

## Christian Opposition to Homosexuality

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*If we fight with any weapon other than rational argument, we will have given our adversaries the greatest victory that they could possibly win, that of debasing our humanity. But if we face the issue with good moral arguments . . . there is reason to believe that we can prevail over prejudice, both in the courts and in the larger society of which we are a part.*

Martha Nussbaum (1999)

*The content and rhetoric of the official teaching are simply repeated whenever a serious challenge seems put to it. The findings, however tentative, of exegetes, psychologists, sociologists, moral philosophers, and theologians and the experience of gays and lesbians and their families seem to have no impact whatsoever.*

Jon Nilson (2001)

*Society loses much of its rationality when it comes to homosexuality and children.*

Bruce McDougall (1998)

Organized religion continues to be a powerful factor in society's evaluation of behaviour. Even those who have expressly abandoned religion often remain deeply influenced by the teachings of the very institution they have rejected. Rueda points out that "religion provides the strongest category by which human acts are evaluated—the virtuous/sinful continuum" and that "there is no question that religious institutions have freely applied . . . the category of sinful when analyzing homosexual behaviour." He concludes that "religious belief is probably the single most important factor in the near-universal rejection of homosexual behaviour."<sup>1</sup>

With few exceptions, religious institutions in Canada remain the one major social force that openly supports discrimination against gay and lesbian citizens.<sup>2</sup> In the last twenty years, provincial governments have passed progressive human rights legislation favourable to gays and lesbians,<sup>3</sup> Parliament has extended protection to them,<sup>4</sup> and courts have rendered judgments that have advanced their interests.<sup>5</sup> But most Christian religious organizations continue to advocate a politics of exclusion and intolerance.

Some of them restrict their attention to issues of "internal politics" such as whether to ordain gay and lesbian applicants for the ministry or bless same-sex unions.<sup>6</sup> Others are also concerned with broader social issues—opposing initiatives that would allow gay and lesbian people to enter civil marriages, adopt children, obtain spousal benefits, and so on. In the first category, we can place Anglicans,<sup>7</sup> Baptists,<sup>8</sup> Lutherans,<sup>9</sup> Presbyterians,<sup>10</sup> and Methodists (in the United States).<sup>11</sup> The Roman Catholic Church has been the most active player in the second category,<sup>12</sup> though in the United States, the Southern Baptist Convention would be a contender for this dubious distinction.<sup>13</sup>

Alongside specifically religious institutions, lobby groups have formed to influence legislators to preserve traditional concepts of the family and to regulate desire. Though such organizations may appear secular, scratching beneath the surface reveals that they have close ties to traditional religion.<sup>14</sup>

How central are gay and lesbian issues to right-wing political movements? I suspect they are right at the core. For traditionalists, it was bad enough that feminists made serious inroads into the social structure—whether in family configurations, economic organizations, or religious institutions—but that gays and lesbians should press for similar rights and opportunities is more than most can bear. The issue is essentially one about change, privilege, and power. Esterberg and Longhofer put it this way:

*The issue of homosexuality is central to this coalition. In the view of the traditionalists, the increased visibility of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals and campaigns for gay/lesbian/bisexual rights represent the final assault on morality, the family, the economic order, the strength of the nation, and the masculinist conceptions of gender that sustain these institutions. . . . In these activists' eyes, the gains of the women's movement and the gay and lesbian rights movement were a clear sign of the need for action.*<sup>15</sup>

Many religious organizations have vigorously opposed initiatives intended to guarantee equal rights and privileges to gays and lesbians. The suffering that this denial of basic rights has caused<sup>16</sup> warrants a closer look at the arguments used to defend this position. The principle that

initiates this inquiry is simply the presumption that people should be treated equally unless there are relevant differences that would justify differential treatment. What beliefs do those who would exclude gays and lesbians have and how valid are they? Even if valid within a particular religious discourse, should they be given any authority to determine or influence laws and practices for society as a whole? The grounds typically given fall into the three categories: the Scriptural and theological, psychological, and prudential. I argue that each of these fail to justify the intervention of these religious organizations and lobby groups into the political process.

### **The Basic Tenets**

It is wise to refer to the “tenets” of the evangelical Protestant position on homosexuality, rather than its “system.” Its spokespersons assert beliefs, but they do not present them in any systematic way nor subject them to rigorous standards of argument. They address a lay audience for whom the niceties of distinctions, inference, and evidence are not a high priority. They appear as proselytizers seeking converts, not educators promoting understanding.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, the Roman Catholic Church does present its views in a systematic way.<sup>18</sup> Through a series of missives,<sup>19</sup> buttressed by the sophisticated work of a number of moral theologians,<sup>20</sup> it does seek to advance argument and promote understanding.

