot, Love, p. 136-139).

### The Healing of Homophobia

Just as the "woman problem" was later redefined as the problem of "sexism," social and clinical scientists are redefining the "homosexual problem" as the problem of "homophobia." And as the forgoing discussion shows, the two problems are intimately linked. The fear of moving away from rigid sexual roles may be at the heart of societies' fear and hatred of homosexuality, and the church's reluctance to affirm publically the gay and lesbian couples in its midst.

For as John Boswell pointed out in a letter to The Parsonage:

the question is not whether the church is to 'marry' homosexual couples, but whether or not such marriages do or do not exist...Where the church simply witnesses or confirms a relationship established by the couple, the church can only investigate whether such relationships have been established by gay couples and then publicly recognized them or not" ("The Parsonage Report on the Blessing of a Covenant in Love," 1984)

As we have seen, the overwhelming evidence of reason and experience is that such relationships do exist in very significant numbers. They are a part of the God given diversity of human sexuality. And such relationships are, aside from their procreative capacity, essentially indistinguishable from heterosexual marriages. These covenants have endured severe social stress due to damaging stereotypes and religiously supported homophobia. Most recently gay and lesbian couples have been scape-goated as a "threat to the family" by those whose vision of family is decidedly narrow and patriarchal.

The position that the Christian Church has taken toward homosexual persons in the past has served as the main justification for discrimination and violence against gay and lesbian people. The healing of homophobia, therefore, is a moral responsibility the Church cannot avoid, and must rightfully bear. Those who argue against the blessing of committed same-sex couples by the church frequently offer poor exegesis of Biblical texts, unfounded biologisms, and warmed over biases in place of sound argument. But any ethical position which ignores the witness of experience is suspect.

Education is not enough. The irrational nature of homophobia is readily apparent because it persists in spite of the facts. Sociological study has shown that "education seems to be necessary, but (is) not sufficient" (Schneider and Lewis, p.59) to diminish homophobia. Personal contact with people who are open about their homosexuality is the single most important factor in bringing about change in homophobic attitudes. The visibility of lesbian and gay people in the San Francisco Bay Area community and our local Episcopal churches is an unprecedented opportunity for the church to come to know homosexual persons and couples, not as abstract stereotypes, but as concrete human beings -- and to witness to the love of Christ in their lives

It is not enough to continue to bless the covenants of gay and lesbian couples in private, without official church sanction, using "underground" liturgies of varying forms. Such is an inadequate and duplicitous response to a pressing moral need. The Diocese of California can be proud of the leadership it has provided to the entire Church in its response to those who are afflicted by the AIDS virus. But the more deadly disease which infects the hearts and minds of all of us -- is the disease of homophobia -- and its correlate, the bigotry of heterosexism. It takes more courage and greater vision to see the presence and consequences of this disease within ourselves and within our community, and to take the appropriate actions to begin the healing in earnest. The question is now how to reconcile the blessing of committed relationships of same-sex couples with a few scriptural passages whose interpretation can be endlessly debated, but how to reconcile the love of Christ with the continued refusal to recognize Christ's presence in the covenants of the lesbian and gay couples in our midst.

The public affirmation and recognition of lesbian and gay couples by the church will inevitably be greeted by fear and outrage -- but also by much rejoicing and thanksgiving -- for it will be a visible sign of the power of Christ breaking down the ancient barriers and divisions between gay and straight, male and female, and opening us all to deeper insights into the mysteries of human intimacy, commitment, and sexuality in the Family of God.

Bonita Ann Palmer, MD

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### III. THEOLOGY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### A Theological and Pastoral Commentary on The Celebration and Blessing of a Covenant in Love

Concerning the Service.

This section establishes a number of requirements:

1. It is first of all to be centered in the relationship between the two persons and God; one, at least, must be a baptized member of the community of faith; there must be witnesses; and the two are not in a prior relationship to this one.
2. It presumes that there are people who do not choose a civil marriage and others for whom a civil marriage is not possible. It also presumes that the Church can bless relationships other than those established in civil law and that such relationships have no civil status in themselves.
3. It is recognized that counselling is an essential preparation for this blessing and that the persons have sponsors who share with them in the preparation and who represent the larger community of faith.
4. Finally, it establishes that this rite should have its presider a priest or a bishop.

