

## EVANGELICALS, HOMOSEXUALITY, AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

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On the otherwise bleak landscape of America's decaying urban neighborhoods shines one bright spot: neighborhoods stabilized and improved by an influx of affluent gays. "Predominantly gay neighborhoods have arisen in a dozen major cities over the last two decades, at once bolstering those cities' sagging tax bases, pumping thousands of dollars into the economy and sometimes making tired neighborhoods safer and more attractive to heterosexuals."<sup>1</sup> Where is this happening? In New York's Greenwich Village, in the Castro district of San Francisco, in the Cheesman Park area of Denver.

Cheesman Park is the previous home of Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary. We moved out before they moved in.<sup>2</sup> We have become suburban; they have become urban. They know we exist; we know they exist. We politely pass each other as the decades change the demography of our city. But our contact with that community or with this issue has been minimal. Such has been the experience of our school with Denver's homosexual community, at least to date, and such may be the experience of many other evangelical seminaries across the nation.

Our insulation from dealing with the homosexual issue may be short-lived. Consider the experience of former seminary adjunct instructor Douglas D. Webster. Soon after he arrived at his new pastorate at the First Presbyterian Church of San Diego he was embroiled in a very public squabble centered around the church's gay organist, who was a fine musician and Bible teacher. The church passed a policy that prompted the organist's resignation. The ensuing media coverage in the San Diego *Union* newspaper consumed every ounce of Webster's energy for several weeks. Of his encounter with the homosexual issue he says, "It may become the ecclesiastical issue of the nineties."<sup>3</sup>

To help make sure just such an eventuality occurs, Mel White has lobbed into the evangelical court quite a challenge.<sup>4</sup> One gets the impression that the

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<sup>1</sup> K. DeWitt, "Gay Neighborhoods Providing Stability in Decaying Cities," *Denver Post* (September 9, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> On a more personal note, our home church, First Evangelical Covenant Church of Denver, was located from 1930 to 1966 at 10th and Clarkson. That building is now the home of the Metropolitan Church of the Rockies. Gay couples now worship in pews where pious Swedes once sat.

<sup>3</sup> D. D. Webster, "A Defining Issue" (unpublished paper, n.d.). Webster's conclusion reminds us of the title of D. Williams' 1978 book on the subject of homosexuality: *The Bond That Breaks: Will Homosexuality Split the Church?*

<sup>4</sup> M. White, *Stranger at the Gate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

evangelical world and especially the famous authors for whom he ghosted are the primary targets of his book.<sup>5</sup> Many evangelicals who read it will not be very impressed, although many will recognize that White has a standard, 1950s-style fundamentalist/evangelical upbringing. We can dismiss his argumentation as flawed and unconvincing, his exegesis as faulty and self-serving, his behavior as disgusting and blatantly sinful, and his conclusions as illegitimate and spurious. Mel White, we say, is “sadly mistaken.”<sup>6</sup> Yet our spurning of his case may miss the point. The media and the secular world are paying attention to him. The morally uncommitted, the religiously unaffiliated, the sexually confused and the Biblically ignorant are and will be impressed with the book. White’s case is an apologetic that appeals to many outside our narrow evangelical world.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile homosexuality continues to throw our modern world into ethical contortions. Society is under pressure to recognize gay marriages, to alter the standards of the Boy Scouts on this issue, and to drop all military bans on the service of practicing gays. Both the American Psychiatric Association<sup>8</sup> and the American Psychological Association are under tremendous pressure to declare that any therapy with homosexual persons not designed to help them adjust to their orientation is unethical.<sup>9</sup> Several states in the United States are in the throes of trying to decide what to do with initiatives dealing with homosexuality.<sup>10</sup>

The American church is facing the question of admitting the Metropolitan Churches of America to the National Council of Churches. Nearly all mainline denominations are embroiled in debates about the nature of human sexuality.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See T. Mattingly, “Gay Church Leader Has Some Questions for Religious Right,” *Rocky Mountain News* (June 11, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Review by B. Davies of *Stranger at the Gate* in *Christianity Today* (June 20, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> As seen in the media’s coverage of Mel White’s recent fast outside the headquarters of Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs (Denver *Post* [July 13, 1994]).

<sup>8</sup> In only ten years after the British Wolfenden Report calling for the decriminalization of homosexuality was published in America (1963), pressure escalated on the American Psychiatric Association to delete homosexuality from the diagnostic manual of psychiatric disorders. The APA board’s 1973 decision to do so was ratified in the next year by the membership (58% in favor of the board’s decision, 37% against). See R. Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry* (Princeton University, 1987), for a full report.

<sup>9</sup> “Hurting Healing,” Family Research Council Washington Watch (May 27, 1994) 2.

<sup>10</sup> See the Denver *Post* (October 12, 1994) for a comprehensive review of the legal storm in Colorado that the passage of Amendment 2 has triggered there. The October 16 issue of the *Post* carried an editorial by a prominent *Post* editor critical of the Colorado State Supreme Court’s decision to declare Amendment 2 unconstitutional (A. Knight, “The Constitution Becomes Silly Putty in Court’s Hands”).