The most basic tenet of the religious right<sup>21</sup> is that homosexual activity is always immoral, even sinful. Without that foundation, the rest of the edifice cannot be constructed. What are the basic religious propositions needed to support this basic tenet? There are four:

- (1) There is a God who cares about the temporal lives and eternal souls of all people—about 6.4 billion at last count. Because He<sup>22</sup> is a caring God, He intervenes in human history: He commands, punishes, and rewards in this world and the next, enters into covenants, demands obedience, entertains petitions (prayers), has a Divine Plan for all persons, and has sent His only son not to judge the world but to save it.<sup>23</sup>
- (2) He reveals His nature and His will through divinely inspired Scriptures. His pronouncements, whether given directly (as we are told they were communicated through Moses to the Ancient Israelites) or prompted by the Holy Spirit (as in the case of the Apostle Paul to the Early Christians), are definitive, clear, and unchanging.
- (3) Through the Old and New Testament, God has revealed unequivocally that homosexuality is an abomination, interpreted either as a sin or a spiritual or mental sickness.
- (4) Faced with the presence of gays and lesbians in our midst and their demands for an inclusive society, the churches must respond in a way that accords with their view of Scriptural authority. For the Catholic hierarchy, gays and lesbians must remain chaste; for evangelicals, parents are assured that there are strategies that will reduce the likelihood that their children will become homosexuals, and should this fate befall them, there is reparative therapy to cure them from their sickness.

The sources for the belief that homosexuality is always immoral are threefold: Scriptural and theological, psychological, and prudential. However, the latter two act only in an auxiliary capacity. If you are persuaded by the first, you will find additional comfort in the latter two. If the first fails, the walls of Jericho will crumble. If all three fail as justifications for the moral

judgments right wingers make—as I think they do—we might speculate about other kinds of explanations for the attitudes they hold. We could ask whether their “reasons” might be rationalizations for some psychological phenomena that exist just below the surface of their own psyches.

### **Scriptural and Theological Bases for Moral Disapproval**

First, proponents must believe in the existence of God. For atheists and agnostics, their argument has no traction. Second, the nature of the divine needed to anchor the argument is very particular. Only a God who has a personal relationship with believers will suit the purpose. Deists and pantheists would not be impressed. If these two theological premises are not accepted, the rest of the argument falters.

But according to the religious right, God determines what is morally good and bad. He possesses a Divine Plan for us that, fortunately, is fully recorded in the Holy Word. Believers claim to have detailed knowledge of God's plan for us including our sexuality. Specifically, His approval of human sexual relationships is limited to the union of man and woman in marriage (Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18, 23-24). Sin has warped our perspective of healthy sexuality (2 Peter 2:2-3a; 3:3). Homosexuality is a symptom of our fallen state. The good news is that God's power can bring healing and restoration (Romans 1:18-32). Once healed and restored, gay and lesbian people can enter into heterosexual relationships and, only then, experience the joys of marriage and family.<sup>24</sup>

Problems for members of the religious right break out over their interpretation of Scripture. Their literal understanding of Biblical texts has been subjected to much hermeneutical questioning and argument. To what extent are the selected texts composed with specific cultural or historical contexts in mind?<sup>25</sup> How seriously is the “sin” of homosexual sexuality taken in Old and New Testament passages when compared to others that are considered?<sup>26</sup> Are the texts that are so often cited even about homosexuality?<sup>27</sup> Given that our Western conception—and so our understanding—of homosexuality began to dawn on us only about 150 years ago, could anything in the Scriptures be particularly relevant?<sup>28</sup>

One example will suffice to illustrate the difficulty the religious right has in maintaining its position. In order to hold an absolute moral standard, it must reject any attempt to loosen the stringency of their literalist Biblical interpretation. This allows its proponents to claim moral certainty on the issue—that is, that homosexual activity is always an abomination before God and so always a moral transgression. But to generate this conclusion, they must hold that all similar Biblical injunctions must be treated in the same manner. The need for consistency lands them with commitments they would rather not have. They criticize liberal Christians for selecting just the passages that promote liberal outcomes and ignoring “inconvenient” texts. However, they engage in the very same practice.