This means that the Church's ability to recognize and bless relationships is not limited to relationships recognized by secular society. We recognize that the relationships to which this rite is appropriate are not marriage in the sense the civil law defines it, and, therefore it is not marriage as the Canons of the Church define it. Such relationship may indeed have a rather close resemblance to marriage, but then other relationships long recognized and hallowed by the church do also (such as profession in a religious community).

#### The Address by the Celebrant

It is to be noted that this rite clearly intends to hallow a life-long commitment. This address expresses the conviction that the fact of humanity's creation in the image of God means that human beings are created to live in committed relationships and that such a relationship is an inherent expression of our vocation as the People of God.

The Address expresses the belief that human beings have the capacity through creation and redemption to be "sacraments" of God's love to others and to be in a grace-filled relationship with another person. Such people become God gifts to each other. It is for that reason that the Church can bless such relationships. For that reason the rite presumes that the primary reason for blessing a relationship is that the community of faith finds itself in agreement with the two persons that the relationship is sacramental. If it is not, then no form of prayers by the church can make it become sacramental (this is equally true of marriage). Thus the two persons and the community

of faith are required before the blessing takes place to commit themselves the support and public affirmation of the relationship.

### The Declaration of Consent

The promises now made ask the two to state their consent to a relationship which is:

A Call from God

Exclusive and Life-long

A means of supporting growth in maturity and wisdom

An instrument of witness to God's love

The Community of Faith then commits itself to support the two persons in their committed relationship.

### The Ministry of the Word.

The Collect again stresses that our call to enter into relationships is a necessary result of having been created in the divine image. It acknowledges that the keeping of such a covenant is dependent on the grace of God.

The readings place the qualities of the relationship within the perspective of the Word of God.

### The Solemn Vows.

Form One is essentially the same wording as that in the Marriage Rite except that gender limiting terms are not used of the persons ("beloved companion" rather than husband and wife).

Form Two seeks to express the same unlimited, exclusive, and life-time nature of the relationship and the same totality of commitment to each other as Form One, but uses a form of words which does not so clearly resemble that used in the Marriage rite.

Form Three is not really a form but states the content required if vows are composed in wording other than one of these two forms.

The giving of symbols is optional rather than required. This recognizes that such symbols may be inappropriate in some cases. When used the symbols are clearly understood to be outward expressions of the total commitment of each to the other.

The Celebrant recognizes the relationship and acts for the community in proclaiming it.

### The Prayers.

The prayers express a number of aspects of the relationship:

1. It is within the redeeming work of God in Christ;

2. The relationship is for all aspects of life, joyful as well as painful;
3. It is brought into the life of God so that its growth is a growth in God as well;
4. It is given by God as a witness to God's will for unity and committed love in all creation;
5. It is a relationship shared with others; children, perhaps; family and friends without question; one whose love is a given not only for the two but for the others;
6. It is a means of encouraging others in their committed relationships;
7. It is bound up in the relationship which all God's People have in God with each other.

#### The Solemn Blessing of the Covenant.

That this prayer is almost completely identical with that in the Marriage rite is intended to demonstrate that the quality of the relationship is the same as marriage even though it is not appropriately called a marriage.

#### At the Eucharist.

It is desired that this rite take place within the Eucharist which expresses its nature as a gift of grace, as an instrument of salvation, and as a foretaste of God's Kingdom.

#### Summary.

The Rite presumes first of all that when the Church blesses persons, relationships, or things it is recognizing that that which is blessed is created capable of bearing God and has been discerned by the church as being in a redeemed relationship with God. The Church's act of blessing does not change or add to that which is blessed. The act of blessing is a proclamation that the Church finds that the object(s) of the blessing is indeed blessed by God. In the case of persons as individuals or in a relationship this is discerned by the quality of the relationship and its likeness to Christ.

This understanding begs the question of whether relationships other than those called by convention, society, and the canons "Marriage" can be grace-filled and redemptive; whether they can be Christ-like. The rite presumes that relationships other than "Marriage" are capable of bearing God's redemptive presence and thus may be blessed by the Church.

The question remains: What determines the "blessability" of a relationship; definitions in Scripture and Tradition or discernment by the Christian Community in the Holy Spirit?