<sup>11</sup> See J. G. Melton, *The Church Speaks on Homosexuality: Official Statements from Religious Bodies* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991), for a compilation of ecclesiastical documents on homosexuality. For two specific examples, see *Christian Century* (June 17–24, 1992) for an account of the Southern Baptist Convention’s action to expel from the denomination two North Carolina congregations and the November 4, 1992, issue for a story about the American Baptist Convention’s resolution regarding the matter. For a current review of the debate that represents both sides of the ecclesiastical aisle see *Caught in the Crossfire: Helping Christians Debate Homosexuality* (ed. S. B. Geis and D. E. Messer; Abingdon, 1994).

For centuries the Church has counted on two powerful factors to help buttress her historic objection to the practice of homosexuality: (1) a broad, cultural consensus that homosexuality was shameful, unnatural and/or illegal; (2) a reliance on the gay community to remain silent and passive. We may now be observing the breakup of that broad cultural condemnation of homosexuality. And the gay community is certainly not silent any longer. Soon the Church, and only some churches at that, may stand alone as she did in the first century in her opposition to the homosexual lifestyle. So if Douglas Webster is correct, this issue will continue to demand the attention of churches, even perhaps of American evangelical seminaries.<sup>12</sup>

The homosexual community in our metropolitan areas may not allow us to remain silent and to keep our objections private. Consider the following scenario.

A prominent, highly gifted student leader on an evangelical seminary campus comes out of the closet and begins to advocate the gay lifestyle. The school dismisses the student.<sup>13</sup> The student contacts local media and gay-rights activists in the city, who decide to march and picket the campus. The local religion editor shows up at the president's office door asking for an immediate interview.

Could it happen? Maybe. A better question might be: Are we ready?

## I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. *The twentieth-century Church and sexuality.* The current clamor over homosexuality is certainly not the first time the Church has had to face a tough sexual issue. In our own century alone the Church has faced a succession of sexual challenges. She has responded to them in a variety of ways. For example, sometimes we have incorporated new ideas by assimilation and accommodation. Birth control was anathema to most conservative Protestants not all that long ago. Margaret Sanger was the frequent target of pulpitering attacks in the first part of our century. Now we routinely assume that birth control is a respectable practice for Bible-believing people. Most people in the pew would be surprised to learn that the Protestant Church had ever objected to it.<sup>14</sup> We have observed similar accommodation

<sup>12</sup> See "Homosexuality Debate Strains Campus Harmony," *Christianity Today* (November 22, 1993), for a discussion of how the issue has grabbed the attention of evangelical undergraduate schools.

<sup>13</sup> One wonders if current seminary policies regarding the issue will be adequate to handle such an eventuality, especially if those policies are subjected to legal challenge. The current student handbook of one evangelical seminary devotes one word to the topic: "The seminary interprets the Bible to forbid explicit immodesty, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, use of pornography, and drunkenness."

<sup>14</sup> We are observing an interesting exception to this general trend in recent discussions among evangelicals in the press and on our campus again questioning the morality of birth control. See C. J. Raatz, "A Woman's View on Birth Control," *Life Advocate* (June 1993). A broadside that recently arrived in my mailbox from a partisan group screamed: "WARNING: Many 'Christians' are not fully pro-life and pro-child. Be not deceived by church family planning teachings which really are idolatry, fornication and child sacrifice in the form of descendant (birth) control. Check out church teachings and doctrine with scripture."

processes regarding the separation of procreation and pleasure functions in marital sexuality and the acceptability of cultivating pleasurable sex in marriage.<sup>15</sup>

On other issues the Church has attempted to hold her ground. The so-called sexual revolution raged throughout our culture during the 1960s and 1970s. Yet we continue to teach our adolescents and unmarried adults the Biblical call to purity, abstinence and celibacy.

On at least one issue we seem to be observing a tightening or clamping-down process. Not all that long ago we would routinely teach that abortion, except in cases of rape, incest, or danger to the mother's life, was contrary to God's standards. In today's highly politicized climate regarding abortion, fewer and fewer commentators are willing to admit to any exceptions to the ban.<sup>16</sup>

In the twentieth century our response regarding homosexuality is a mix of the above strategies. The Church has always condemned the practice of homosexuality by either males or females as shameful.<sup>17</sup> As recently as 1953 the Archbishop of Canterbury was saying, "Let it be understood that homosexual indulgence is a shameful vice and a grievous sin from which deliverance is to be sought by every means."<sup>18</sup> We have continued to oppose the practice. Yet at some level we have attempted to fine-tune our opposition. Most Christian authors now routinely attempt to distinguish between the homosexual condition (widely seen as not sinful) and the practice of homosexuality (widely seen as very sinful).<sup>19</sup> At other levels we have tried to hold our oppositional ground regarding the practice of homosexuality.

Meanwhile gays still wish to be a part of the Church.<sup>20</sup> They have established their own denomination, the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan

<sup>15</sup> Nearly every major evangelical publishing house has issued in the recent past a marriage manual detailing sex techniques. Such explicit frankness would have shocked our grandparents.

<sup>16</sup> Several titles helpfully chronicle the abortion debate among us during the last few decades: N. Anderson, *Issues of Life and Death* (InterVarsity, 1976); *Abortion: A Christian Understanding and Response* (ed. J. K. Hoffmeier; Baker, 1987); J. W. Montgomery, *Slaughter of the Innocents* (Cornerstone, 1981); R. C. Sproul, *Abortion: A Rational Look at an Emotional Issue* (NavPress, 1990); *Symposium on the Control of Human Reproduction* (Tyndale House, 1968).