Leviticus 20:13 is often cited to provide moral leverage for condemning homosexuality:

*If a man has sexual relations with another man, they have done a disgusting thing, and both shall be put to death. They are responsible for their own death.*<sup>29</sup>

Members of the religious right appropriate the first half of the first sentence, but they dance

gingerly around the second and the last sentence that assigns blame.<sup>30</sup> The chapter begins “The Lord told Moses to say to the people of Israel. . . .” There is no reason for fundamentalists to believe that the command to impose the death penalty is anything other than the Word of God.<sup>31</sup> But if the death penalty prescription is not mandatory, why should the proscription against homosexual relations be considered absolute—unless one has resorted to picking and choosing parts of texts to suit a predetermined view? If the Bible is taken as the final and definitive statement of God’s wishes, much vigilante activity is called for.<sup>32</sup>

### **Alternative Bases for Moral Disapproval**

Biblical underpinnings are not convincing to everyone, and so, other grounds are brought to bear. If sinfulness cannot be proven, perhaps mental illness can. Until 1973, “Homosexuality” could be found as a category of mental disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)* of the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Until that time, the religiously conservative could claim support from psychiatrists and psychologists. But then an APA committee reviewed the scientific literature and consulted with experts in the field. They concluded that “for a mental condition to be considered a psychiatric disorder, it should either regularly cause emotional distress or regularly be associated with clinically significant impairment of social functioning.”<sup>33</sup> Homosexuality in and of itself did not meet either of these criteria. Arguably, gay and lesbian people experience mental illness--perhaps even to a greater degree than heterosexuals--not because they are intrinsically disordered but because of the hostile social environment in which they live. In December 1973, the American Psychiatric Association's Board of Trustees deleted homosexuality from its official categorization of mental disorders.<sup>34</sup> Officially, then, gay and lesbian people are not mentally ill simply by virtue of being homosexual.<sup>35</sup>

However, the evangelical and Catholic churches continue to claim that gay and lesbian people suffer from a “disorder.”<sup>36</sup> In their own accounts, they do not provide a definition of the kind of disorder they have in mind, and they do not argue for the criteria that would help us identify cases that would count from those that would not. “Disorder” necessarily carries negative connotations and so operates as a prejudicial label in their writing. Because of its semi-clinical ring, the word appears to justify a bias that one may already have against gay and lesbian people. It certainly does not encourage rational consideration. This “disorder,” then, is of a theological kind, the origins of which are metaphysical at best. Apart from using the same word as was once used by mental health practitioners, this concept bears no substantial similarity in meaning to the one once employed in the fields of psychiatry and psychology and so these advocates commit what is known in philosophy as the “fallacy of equivocation.”<sup>37</sup>

We are left to ask why the APA has not added a new category—“Homophobia”—to its diagnostic list. If “homophobia” can reasonably be defined as “the irrational fear or hatred of gays and lesbians,” it would seem to have all the characteristics needed to be a suitable entry, for it designates an irrational attitude that can and does result in violent and anti-social behaviour.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, George Weinberg, who coined the word “homophobia” in 1969, begins his *Society and the Healthy Homosexual* with this forceful claim: “I would never consider a patient healthy unless he had overcome his prejudice against homosexuality.”

Notwithstanding narrowly and arbitrarily interpreted Scriptural references, and the influential APA 1973 decision that undermined the force of mental-health arguments, the

religious right still points to dire consequences of accepting gays and lesbians as fully equal persons for the individuals, families, societies, and the whole of Western civilization. For example, in a “Focus on the Family” essay, Don Schmierer claims that homosexuality “involves physical, emotional, and spiritual dangers, such as decreased life expectancy, disease, and high suicide rates.”<sup>39</sup> As part of its mandate, the Culture and Family Institute claims that “the homosexual activist movement and other forces . . . threaten to undermine marriage, family, and religious freedom.”<sup>40</sup> In an apocalyptic moment, Pat Robertson told viewers of his TV program, “The 700 Club,” that “the Apostle Paul made it abundantly clear in the Book of Romans that the acceptance of homosexuality is the last step in the decline of Gentile civilization.”<sup>41</sup>

The first position rests on a confusion of causes. If it is shown empirically that gays and lesbians have a lower life expectancy and higher suicide rate than similar heterosexual populations, it is reasonable to assess the contribution made to unhappy state of affairs by the very toxic social atmosphere that Schmierer’s religiosity promotes.<sup>42</sup> Sexual diseases are rampant in heterosexual as well as in homosexual communities and for many of the same reasons. They can also be ameliorated by some of the same means. Expanding marriage to include same-sex couples would be one such measure. Far from undermining marriage and the family, it would strengthen the institution and increase social stability. Finally, extending human rights to gays and lesbians would hardly diminish religious freedom, though it might rein in some bigotry.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Problem of Choice**

To defend its position, the religious right needs to take a stand on the origins of homosexuality. Despite acknowledging that the scientific evidence is not conclusive, evangelical fundamentalists insist that gays and lesbians in some sense “choose” their “lifestyle.” Gays and lesbians, thus, can be held accountable for their orientation. As their “preference” is unnatural and abnormal, they have an obligation to make every effort to become heterosexual.