The Rev. Canon Michael Merriman

#### Thoughts on the Ethics/Moral Theology of Same-Sex Unions

As a newcomer to the Bishop's Committee I realize that I have missed a great deal of material and discussion that has gone on during the past year or so.

My first reaction is that the cart was placed before the horse. All of the theological study should have gone on before a liturgy for the blessing of same-sex unions was written. With that in mind it is doubly difficult to pass ethical/moral judgment upon a completed project rather than an idea.

The usual pattern for ethics papers would be to study scripture, tradition and reason. And so I shall sketch out some thoughts.

Scripture: the Old and New Testaments still form the basis of theological authority in the Episcopal Church and are one of the points in the Lambeth Quadrilateral. I have sat through a lecture by an eminent Biblical Scholar and Professor at G.T.U. who have the most twisted and distorted exegesis to prove that homosexuality is OK in the Biblical tradition. I cannot agree with his conclusions.

God created MAN (generic), male and female created he them, sent them forth to multiply and said it was good.

Jesus said that man should leave his mother and cleave to his wife and the two would become one flesh.

Furthermore, the 1979 Prayer Book gives three purposes for marriage: 1) for mutual joy, 2) for help and comfort given one another, and 3) for the procreation of children and their nurture. These three are well-founded in Scripture.

Tradition: I have looked over several books on Church History and the History of Theology and find nothing that counters my feelings about Scripture. It may well be that JOY was left out in the cold during the puritan period but even Cromwell, who thought he was God, probably found it was good! It is true that homosexuals have contributed much to Christian thought, art and music. The Church has gained much from their talent and labor for God. It is also true that Christians have often treated the homosexual as less than human and put him/her to death for being such. Two wrongs, however, do not make a right.

Reason:

A. The proposed liturgy and the Prayer Book. Who is the liturgical committee trying to fool? The proposed service parallels the Marriage service so closely that the one cannot escape the intent that this is a marriage. The change of 'companion for life' rather than 'husband' or 'wife' in the vow could also be used as a phrase in a Christian marriage. Moreover the final blessing is word for word the same!

Under California (and I assume all other states) law you cannot marry same sex persons. By Canon Law the clergy must comply with civil law. The Church would be in gross error were it to flaunt the state by misleading people to think that black is white.

B. A blessing is a blessing is a blessing. The whole point of a Christian marriage service is to have the priestly blessing upon it. Bishop Pike was

quite right when he ruled that a Deacon could do the legal part of the marriage service but a priest must be present to give the blessing. If the blessing is the same, then I find it hard to see a difference between the proposed service and the Blessing of a Marriage. I shall return to the matter of the blessing in a moment.

C. In one of the papers submitted to this Committee it was stated as a reason for the blessing of a same sex union that people want it so very much. We might add and so many people want such a blessing.

One of the hard facts about a democracy is that the majority may rule but not be right. I know that what I am saying may be hard for some to take and may even be hurtful and seem unkind. For that I am sorry but I must be true to my conscience, my training, belief and faith. I have, over nearly forty years, ministered to many homosexual men and women. They have served on my Vestry, read the lessons, taught Sunday School, been ushers and so forth. I once thought that if I were a Bishop I could not ordain a homosexual. I have knowingly taken part in the ordination of known homosexuals and can do so in the spirit of agape love. But I also believe that there is a point at which the Church, if it is to be true to the Faith Once Delivered to the Apostles, must say there is a limit and we stop here.

One of the roles of the Church is to be the conscience of society. It is not a popular roll and has often put the Church at odds with most of those who call themselves christian or nonchristian. We do not like to be told that what we do is wrong or not in keeping with God's Will. But that is one of the hard tasks which moral theology places upon the Church.

D. I am afraid that the blessing of a same sex union is one of those acts which places the Church in the roll of moral judge. Some years ago I sat at the feet of a theologian who maintained that nothing should be said when the elements are placed on the Altar because there was no difference between a blessing and the consecration. If a blessing or grace was said over the elements then they were consecrated and the act should stop there because the prayer of consecration would be redundant.

A blessing is in the nature of a sacramental act. I believe that both Scripture and tradition are clear that same sex unions are not what God intends and that it would be a misuse of the sacramental blessing to use it for such a rite.