<sup>17</sup> See V. L. Bullough, *Homosexuality: A History* (1979), for a full discussion of the opposition of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin to the practice of homosexuality.

<sup>18</sup> R. Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis* (Princeton University, 1987) 16.

<sup>19</sup> Paralleling to some extent our current view of alcoholism. We do not see the "condition" or "disease" of alcoholism as sinful, but we do see indulgence in drinking as sinful. See J. S. Siker, "How to Decide? Homosexual Christians, the Bible, and Gentile Inclusion," *TToday* 51 (July 1994) 219-234, for a fine discussion of how the analogy of alcoholism with homosexuality can be both helpful and unhelpful.

<sup>20</sup> Examples of those who urge that we moderate our position regarding the participation of homosexuals in our Christian communions would be T. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David* (Westminster, 1978); J. J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Beacon, 1993); L. Scanzoni and V. Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* (Harper, 1980); R. Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Fortress, 1983). Representative of titles that urge we not abandon our position are D. Atkinson, *Homosexuals in Christian Fellowship* (Eerdmans, 1979); J. W. Drakeford, *A Christian View of Homosexuality* (Broadman, 1977); D. Field, *The Homosexual Way—A Christian Option?* (InterVarsity, 1979); *The Crisis of Homosexuality* (ed. J. I. Yamamoto; *Christianity Today*, 1990). Mounting a sharp and pointed attack is G. Grant and M. A. Horne, *Legislating Immorality* (Moody, 1993).

Community Churches. In mainline denominational settings where gays and lesbians do not feel fully included, various alliances and advocacy groups have formed.<sup>21</sup> Putting out an unwelcome mat has not deterred homosexuals from asking to get in.

2. *The Church and social science.* As the Church faces the homosexuality issue in the waning years of the twentieth century, does social science have any role to play in our deliberations? Some might be tempted to say that good, solid exegesis is all we need in preparation for this critical debate. Yet we must admit that science in general as well as social science in particular can inform us and equip us in powerful ways to facilitate our determination to defend a Biblical position on the subject. Two examples will suffice. Recently, progay activists have been strenuously challenged regarding their claims that homosexuality occurs in roughly ten percent of the population. Antigay groups have insisted that better sampling techniques be used on the hunch that the incidence rate is far less than what has been routinely claimed. Emerging data supports the antigay groups, an example of the effective use of social science in support of the Church's cautions.<sup>22</sup> A second example has to do with the recency of the issue. Many gay authors are claiming that because the words "heterosexuality" and "homosexuality" are only about 100 to 150 years old, the whole homosexual debate is just a problem for us. It never really bothered anyone before the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Careful historical work, however, can effectively foil this irrelevant and incorrect claim.<sup>24</sup>

Keeping abreast of the reliable and trustworthy findings of the sciences regarding homosexuality will also help prevent the debacle that afflicted the seventeenth-century Roman Catholic Church. When Galileo (1564–1642) dared question some of the Tridentine dogmas and Aristotelian convictions of the Church, the Church excommunicated him. In the long run, however, science and Galileo proved to be more correct than did the Church that held

<sup>21</sup> Brethren/Mennonite Council for Lesbian and Gay Concerns; Presbyterians for Gay/Lesbian Concerns (PCUSA); United Church Coalition for Lesbian/Gay Concerns (UCC); Evangelicals Concerned; Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (Quaker); Lutherans Concerned; National Gay Pentecostal Alliance. Several Roman Catholic organizations have also been formed: Dignity USA; New Ways; Chaste Lives (only the last of these groups has earned a bishop's imprimatur). The organization SDA Kinship International was sued by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in 1991 for using "SDA" in its title. The denomination lost its battle in court.

<sup>22</sup> See F. Barringer, "Sex Survey of American Men Finds 1% Are Gay," *New York Times* (April 15, 1993); P. Painton, "The Shrinking Ten Percent," *Time* (April 26, 1993); J. G. Muir, "Homosexuals and the 10% Fallacy," *Wall Street Journal* (March 31, 1993); "Study Finds Homosexuals Fewer Than Activists Claim," *Science* (July 2, 1992). Yet this victory for antigay groups also has to it a downside: If the homosexual population is indeed so small, why are we so worried about them?

<sup>23</sup> "Heterosexuality" and "homosexuality" do not appear in the main text of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1884–1928) but only in the supplement. The *OED* gives the earliest citations for these two words as 1901 and 1897 respectively. Both words are "barbarous" hybrids of Latin and Greek components, according to Havelock Ellis.

<sup>24</sup> Two sources give comprehensive critiques of this recency claim: S. W. Augsburg, *The Church as a Change Agent for the Male Homosexual* (doctoral thesis, 1984); J. Griffin, "Love and Sex in Greece," *New York Review of Books* (March 29, 1990).

too long to outdated science and philosophy.<sup>25</sup> Should convincing evidence eventually emerge that homosexuality is an inborn trait/condition/given, we will need to incorporate those findings into our overall approach to this difficult issue.

3. *A politicized issue.* As the stakes rise in the debate over homosexuality, so does the rhetoric surrounding the issue. Partisan groups on both sides increase the volume and intensity of their charges against their opponents. The far right on this issue is as guilty as the far left. Each side illustrates its case with the most extreme examples from the other side. At times the arguments of each side are difficult to assess because one is uncertain about the validity of the material being cited in the argument.<sup>26</sup> Each side accuses the other of having a highly organized agenda with the intent to obliterate the opposition.