If gays and lesbians are to be held accountable for their orientation and activity that might flow from it, some degree of freedom of choice must be available to them. Even if it were possible, it hardly seems likely that many people would choose to be gay or lesbian. As Posner puts it so pointedly:

*Given the personal and social disadvantages to which homosexuality subjects a person in our society, the idea that millions of young men and women have chosen it or will choose it in the same fashion in which they might choose a career or a place to live or a political party or even a religious faith seems preposterous.*<sup>44</sup>

Both Catholics and evangelical fundamentalists concede that the scientific evidence on the origins of homosexuality is not conclusive. As early as 1976, the Roman Catholic Church thought it could reasonably distinguish between

*homosexuals whose tendency comes from a false education, from a lack of normal sexual development, from habit, from bad example, or from other similar causes, and is transitory or at least not incurable; and homosexuals who are definitively such because of some kind of innate instinct or a pathological constitution judged to be incurable.*<sup>45</sup>

The Church did not speculate on the proportions of gays and lesbians that might fall into each category, but it was prepared to contemplate the possibility that some—perhaps most or all—homosexuals are such by virtue of some biological factor. The Church further concedes that reparative therapy is not an option for some. It hastens to add that, in spite of this biological determinism, the sexual acts of homosexuals are “intrinsicly disordered and can in no case be approved of.”<sup>46</sup> If some gays and lesbians cannot be said to have chosen their orientation, it is within their power to control their actions:

*What, then, are homosexual persons to do who seek to follow the Lord? Fundamentally, they are called to enact the will of God in their life by joining whatever sufferings and difficulties they experience in virtue of their condition to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross. That Cross, for the believer, is a fruitful sacrifice since from that death come life and redemption. . . . It is, in effect, none other than the teaching of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians when he says that . . . , “You cannot belong to Christ unless you crucify all self-indulgent passions and desires . . .” (5:24). Christians who are homosexual are called, as all of us are, to a chaste life.*<sup>47</sup>

Evangelical fundamentalists bring a touch of American pragmatism to the issue. Though they also acknowledge that the scientific evidence is inconclusive,<sup>48</sup> they proceed nevertheless as if one's sexuality is quite malleable—at least, the sexuality of homosexuals. No one is beyond the reach of salvation. Indeed, they hold out the promise that homosexuality can be prevented with proper parenting<sup>49</sup>; if that fails, gays and lesbians can always be “fixed” by reparative therapy.<sup>50</sup>

Catholics and others who allow for cases of biological determinism, combined with a strong version of the Creator story, create for themselves a minor theological problem. Can God really have created people who in their essential nature are an abomination? Is He without blame for the apparent curse He has inflicted on some of His children? What a strange God! Those who believe that homosexuality is created by parental influences, poor models, gender ambiguity, and the like evade this dilemma.<sup>51</sup> Responsibility, then, falls on social conditions and individual choice. As Esterberg and Longhofer point out:

*In a perverse twist, [these] religious rightists end up (unintentionally) as standard bearers for a constructionist view of sexuality, while many lesbian and gay activists then take up an essentialist position.*<sup>52</sup>

Actually, the picture is probably a little more complicated than this. The evangelical right takes a pragmatic, constructionist position on strategic grounds—that is, it permits them to believe that “conversion” to heterosexuality is possible. Should a “gay gene” ever be found, they would be the first to line up on the biological side of the debate and begin counselling gays and lesbians to undergo medical gene manipulation. Sexual-orientation salvation is the goal by whatever means.

There is something in the religious right's antipathy for homosexuality that is reminiscent of pre-Newtonian beliefs about motion. For Aristotle, bodies at rest were regarded as in a natural state. What needed explanation was motion: all instances of motion had to have a “mover.” By contrast, Newton postulated two natural states for bodies—motion and rest. When a body that had been moving on a flat surface slowed and came to rest, friction was invoked to account for the change. Were there no friction, the body would never come to rest. Similarly, the religious right believes that only heterosexuality is natural and so it is homosexuality that

needs to be explained. But if we postulate that the two states are natural,<sup>53</sup> then neither needs to be explained. Outside of the extraordinary theological apparatus they employ, no one would see the need to change. We need a Newtonian revolution in our thinking about sexuality.