It would be more to the point to say as Jesus did, God loves you, go and sin no more. I have not dealt with the erotic side of homosexuality. I assume that is a major part of what the rite is intended to bless. And that is where I draw the line.

Certainly there are deep and meaningful relationships between people of the same sex, there may be life long friendships and on the level of phileo, brotherly love, but stop short of genital activity. If God had intended there to be genital activity between those of the same sex then, I think He would have created us a bit differently.

When I put my thoughts together I quite agree that the homosexual is (if Baptized) a child of God an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. That along with the heterosexual they are full members of the Church and partakers in the community of the the people of God. But I have to stop short of the sacramental blessing of same sex unions. I do not agree with the 'free sex' movement of the sixties that anything goes as long as it is meaningful. Such philosophy is pure hedonism and less than the highest standards of the Judeo-Christian ethic.

A Footnote:

As a practical matter, where would the clergy record a same sex service? In the Parish Marriage Register? In the Service Register? Would a certificate be issued? Let's quit kidding around. The plain fact is that the sacramental blessing of a same sex union is the same as the sacramental blessing of a heterosexual union and under State Law we cannot marry those of the same sex.

Wilfred H. Hodgkin, D.D.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

While this document reflects a wide range of careful thought and opinion on the topic, most members of the Group affirm the blessing of same-sex unions. The following recommendations and questions therefore are not agreed upon by all. They reflect the thought and experience of the diversity of the group.

Some members of the Group believe that it is advisable for the Church to bless same-sex unions. Recognizing that the Church does not have a common mind but that there are communities within the Church that would be supportive, it is recommended that the rite upon which this study is based be used where clergy and congregations witness to this support. The Church, by virtue of Christ's commission, has the obligation to uphold and to bless the manifestations of the life of God shown forth in the committed love of Christian same-sex couples.

Other members of the Group believe that it is inadvisable to use the rite based on three reasons: 1) There is a strong biblical injunction against persons of the same-sex having sexual intercourse; 2) Because of the unity of the Church, both "inter" and "intra", it is not the best time to move in this direction; and 3) Since the rite itself is not restricted to same-sex couples, it could be used by heterosexual couples as an alternative to the service of Holy Matrimony in the Book of Common Prayer.

Finally, it is the view of some that the Church should affirm the blessing of same-sex couples, yet the proposed rite should be revised along more realistic lines. Such a revision should take into account the reality that the couple asking for the Church's blessing are already fully committed, body, mind, and spirit. (This holds true for both heterosexual and homosexual couples.)

### Questions for Further Study

1. What does the Bible say about the notion of family?
2. Further define the Christian meaning of sexuality.
  - A. What role does the "body" play in our human relationships, in our sexuality, and in God.
  - B. What are the implications of the above question to all sexual relations outside of marriage (including sexual relations of divorcees, persons who have not remarried, sexual relations among teenagers, and recreational sex within a marriage)?
3. What structure might there be for dissolving relationships blessed under the proposed rite?
4. Topics that should be explored by the Church include homophobia, scapegoating, and the idolatry of sex roles.

## THE PROPOSED RITE

### Concerning the Service

A Christian covenant in love is a solemn and public covenant between two persons in the presence of God. It is required that one, at least, of them must be a baptized Christian; that the ceremony be attested by at least two witnesses; and that the persons be free by law and custom to commit themselves to this exclusive relationship.

This service is designed for persons intending a life-long commitment, and for whom a civil marriage is not, or cannot, be chosen. As a result, this rite hallows a relationship in the vision of the Church without creating a relationship or status under civil law.

The persons shall be counselled as to the nature, meaning, and purpose of the covenant. Counsel should aid in clarifying the suitability of a covenant, identify problems in the relationship, identify legal issues, and suggest opportunities for continued growth.

The persons may have sponsors, normally from the parish community, to provide support and assistance and share their spiritual pilgrimage in making the covenant; normally the sponsors are the witnesses at the celebration.

A priest or a bishop normally presides at the Celebration and Blessing of a Covenant in Love, because such ministers alone have the function of pronouncing the solemn blessing, and of celebrating the Holy Eucharist.

In the opening exhortation (at the symbol of N.N.), the full names of the persons are declared. Subsequently, only their Christian names are used.