The Church needs now more than ever a balanced approach, one that expresses the compassion of Christ for sinners as well as one that speaks the truth about homosexual behavior.

We must welcome into the family those Christians who struggle with their sexuality and their past. Jesus went to a lot of trouble to bring sinners to the throne of grace. If we forget how we got there, we will increasingly become narrow, negative, and critical of one another. We will take what God intended to be a place of softness and heavenly welcome, and make it into an outpost of hell on earth.<sup>27</sup>

One unfortunate fallout of the highly-charged environment in which this issue is being discussed is the almost total ruination of the word "homophobia." Gay activists now routinely use the word to describe anyone who disagrees with them. David Haaga suggests that we reserve the term homophobia for clearly phobic reactions to homosexuality or to homosexuals and use the phrase "anti-homosexual prejudice" to describe reactions beyond a public response.<sup>28</sup>

Even though we do not like the label "homophobic" when it is applied to ourselves, we do have to pause and give thought to the possibility that some of our extreme revulsion to the condemnations of homosexual behavior may be more than is called for. Anecdotal evidence, supported by empirical findings, supports the notion that when someone is personally acquainted with a gay or lesbian person, understanding increases and prejudice decreases.<sup>29</sup> Could it be that our isolation from the homosexual community allows us to harbor overly intense attitudes against them and thus prevents any sig-

<sup>25</sup> See P. Redondi, *Galileo: Heretic* (Princeton University, 1987), for a discussion of the "exegetical cunning" used by the Church in her fight with Galileo and his espousal of Copernican thought.

<sup>26</sup> An example from the left is D. Minkowitz, "The Christian Right's Antigay Campaign: Part Stealth, Part Muscle," *Christianity and Crisis* (April 12, 1993); from the right, P. LaBarbera, "Gay Youth Suicide: Myth is Used to Promote Homosexual Agenda," *Insight* (Family Research Council, n.d.).

<sup>27</sup> S. Brown, "Welcoming the Sexually Tempted," *Christianity Today* (April 5, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> D. Haaga, "Homophobia," *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality* 6, pp. 171–174.

<sup>29</sup> See A. Furnham and L. Taylor, "Lay Theories of Homosexuality: Aetiology, Behaviours, and 'Cures,'" *British Journal of Social Psychology* 29, pp. 135–147.

nificant ministry to them? Sometimes our behavior seems prompted by the idea that if we address the issue we will make it worse.<sup>30</sup> John Drakeford writes:

A man stands up in church and tells the story of his early drinking escapades and slavery to alcoholism. Another admits having used drugs and tells of his struggle with addiction across the years. In both cases if the man then declares he is through with it all, he is hailed as a trophy of grace. In fact, there are preachers who travel the countryside relating the gory details of their past and drawing large crowds of hearers. But let a man stand in church and tell about his struggle with homosexuality. A strange hush will descend. The people do not want him to go on. In fact, they generally don't want him to belong to their church. One preacher who later changed his mind said, "I thought homosexuals were just animals rather than human beings." Why this distinction between homosexuality and other forms of deviance?<sup>31</sup>

Could the difference be homophobia? Perhaps a helpful criterion for determining if we harbor any genuine homophobia is to ask ourselves if we feel the same revulsion and express the same level of condemnation for the other sins listed in Romans 1 that the apostle enumerates as illustrative of our rebellion against God. Throughout the NT the sins of homosexual behavior are listed side by side, no distinctions implied or stated, with other sexual sins, with religious and private sins of the heart, with sins of excess, and with so-called white-collar sins. We are on shaky exegetical ground if we single out the sins of homosexual behavior for more hate and condemnation than the NT gives these sins.<sup>32</sup>

## II. ETIOLOGY

The etiology of homosexuality has captured the interest of evangelicals far more than other aspects of the problem.<sup>33</sup> Our concern regarding etiology is related to the trend of research that is looking for organic (physiological, biological, hormonal, genetic) etiologies rather than functional or psychological explanations. We are deeply offended by the widespread claim made by gay authors, Mel White included, that their homosexuality is inborn and therefore unchangeable. But if more than psychology and spirituality is genuinely involved in the etiology of this condition, evangelicals reason, we will have to adjust our understanding of the condition and how to deal with it. The current etiological debate focuses on three main areas: family studies, physiological causes, psychological causes.

<sup>30</sup> J. Boswell writes: "No current scientific theories regarding the etiology of homosexuality suggest that social tolerance determines its incidence" (*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* [University of Chicago, 1980] 8–9).

<sup>31</sup> J. Drakeford, *A Christian View of Homosexuality* (Broadman, 1977) 129–130.

<sup>32</sup> Mel White charges that some people in the religious-right movement are exploiting the issue by playing on the fears of contributors in order to raise money. His charges are serious and, if true, require that we hold accountable some organizations that may be raising funds at the expense of Christian sensibility and faithfulness to the gospel of Christ.

<sup>33</sup> Even though the secular field, according to J. Laird, has moved beyond etiological studies to an examination of the adjustment of homosexuals to their condition; see "Lesbians and Lesbian Families: Multiple Reflections," *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 63, pp. 209–213.