### **The Inanity of “Lifestyle” Talk**

Those on the religious right like to characterize gays and lesbians as having a “lifestyle,” rather than a sexual orientation. This helps them maintain the illusion that gays and lesbians have made a choice on a par with deciding to decorate their homes with furnishings from IKEA. To refer to gays and lesbians possessing a lifestyle trivializes central portions of their identity and their relationships. To see how flaccid this word is in this context, take up this challenge: offer a complete description of a heterosexual lifestyle. This is not a difficult assignment; it is an impossible one. The stupidity of using “lifestyle” in this context is immediately revealed. The comedian, George Carlin, offers wise counsel:

*And you will not hear me referring to anyone's lifestyle. If you want to know what a moronic word “lifestyle” is, all you have to do is realize that in a technical sense Attila the Hun had an active, outdoor lifestyle.*<sup>54</sup>

The second use of the word is much nastier: “lifestyle” acts covertly as a euphemism for sexual activity that members of the religious right would rather not talk about in “polite” society. It suggests that the lives of homosexuals revolve around the pursuit of promiscuous, sexual encounters. There are two issues here. First, promiscuity “is not a result of an individual’s sexual orientation, but a reflection of an individual’s values, beliefs, and personal standards.”<sup>55</sup> Second, those on the religious right purport to be appalled by the nature of homosexual sexual activity. But simply to argue “I find ‘X’ disgusting, therefore ‘X’ is morally bad” is to commit what is referred to in philosophical ethics as the “is-ought” fallacy—in this case, to argue directly from a psychological state of mind to a moral conclusion.<sup>56</sup> One can be disgusted by something and the reaction need have no moral content. However, it might be worth inquiring whether one’s sense of being repelled does have some kind of moral basis. One rightfully recoils at the thought of Auschwitz because what was done on that site was morally horrific, but the place is not the site of immoral events *because* one is repelled. That is, the moral judgement is logically prior to the attitude of disgust that is simply the appropriate emotional response. Kolnai sums up this point neatly:

*It is certainly true that disgust does not attain normative certainty, as does contempt. Rather, it manifests an intimate intermingling with extra-ethical emotions of taste. In general, it can only serve as a signpost towards a subsequent ethical judgement, and cannot be its immediate determining factor.*<sup>57</sup>

Disgust is more a matter of taste than morals and does not provide us with a reliable moral compass. As to the matter at hand, Quinton reminds us that

*In general, full-blooded sexual activity of any kind is not aesthetically suitable for close inspection. Heterosexuals and homosexuals alike adopt ridiculous positions, emit hoarse, inarticulate cries, [and] twist their faces absurdly in the culminating phase of their relations.*<sup>58</sup>



Talk about “lifestyle” should be banished from this discourse as totally unhelpful.

### **Accounting for Vehemence**

What can account for the vehemence of the religious right in condemning homosexuality? After all, other “Biblical sins” do not result in calls for such harsh treatment. Boswell observes:

*The very same books that are thought to condemn homosexual acts condemn hypocrisy in the most strident terms and on greater authority<sup>59</sup>; and yet Western society did not create any social taboos against hypocrisy, did not claim that hypocrites were “unnatural,” did not segregate them into an oppressed minority, did not enact laws punishing their sin by castration or death.<sup>60</sup>*

Something more than Scriptural authority is needed to explain the repressive behaviour of European and North American states throughout their histories, or as Boswell puts it, “Biblical strictures have been employed with great selectivity by all Christian states, and in a historical context what determines the selection is clearly the crucial issue.”<sup>61</sup>

The underlying causes of homophobia are little understood. Relatively speaking, they have been subject to very little theoretical and empirical scrutiny.<sup>62</sup> Yet, for many Christians, contemplating homosexuality is a psychic volcano always threatening to explode. Farley speculates that

*. . .the vehemence of the negative judgements that continue to be made regarding homosexual activity and relationships. . . . [has] the power of an unreasoned taboo, lodged in and reinforcing a kind of unreflective repulsion that must be addressed if we are to move forward politically on these issues.<sup>63</sup>*

I suspect there are deep and pervasive sociological and psychological causes of homophobia.<sup>64</sup> While evangelical Christians and their Roman Catholic cousins hardly possess a monopoly on them, they are able to offer a degree of respectability to those who feel a need for it.<sup>65</sup> We know that acquiring a homophobic attitude is a learned process. Young people pick it up on school playgrounds, in classrooms, from coaches and teachers, in Bible classes, and on the Internet. Homophobia is in the very air they breathe. Efforts in schools to inoculate them against the contagion are vigorously opposed by parent and church groups. Add to this a psychological dimension (that admittedly is little understood) and is it any wonder that a new, deeply homophobic generation arises? This is fertile ground for the predatory religious right to promote its bigoted agenda.