### THE CELEBRATION AND BLESSING OF A COVENANT IN LOVE

- \* At the time appointed, the persons desiring to make a life-long commitment of love to each other, with their witnesses, assemble in the church or some other appropriate place.
- \* A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.
- \* Then the Celebrant, facing the People and the two persons, addresses the congregation and says:

Dear Friends in Christ: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the covenant of these persons in a life-long commitment of love. The calling to live in a bond and covenant of love is a gift from God in whose image we are created and by whom we are called to love, to reason,

to work and play, and to live in harmony with God and one another. In celebrating this covenant, we are reminded of our highest vocation: to love God and to love our neighbor.

N.N. and N.N. are here to bear witness to their love for each other, and their intention to embody Christ's love in their relationship. Each has found the other to be a gift of God in the midst of a broken and sinful world. We are now called to share in their happiness, and to witness this exchange of vows because we believe God, who is love and truth, sees into their hearts and accepts the offering they are making.

The union of two persons 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 for the greater manifestation of love in the lives of all whom they encounter. Therefore this commitment is to be undertaken and affirmed seriously, reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with God's intention for us.

#### The Declaration of Consent

\* The Celebrant addresses the two persons, saying:

N. and N.: You have come here so that God may confirm and strengthen your love in the presence of this company. Therefore I ask you to declare the firm intention of your covenant. Do you believe God has called you to live together in love?

> We do.

Will you remain faithful to each other, never allowing any other relationship to come before the one you are now to affirm?

> We will.

Will you nurture each other's ability to grow in maturity and wisdom within this relationship?

> We will.

Will you do all in your power to make your life together a witness to the love of God in the world?

> We will.

\* The Celebrant then addresses each person separately, saying:

N., will you take N. to live together in a covenant in love as long as you both shall live?

\* Each answers

> I will.

\* The Celebrant then addresses the congregation, saying

Will all of you witnessing these promises do all in your power to uphold these two persons in their commitment?

\* The people answer

> We will.

\* The Celebrant then says to the People:

The Lord be with you.

> And also with you.

Let us pray.

O gracious and everloving God, you have created us in your image: Hear our prayers for N. and N., who now celebrate before you their covenant in love increase their faith in you and in each other; give them grace to keep the promises they make that their life together be a witness to your love; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. > Amen.

\* Then one or more of the following passages from Holy Scripture is read. If there is to be a Communion, a passage from the Gospel always concludes the Readings.

\* At the conclusion of each Reading, the Reader says

The Word of the Lord.

> Thanks be to God.

\* Between the Readings, a Psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said.

\* When a passage from the Gospel is to be read, all stand, and the Deacon or Minister appointed says:

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to \_\_\_\_\_.

> Glory to you, Lord Christ.

\* After the Gospel, the Reader says:

The Gospel of the Lord.

> Praise to you, Lord Christ.

- \* A homily or other response to the Readings follows.

## THE SOLEMN VOWS

- \* The two persons face each other, and in turn each takes the right hand of the other and says a solemn vow.

### Form One

In the Name of God and before this community, I, N., take you, N., to be my beloved companion in life, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse; for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vows.

### Form Two

In the name of God, I, N., take you, N., to be my companion; and I solemnly promise, here with your witnesses and God: to stand beside and with you always; in times of celebration and times of sadness; in times of pleasure and times of anger; in times of pain and times of health; I will live with you and love you; as long as we both shall live.

### Form Three

- \* After suitable counseling and in agreement with the celebrant, the two persons may recite vows composed by themselves or by others, which embody the intention to live without reservations in a life-long relationship.
- \* They loose their hands.

//                   \* The Celebrant may ask God's blessing on the tangible  
//                   symbol(s) (such as ring(s)) of the covenant and  
//                   relationship. The following is a suitable blessing.  
//

// Bless, O Lord, these \_\_\_\_\_ to be signs of the vows by which  
// these persons have bound themselves to each other in love,  
// through Jesus Christ our Lord. > AMEN.  
//

//                   \* The giver then delivers the symbol to the other in an  
//                   appropriate manner and says:  
//

// N., I give you this \_\_\_\_\_ as a symbol of my vow: receive  
// and treasure it as a pledge of my love for you. With all that I  
// am, and all that I have, I honor you, in the Name of the Father,  
// and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (or in the Name of God).  
//

- \* Then the Celebrant joins the right hands of the two persons and says:

Now that N. and N. have given themselves to each other by solemn vows,

with the joining of hands (and the giving and receiving of \_\_\_\_\_), I declare that they are united to one another in a solemn covenant in love, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Let us all uphold them in this Covenant.