1. *Family studies.* An important area of current research attempts to study families and family life and how they relate to the eventual development of homosexuality. J. M. Bailey and A. P. Bell examined the sexual orientation of siblings of homosexual males and females. Lesbians had an excess of homosexual brothers when compared to the control group of heterosexual women. Also, both homosexual men and women had approximately the same proportions of either homosexual sisters or brothers.<sup>34</sup> R. C. Pillard and J. D. Weinrich also studied family patterns among male homosexuals by looking at the sexual preferences of siblings. "Heterosexual subjects had homosexual brothers in proportion to national prevalence figures; homosexual subjects had four times as many homosexual brothers as would have been predicted."<sup>35</sup> Twin studies find a higher level of concordance in sexual orientation among monozygotic twins than among dizygotic twins.<sup>36</sup> Research studies such as these point strongly to the familial nature of homosexuality. Of course this evidence still does not help us determine if the principal antecedents of homosexuality are environmental or more directly biological since all siblings share in common a great deal from both sources.

Work also proceeds in other areas of family life. For example, B. Zuger studied the role of early effeminate behavior in boys as a predictor of later homosexual preference. Effeminacy was defined in the study as an aversion to boys' games, cross-dressing and feminine gesturing. Zuger concluded that early effeminate behavior is an early expression of homosexuality and that developmental differences between those boys who will become heterosexual and those who will become homosexual can be observed as early as two years of age.<sup>37</sup> Studies such as Zuger's prompt some observers of the current scene to advocate clear gender roles and gender-specific games for children, although we have no evidence that such planned environmental exposure would produce lower-incidence rates of homosexuality.<sup>38</sup>

A final example of family studies comes from the work of W. S. Bainbridge, who attempted to determine if religion was indeed a suppressor variable for various kinds of deviance (suicide, crime, homosexuality, cultism). His findings indicated that religion in families was a suppressor of crime and cultism but that its relationship to homosexuality and suicide was indirect.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> J. M. Bailey and A. P. Bell, "Familiality of Female and Male Homosexuality," *Behavior Genetics* 23 (1993) 313-320.

<sup>35</sup> R. C. Pillard and J. D. Weinrich, "Evidence of the Familial Nature of Male Homosexuality," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 43 (1986) 808-812.

<sup>36</sup> R. C. Pillard and J. Poumadere, "Is Homosexuality Familial? A Review, Some Data, and a Suggestion," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 10 (1981) 465-475.

<sup>37</sup> B. Zuger, "Is Early Effeminate Behavior in Boys Early Homosexuality?," *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 29 (1988) 509-519.

<sup>38</sup> See G. A. Rekers, *Growing Up Straight: What Every Family Should Know About Homosexuality* (Moody, 1982). Traditionalist arguments regarding roles for men and women continue to be a reflection of the fear that a relaxation of role definitions for men and women, as encouraged by egalitarians, will inevitably lead to higher rates of homosexuality.

<sup>39</sup> W. S. Bainbridge, "The Religious Ecology of Deviance," *American Sociological Review* 54 (1989) 288-295.

## 2. *Biological causes*

A biological or physiological origin for homosexuality is not proven. What biological evidence exists thus far of innate biological traits underlying homosexuality is flawed. Genetic studies suffer from the inevitable confounding of nature and nurture that plagues attempts to study heritability of psychological traits. Investigations of the brain rely on doubtful hypotheses about differences between the brains of men and women. Biological mechanisms that have been proposed to explain the existence of gay men often cannot be generalized to explain the existence of lesbians (whom studies have largely neglected). And the continuously graded nature of most biological variables is at odds with the paucity of adult bisexuals suggested by most surveys.<sup>40</sup>

Given this sobering assessment of current scholarly research, Mel White's comments sound very unconvincing and fundamentally misleading. White writes: "Today scientists explain the sexual orientation as involuntary, something that happens to two gametes at conception, or to a fetus in the womb or to an infant in the first few years of childhood."<sup>41</sup> He may only be correct in his final statement regarding the early years of childhood.

Yet the unproven nature of the biological connection does not mean that such a link will never be discovered. Many scholars who work in this field, while admitting that the final answers are not yet in, are convinced that some biological determinants will eventually surface that will help explain at least in part the development of homosexuality. Biological research goes on in many areas.

3. *Hormonal studies.* The prenatal-hormone theory of sexual orientation postulates that androgen exposure in the womb is determinative of later sexual orientation. At this point in time the data are more convincing as a possible explanation for homosexuality in females than in males. Women who were prenatally hyperandrogenized show an increase in bisexual and homosexual orientation. For both genetic males and females, exposure to the androgens is related to but not determinative of later attraction to females. Complete nonresponsiveness to the androgens is related to the development of erotic attraction to males, either in females or males. Most researchers argue that any hormonal influence on sexual orientation is prenatal and that no hormonal treatments during adolescence, for example, will have any effect on one's developing sexual orientation.<sup>42</sup> The evidence is not conclusive, but research continues.<sup>43</sup>

4. *Brain structure.* The brains of rats exhibit sexually dimorphic nuclei in the preoptic area of the hypothalamus. The human equivalent of this area

<sup>40</sup> W. Byne, "The Biological Evidence Challenged," *Scientific American* (May 1994) 50–55.

<sup>41</sup> White, *Stranger* 72.

<sup>42</sup> B. Meyer and F. Heino, "Can Homosexuality in Adolescents Be 'Treated' by Sex Hormones?," *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology* 1 (1990–91) 231–235.