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## Notes

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1. Rueda, 1982, p. 243.
2. Of course, there are exceptions to this generalization—notably, the United Church of Canada, the Society of Friends, and the Unitarian Church. In general, the more theologically liberal a religious community is, the more liberal it will be on gay and lesbian issues. I have restricted this chapter to evangelical Christian and the Roman Catholic churches partly because they have been the most active and vociferous on the issue of homosexuality and partly to keep the length of the paper manageable. For an excellent survey of the positions of different religions, see Marilyn Bennett Alexander (1998).
3. All provinces now have “sexual orientation” written into their human rights codes so that gays and lesbians are legally protected from discrimination.
4. In a recent example, the Senate gave final reading on 28 April 2004 to Bill 250 that expanded the definition of “identifiable group” to include sexual orientation in the hate propaganda provisions of the Criminal Code (s. 318). It was given royal assent by the Governor General on 29 April 2004 and went into effect immediately. The bill had been opposed earlier in the House of Commons by the Canadian Alliance and a smattering of Conservatives and Liberals. Outside pressure groups that opposed the bill included Focus on the Family (Canada), The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Canada Family Action Coalition, and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.
5. Among the more important cases heard by the Supreme Court of Canada are *Haig v. Canada* (1992), 16 C.H.R.R. D/226 (Ont. CA); *Egan v. Canada*, [1995] 2 S.C.R. 513; *Moore v. Canada (Treasury Board)* (1996), 25 C.H.R.R. D/351 (Can. Trib.); *Vriend v. Alberta*, [1998] 1 S.C.R. 493; *Little Sisters Book and Art Emporium v. Canada (Minister of Justice)*, [2000] 2 S.C.R. 1120; and *Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36*, [2002] 4 S.C.R. 710. The narrow split decision in *Canada (Attorney General) v. Mossop* was only a temporary setback. The Parliamentary Research Branch (PRB) of Canada’s Library of Parliament has prepared a valuable survey of legal cases and government legislation entitled “Sexual Orientation and Legal Rights” (2003) which is available at <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/921-e.htm>.
6. Most Christian churches in North America forbid the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy. However, according to Andy Lang, managing editor of the United Church of Christ’s “United Church News—Online Edition,” some twenty-four Protestant churches in Continental Europe permit ordination. See his June 2002 “Global trend: World’s oldest Protestant churches now ordain gays and lesbians” at <http://www.ucc.org/ucnews/jun02/trend.htm>.
7. See the Anglican Church’s press release of 30 October 1997 entitled “Human Sexuality: A statement by the Anglican bishops of Canada—1997.” The church recalled its statement of 1979 in which it rejected “the blessing of homosexual unions” and permitted the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy, provided they inform their bishop of their sexual orientation and promise to abstain from all homosexual acts. The church continued to study the question of homosexuality

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in the larger context of human sexuality; the tone of its 1997 statement is conciliatory and the church remained open to continued dialogue while it searched for wider consensus. However, it retained its original position on holy matrimony and on the ordination of gay and lesbian clerics. Consensus clearly had not been reached by June 2001 when the New Westminster diocese's governing body, the synod, voted 63% in favour of blessing gay and lesbian unions. The decision caught the attention of Archbishop Carey ("Gay unions a threat to church, leader warns," *Globe and Mail*, 30 May 2003, A8) and some other communions, especially that of Nigeria. See also the uproar over the ordination of Bishop Gene Robinson in New Hampshire on 7 March 2004, the first openly gay bishop in all of Christendom, and the failed attempt by the Bishop of Oxford in June, 2003 to install Dr. Jeffrey John as Bishop of Reading. More recently, the Anglican Church of Canada voted to delay a decision on whether to permit the blessing of same-sex marriage and called, instead, for a two-year study on whether same-sex rituals are "a matter of doctrine" (Canadian Press, 3 June 2004).

8. For example, at its 2004 Assembly, the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec relied on a 1988 resolution that stated that "homosexual behaviour is unacceptable in the sight of God, since it is contrary to Scriptural principles of morality and family life." It then passed a recommendation urging its members "to oppose all efforts by any court or legislative body to validate or legalize same-sex marriages."