\* The people respond

> Amen.

### The Prayers

\* All standing, the Celebrant says:

Let us pray together in the words our Savior taught us.

\* People and Celebrant together

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your Name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.

\* If Communion is to follow, the Lord's Prayer may be omitted here.

\* The Deacon or other person appointed reads the following prayers, to which the People respond. After suitable counseling, and with the consent of the Celebrant, other appropriate words may be used.

Let us pray.

Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life, author of salvation, and giver of all grace: Look with favor upon the world you have made, and for which your Son gave his life, and especially upon these persons whom you have united in love. AMEN.

Give them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy. AMEN.

Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will, and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may grow in love and peace with you and another all the days of their life. AMEN.

Give them grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other's forgiveness and yours. AMEN.

Make their life together a sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair. AMEN.

// Give them calm strength and patient wisdom in bringing up the  
// children you give them, that they may know you, love you, and  
// serve you. AMEN.

Enhance their relationship with joy and beauty, that their family and friends may rejoice with them. AMEN.

Give them such fulfillment of their mutual affection that they may reach out in love and concern for others. AMEN.

Grant that all those who have witnessed these vows may find their own lives strengthened and their loyalties confirmed. AMEN.

Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which all your children are united one to another, and the living to the dead, may be so transformed by your grace, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; where, Father, with your Son and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign in perfect unity and love, now and forever. AMEN.

\* The People remain standing. The two persons kneel, and the Priest says one of the following prayers:

Most gracious God, we give you thanks for your tender love in sending Jesus Christ to come among us, to be born of a human mother, and to make the way of the cross to be the way of life. By the power of your Holy Spirit, pour out the abundance of your blessing upon these persons, now joined together in a solemn covenant in love. Defend them from every enemy. Lead them into all peace. Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads. Bless them in their work and in their companionship; in their sleeping and in their waking; in their joys and in their sorrows; in their life and in their death. Finally, in your mercy, bring them to that table where your saints feast for ever in your heavenly home; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. AMEN.

\* The couple still kneeling, the Priest adds this blessing:

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life, and in the age to come have life everlasting. AMEN.

## The Peace

- \* The Celebrant may say to the People:

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

> And also with you.

- \* The two persons then greet each other, after which greetings may be exchanged throughout the congregation.
- \* When Communion is not to follow, the couple leaves, followed by their witnesses and the People. A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

## At the Eucharist

- \* The liturgy continues with the Offertory, at which the couple may present the offerings of bread and wine.
- \* For the Proper Preface, the following may be used, or another one suited to the day.

You created us to share in your divine life, and forming us in your image you called us to live in harmony with you and all creation in your Kingdom; through the unity of persons one with another, you teach us that love is our origin, our constant calling, and our fulfillment in heaven.

- \* At the Communion, it is appropriate that the couple receive Communion first, after the Ministers.
- \* In place of the usual postcommunion prayer, the following is said:

O God, the giver of all that is true and lovely and gracious: We give you thanks for binding us together in these holy mysteries of the Body and Blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that by your Holy Spirit, N. and N., now joined in a solemn covenant, may become one in heart and soul, live in fidelity and peace, and obtain those eternal joys prepared for all who love you; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

- \* As the party departs, a hymn, Psalm, or anthem may be sung; or instrumental music may be played.

## Additional Directions

When both a bishop and a priest are present and officiating, the bishop should pronounce the blessing and preside at the Eucharist.

A deacon, or assisting priest, may deliver the charge, ask for the



Declaration of Consent, read the Gospel, and perform other assisting functions at the Eucharist.

On occasion, and as appropriate, instrumental music may be substituted for a hymn or anthem.

Silence may follow any reading.

It is desirable that the Lessons from the Old Testament and the Epistles be read by lay persons.

If there is to be a presentation of either or both persons by family members or others, it takes place immediately following the declaration of consent. A hymn, psalm, or anthem may follow.