<sup>43</sup> B. Meyer and F. Heino, "Will Prenatal Hormone Treatment Prevent Homosexuality?," *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology* 1 (1990–91) 279–283.

is the interstitial nuclei of the anterior hypothalamus (areas 1–4). Simon LeVay's recent study, a research project that has been given extensive media coverage, was a postmortem investigation of this very area of the brain. D. F. Swaab's work in the Netherlands in this area leads him to believe that sexual dimorphism of the human brain only becomes manifest after the age of two to four years and that male homosexuals do not have a female differentiation of the hypothalamus.<sup>44</sup> LeVay's work, like that of all other researchers in anatomical configurations of the brain, is not conclusive.<sup>45</sup>

5. *Genetics.* Indicators of genetic influence in the development of homosexuality come from familial research as well as from twin studies. J. M. Bailey, L. Willerman and C. Parks concluded a major study with the suggestion that genetic mechanisms may indeed influence sexual orientation.<sup>46</sup> N. Buhrich, Bailey and N. G. Martin found a significantly higher rate of homosexuality among monozygotic twins than among dizygotic twins, again suggestive of genetic influence.<sup>47</sup> Presumably the environment for twins, whether fraternal or identical, is roughly the same. Studies of the difference in rates between the two types of twins can give us a rough estimate of the influence of genetics on development. D. H. Hamer and others suggest that increased rates of same-sex orientation in the families of male homosexuals are found only in the maternal line, not the paternal. This finding suggests a sex-linked transmission process. The Hamer group suspects that markers on Xq28, the subtelomeric region of the long arm of the sex chromosome, may be the location of a gene that determines, at least in some males, homosexual orientation.<sup>48</sup>

6. *Prenatal influences.* In addition to prenatal hormonal studies, research is also exploring other prenatal factors. Bailey, Willerman, and Parks found that stress proneness as well as retrospective reports of stress during pregnancy were related to effeminacy in male children but not to gender non-conformity in childhood nor to sexual orientation as adults.<sup>49</sup> L. Ellis and M. A. Ames conclude their investigation with a comprehensive theory of prenatal influences:

According to our theory, complex combinations of genetic, hormonal, neurological, and environmental factors operating prior to birth largely determine what an individual's sexual orientation will be, although the orientation itself awaits the onset of puberty to be activated, and may not entirely stabilize un-

<sup>44</sup> D. F. Swaab, "Sexual Differentiation of the Human Hypothalamus: Ontogeny of the Sexually Dimorphic Nucleus of the Preoptic Area," *Developmental Brain Research* 44 (1988) 314–318.

<sup>45</sup> Byne, "Biological."

<sup>46</sup> J. M. Bailey, L. Willerman and C. Parks, "A Test of the Maternal Stress Theory of Human Male Homosexuality," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 20 (1991) 277–292.

<sup>47</sup> N. Buhrich, J. M. Bailey and N. G. Martin, "Sexual Orientation, Sexual Identity, and Sex-Dimorphic Behaviors in Male Twins," *Behavior Genetics* 21 (1991) 75–97.

<sup>48</sup> D. H. Hamer *et al.*, "A Linkage Between DNA Markers and the X Chromosome and Male Sexual Orientation," *Science* 261 (1993) 321–327.

<sup>49</sup> Bailey *et al.*, "Test."

til early adulthood. The involvement of learning, by and large, only appears to alter how, when, and where the orientation is expressed.<sup>50</sup>

Their theory of course waits to be tested and replicated.

*7. Temperamental inheritability.* A final line of research has to do with the inheritability of certain temperamental tendencies that in turn skew the development pattern in such a way that it gets directed toward the evolution of homosexuality. William Byne proposes, for example, that temperamental heritage interacts with other environmental factors to produce homosexuality. Some of the traits that might influence such a process are novelty seeking, harm avoidance and reward dependence.<sup>51</sup>

What is ahead in the scientific quest for a biological explanation for the etiology of homosexuality? R. C. Friedman and J. Downey assert that an interaction between mind and body, between psychology and physiology, is likely to emerge in the future.<sup>52</sup> Chandler Burr writes: "Yet even at this relatively early date, out of the web of complexities it is becoming ever clearer that biological factors play a role in determining human sexual orientation."<sup>53</sup> The comments of John Money best sum up the mainstream of scientific thought today regarding biological factors:

They (genetic, prenatal-hormonal, pubertal-hormonal, and socialization determinants of being gay, straight, or bisexual) indicate that sexual orientation is not under the direct governance of chromosomes and genes, and that, whereas it is not foreordained by prenatal brain hormonalization, it is influenced thereby and is also strongly dependent on postnatal socialization.<sup>54</sup>

*8. Psychological causes.* Human sexuality is comprised of at least seven dimensions: sexual attraction, sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, self-identification, heterosexual/homosexual lifestyle.<sup>55</sup> Given this complexity, we are not surprised that a host of psychological explanations has arisen to explain the development of homosexuality. In nearly every case, any psychological explanation will be true for some persons. The pressing question we must ask of these causal explanations is this: Does your theory explain all or nearly all of the instances? Few theories meet this stringent test.

Sigmund Freud postulated that heterosexuality was the normal end product of psychosexual development. On their way to this state, all persons pass through a homosexual phase. Normal development deflects this impulse toward the further maturation of the individual toward heterosexual

<sup>50</sup> L. Ellis and M. A. Ames, "Neurohormonal Functioning and Sexual Orientation: A Theory of Homosexuality-Heterosexuality," *Psychology Bulletin* 101 (1987) 251.