9. Both the Lutheran Church–Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada rely on 1993 convention resolutions on homosexuality. In the first case, the church declared that "homosexuality is a distortion of God's intention for the human race, and homosexual thoughts, desires, words, and deeds are contrary to God's will"; in the second, the church reaffirmed its bishop's statement that "a self-declared and practicing homosexual person is not to be approved for ordination and, if already ordained, is not to be recommended for call."

10. In 1997, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada passed Overture No. 15, which asked a special committee on sexual orientation "to clarify the limits of the role that homosexual and lesbian people play within The Presbyterian Church in Canada" (A&P 1997, p. 503, 19). Six years later, the committee submitted its final report to the 129<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2003). The report was referred to other committees. A recommendation to encourage congregations and sessions to use the study guide, *Listening. . . Understanding Human Sexuality*, was defeated. The denomination will not be making significant changes any time soon. Presumably, the formation of the subcommittee arose out of the acrimonious debate in the 1996 General Assembly over the efforts by the congregation of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Lachine, Quebec to ordain Mr. Darryl MacDonald, the first openly gay candidate for ministry in the church's history. See "Church struggles with gay ordination" and "Presbyterians reject congregation's bid to hire gay minister," *Globe and Mail*, 13 May and 11 June 1996 respectively.

11. See reports of the 2004 United Methodist Church General Conference in which the church reaffirmed its stand that it "does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers the practice incompatible with Christian teachings" and that "avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church." For a very useful summary of struggles within Protestant denominations in the United States, see Cadge (2002).

12. The Church has been active in attempting to influence the political process. See, for

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example, “Presentation by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights on the Discussion Paper Marriage and Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Unions” (13 February 2003); “Letter from the CCCB, President Bishop Jacques Berthelet, C.S.V., to Prime Minister Jean Chretien Regarding Marriage and Same-Sex Unions” (19 June 2003); and “CCCB Statement on the Tabling of Draft Legislation by the Federal Government Regarding Marriage” (17 July 2003). See also the attempts of Bishop Fred Henry of Calgary to bully the prime minister by suggesting that he “risks burning in hell if he makes same-sex marriage legal in Canada” (“Chrétien's 'morally grave' error,” *Globe and Mail*, 31 July 2003). Meanwhile, in the United States, the Catholic Church was making similar moves. On 10 September 2003 the Administrative Committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops released a statement entitled “Promote, Preserve, Protect Marriage,” calling for a constitutional amendment to protect “the unique social and legal status of marriage.” The Church, thus, lined up with the Republican President George Bush, though quite possibly for different reasons. Speaking from the Roosevelt Room in the White House on February 24, 2004, President Bush warned, “If we are to prevent the meaning of marriage from being changed forever [by activist judges], our nation must enact a constitutional amendment to protect marriage in America.”

13. At its June meetings, the Southern Baptist Convention's anti-gay and anti-lesbian resolutions are almost an annual event: “On Same-Sex Marriage” (2003), “On the Judicial Oppression of the Boy Scouts of America” (2000), “On the Threat of New Age Globalism” (2000), “Resolution on President Clinton's Gay and Lesbian Pride Month Proclamation” (1999), “Resolution on the President's Executive Order on Homosexual Federal Employees” (1998), “Resolution on Domestic Partner Benefits” (1997), “Resolution on Homosexual Marriage” (1996), “Resolution on Disney Company Policy” (1996), “Resolution on Homosexuality, Military Service, and Civil Rights” (1993), “Resolution on Support of the Boy Scouts of America” (1992), “Resolution on the Use of Government Funds to Encourage Immoral Sexual Behavior” (1991), “Resolution on the White House Conference on the Family” (1980), “Resolutions on Homosexuality” (1988, 1985, 1980, and 1977), “Resolution on Human Rights and Certain Misapplications” (1977), “Resolution on Religious Liberty and Employment Practices” (1977).