<sup>51</sup> Byne, "Biological."

<sup>52</sup> R. C. Friedman and J. Downey, "Psychoanalysis, Psychobiology, and Homosexuality," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 41 (1993) 1159-1198.

<sup>53</sup> C. Burr, "Homosexuality and Biology," *Atlantic* (March, 1993) 65.

<sup>54</sup> J. Money, "Sin, Sickness, or Status?," *American Psychologist* 42, pp. 384-399.

<sup>55</sup> F. Klein, B. Sepekoff and T. J. Wolf, "Sexual Orientation: A Multi-Variable Dynamic Process," *Journal of Homosexuality* 11 (1985) 35-49.

functioning. Remnants of this homosexual phase remain, however, to form the basis of normal friendship and love of fellow human beings. Freud also felt humans were constitutionally bisexual. Thus homosexuality was a form of arrested development for Freud.<sup>56</sup>

Neo-Freudians have continued operating with these early themes with some variation. Bieber thought that a tight mother-son bond could restrict the normal maturation processes and result in male homosexuality. Elizabeth Moberly has continued this tradition with one important shift: She argues that deficits in the same-sex parental relationship are the dynamic patterns that explain the development of both male and female homosexuality. The active homosexual is thus seeking in inappropriate, adult ways to achieve what was missing in childhood: intimacy with the same-sex parent.<sup>57</sup>

Moberly's work is the most commonly cited psychological explanation found among evangelical exit ministries. Evangelicals are attracted to this explanation because it gives hope for change and minimizes any intractable etiological factors such as biology and genetics, which are more difficult, according to some, to merge with Scriptural teaching. But the weaknesses of Moberly's arguments are (1) that they are buttressed mainly by clinical and anecdotal evidence, (2) that solid empirical support is lacking, and (3) that her position does not account for the myriad of psychological etiologies that observers have been chronicling for decades.<sup>58</sup> But like all good analytic theories, this theory is hard to disprove. Good analysts can explain away each seeming exception to the theory. Clearly, Moberly effectively explains for us some instances of homosexuality but not all of them.

Other work in the area of psychological etiology has to do with learning. The major proponent of this line of reasoning is Charles W. Socarides who is a psychiatrist actively working to thwart the current American Psychiatric Association's attempt to stifle all reparative therapies for homosexuals.<sup>59</sup> M. Dannecker argues that homosexuality is comprised of three components: disposition, praxis, identity. A homosexual disposition appears early in life, but this disposition is far from a full-blown identity. Homosexual identity does not fully form until adulthood.

There is, of course, a considerable difference between having a homosexual identity and having a homosexual praxis. Large numbers of men engage in homosexual behavior for long periods of time without acquiring the slightest traces of homosexual identity. However, I do not believe that the concept of identity

<sup>56</sup> Bayer, *Homosexuality*.

<sup>57</sup> E. Moberly has two titles that elucidate her approach: *Psychogenesis: The Early Development of Gender Identity* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), a book for professionals, and *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic* (Attic, 1983), a book for laypeople. For sample reviews of her work see P. E. Coleman in *Theology* (March 1984); M. Hill in *Reformed Theological Review* (September–December 1983); L. P. Bird in *Christian Scholar's Review* (1986).

<sup>58</sup> On the last point see L. J. Hatterer, *Changing Homosexuality in the Male* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970). Hatterer enumerates multiple patterns in the family histories of male homosexuals from his wide clinical experience. Only some of them are consistent with Moberly's hypotheses.

<sup>59</sup> C. W. Socarides, *Homosexuality* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1978).

can be applied to those empirical studies on adult homosexuals that show that many knew at a very early age that they were homosexual. Identity is acquired relatively late in life. Once it has established itself, the person retrospectively reconstructs his biography in its light.<sup>60</sup>

Studies with incarcerated males who may practice homosexuality during confinement but revert to complete heterosexual functioning upon release tend to confirm Dannecker's suggestions. Also, cross-cultural studies with the Sambia people in New Guinea add weight to his arguments. Sambia boys are expected to engage in exclusively homosexual, homosocial and homoerotic activities from the onset of puberty until adulthood, at which time they revert in almost every case to exclusive heterosexual functioning as adults.<sup>61</sup>

What conclusion can we draw regarding various theories of the etiology of homosexuality? Joe Dallas reminds us that we must respond with a certain sense of balanced perspective:

Our response should show interest and concern, two qualities the church has rarely shown when dealing with homosexuality. We must admit we have mis-handled the issue in many ways: we have veered between ignoring the problem to becoming obsessed with it; we have made hasty and false generalizations at times about homosexuals themselves; and we have shown a tremendous zeal for defeating the political goals of gays while showing less concern for their eternal well being. So when we respond to progay research, let's keep in mind the sad truth that our own record on this issue is less than ideal.<sup>62</sup>

John Money attempts to synthesize etiological explanations to incorporate the complexity of the issue as well as biological and psychological factors. He believes that the nature-nurture debate needs to be expanded to a nature/crucial-phase/nurture scheme. He argues that prenatal influences are specifically linked to crucial phases, as are the various environmental effects after birth: rehearsal play, parental sexological health, and other variables that influence male/female differentiation of the gender identity role.

### III. TREATMENT

As we have seen, those who argue that homosexuality is inborn or nearly so object to any treatment designed to change this basic orientation. Those of us who argue that homosexuality is not part of God's design for human functioning and is something that must change with God's help are very interested in treatment. All Christian therapists who work in this area agree that a fully developed homosexual identity complete with homosexual lifestyle and practice is difficult to change. Consider for a minute that you have practiced a homosexual lifestyle for several years as an adult. Then

<sup>60</sup> M. Dannecker, "Towards a Theory of Homosexuality: Socio-Historical Perspective," *Journal of Homosexuality* 9, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> R. J. Stoller, "Theories of Origins of Male Homosexuality: A Cross-Cultural Look," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 42 (1985) 399-404.

<sup>62</sup> J. Dallas, "Born Gay: How Politics Have Skewed the Debate over the Biological Causes of Homosexuality," *Christianity Today* (June 22, 1992) 23.

you come to faith in Christ and respond to God's call on your life to convert from a homosexual lifestyle to a heterosexual lifestyle. You would have to change your friendships, your pattern of making friends, your thought and fantasy life, your patterns of leisure time, and your habits. You would have to suppress powerful impulses and encourage the emergence of weak and underdeveloped heterosexual responses and impulses. If you failed to make a complete change, you would have to learn the discipline of celibacy after many years of noncelibate behavior. Change is not impossible, but it nearly always is very difficult.

Leann Payne has done considerable work with the change process as part of spiritual formation. She urges gays to practice listening prayer that responds to God's voice through Scripture as well as silence.<sup>63</sup> Moberly calls for gender-matched, gender-specific psychotherapy that is devoid of genital engagement as the treatment of choice. Thus the homosexual would form a healthy same-sex bond with the therapist that would repair that same deficit from childhood and would allow the individual to proceed with further development toward heterosexuality. This type of therapy takes great courage and discipline on the part of therapist and client. J. Nicolosi offers a secular equivalent of Moberly's treatment approach. His strategies, however, are less limiting than are Moberly's.<sup>64</sup>

All of these approaches are roundly criticized for their lack of empirical support and follow-up studies of success. These problems may be overcome in time. What is well established is the difficult nature of this work. Almost all Christian approaches to treatment include group support as well as individual therapy.<sup>65</sup> Homosexuality is not immutable, nor is it a condition that forces people to act on it.<sup>66</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Although one wonders if it is possible to understand this issue completely given this dizzying pile of social-science material, we can come to at least some conclusions.

1. A one-word treatment of the issue in our seminary handbooks is going to be inadequate given certain eventualities. Our institutions should be bet-

<sup>63</sup> L. Payne, *The Broken Image: Restoring Personal Wholeness Through Healing Prayer* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1981).

<sup>64</sup> See J. Nicolosi, *Healing Homosexuality: Case Stories of Reparative Therapy* (Jason Aronson, 1993); *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality: A New Clinical Approach* (Jason Aronson, 1991).

<sup>65</sup> For a review and appraisal of Christian approaches see the special issue of *Christianity Today*, August 18, 1989.

<sup>66</sup> Progay activists will have to demonstrate not only the innateness of homosexuality but its immutability in order to accomplish their full goals of civil-rights protection. See A. S. Greenberg and J. M. Bailey, "Do Biological Explanations of Homosexuality Have Moral, Legal, or Policy Implications?," *Journal of Sex Research* 30 (1993) 245-252; R. Green, "The Immutability of (Homo)Sexual Orientation: Behavioral Science Implications for a Constitutional (Legal) Analysis," *Journal of Psychiatry and the Law* 16 (1988) 537-575.

ter prepared for vigorous challenges to our opposition to the practice of homosexuality.

2. This issue confronts us with massive implications for the education of our children and adolescents in the home and church. Mel White spoofs our 1950s approach to heterosexual promiscuity: Ban dancing. In many ways he is right. We often miss the target and impose irrelevant or ineffective behavioral guidelines. We must respond to this challenge with more creativity and Scriptural soundness than our track record indicates we have done in the past.

3. We must speak as a Church with a clear and informed voice on this subject to our hostile and unbelieving surroundings. If we do not, the secular world will continue to lump us together with Fred Phelps, who has proved to be an embarrassment to all thoughtful Christian people.<sup>67</sup>

4. We need to reactivate our theology of celibacy. We have too quickly allowed the world's agenda—that all people deserve full and joyful sexual expression—to become our own. What about celibacy? What about celibacy for both heterosexuals and homosexuals? How does it work? How can we use it to honor and serve God?

5. The Church must seek to minister to homosexuals, both the unrepentant and the repentant. We must continue to call those who are active and unrepentant to behavioral abstinence and to restoration. We must offer succor and encouragement to those who seek to change in faithful obedience to God's Word. Treating them as lepers is not a sufficient or acceptable strategy.

6. We cannot base our social ethic regarding homosexuality on the presumption that evidence for biological factors as determinants will not someday emerge. Emerging biological research may indeed become more compelling over the next two decades. We need to be prepared for such an outcome.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> See H. Lerner, "Hating Fred," *Family Therapy Networker* 18 (March/April 1994) 47–49.

<sup>68</sup> The author wishes to express appreciation to Penny Rollert and Matt Richburg, both of whom ably assisted in collecting research for this paper.