14. For example, Rev. Donald Wildmon, Chairman and Founder of the American Family Association (AFA) claims that “. . .the Bush administration is opening its arms to homosexual activists who have been working diligently to overthrow the traditional views of Western civilization regarding human sexuality, marriage, and family. The AFA would never support the policies of a political party that embraced the homosexual movement. Period.” (16 April 2001, AFA Press Release). The President of the American Center for Law and Justice is also the founder of the “700 Club” and the Christian Coalition. The ACLJ's director, Jay Sekulow, is quoted as asking, “Can you imagine, that in public schools of America today, students are being taught that homosexual conduct, which in many states is still deemed illegal, is not only a viable alternative lifestyle, but is actually equal to heterosexual relationships?” (2 January 1997, *Danbury News-Times*). The founders of the Alliance Defense Fund include Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, Larry Burkett, founder of Christian Financial Concepts, Rev. James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, Rev. D. James Kennedy, founder of Coral Ridge Ministries, Marlin Maddoux, President of International Christian Media, and the Rev. Don Wildmon, founder of the AFA. They claim that one of the two issues that unite the founders is “. . . their work against . . . gays and lesbians. They are particularly tireless in attacking any and



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every attempt by gays and lesbians to have families, domestic partnership or civil unions, or be protected from discrimination in employment or housing.” The founder and chairman of the Traditional Values Coalition and an aide to Pat Robertson in 1987, Rev. Louis Sheldon fears that “[a]s homosexuals continue to make inroads into public schools, more children will be molested and indoctrinated into the world of homosexuality. Many of them will die in that world” (In “Homosexuals Recruit Public School Children.” special report, Volume 18, Number 11, n.d.).

The three most active lobby groups in Canada are the Canada Family Action Coalition (CFAC), Focus on the Family–Canada, and REAL (Realistic, Equal, Active for Life) Women of Canada. CFAC’s co-founder and executive director has a diversified background as a family and addictions counsellor, dean of a Bible college, and associate pastor. The organization’s president, Dr. Charles McVety, is President of Canada Christian College in Toronto. CFAC was founded in early 1997 “with a vision to see Judeo-Christian moral principles restored in Canada.” Its policies and statements are to be “founded upon the Bible.” Focus on the Family–Canada, an off-shoot of the American organization, has been running radio spots and display ads in twenty-six Canadian newspapers promoting the view that marriage means the union of a man and woman. The ad copy reads “Traditional marriage–if you believe in it, protect it.” According to Derek Rogusky, the group’s vice-president for family policy and director of research, the campaign had cost about \$600,000 by the third week of the 2004 federal election campaign (Jeff Sallot, *Globe and Mail*, 19 May 2004, p. A6). REAL Women are active in the courts and the election campaigns in attempts to ensure that elected MPs support the traditional definition of marriage. To this end, on 7 July 2003, they announced their intention to apply for Leave to Appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada from the Ontario Court of Appeal’s decision on same-sex marriage. One question in their survey for candidates in the 2004 election reads: “If elected, would you support Parliament invoking Section 33 of the Charter of Rights, the notwithstanding clause, to preserve and protect the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman?” Clearly, the correct answer from their point of view is “yes.” For an interesting discussion of these groups, see Herman (1994).

15. Esterberg and Longhofer, 1998, p. 184.

16. For a chilling historical account of how gay and lesbian people have been treated throughout the history of Western civilization, see Crompton (2003). For an overview of the stigma, prejudice, and violence directed against gays and lesbians in the United States at present, see Herek, (1991).

17. See, for example, “It is easier to nauseate than educate” uttered by Tony Marco, co-founder of Colorado for Family Values on his group’s publicity tactics for getting the state’s anti-gay amendment passed. This quotation was published in “The Freedom Watch,” *The Citizens Project Newsletter*, 2(2), (April-May) 1993 and reproduced in *The Gay Almanac* (1996).

18. However one assesses the Roman Catholic position on homosexuality in the end, one can say that its proponents strive for higher levels of rational coherence. Sidney Callahan (2001, p. 202) claims correctly, I believe, that “[t]he interlocking assumptions and fundamental presuppositions that undergird current Roman Catholic teaching on sexuality are a tightly wrapped package. . .” though she concludes in the final analysis, “they are not rationally convincing, morally helpful, or theologically adequate.”

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19. In the last quarter of a century, the Church has set out its views on homosexuality in four major documents: (1) *Personae Humanae—Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics* (1976); (2) *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (1986); (3) *Some Considerations Concerning the Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons* (1992); and (4) *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons* (2003).

20. In particular, see the work of John Finnis, Robert P. George, Germain Grisez, and William E. May. Challenging criticisms have been mounted by Stephen Macedo, Charles E. Curran, Mark Strasser, and Judith Plaskow.

21. No one term completely captures the many differences among the religious institutions and agencies discussed in this chapter. Where these are significant, I point them out. Churches vary in the way they promulgate their version of the faith: for example, Presbyterians vote on motions at their annual general assemblies; the Vatican publishes authoritative letters to its bishops; evangelical Protestants are activists who make constant use of television and the Internet. But despite these rather superficial differences, they all subscribe to the four tenets I have postulated. For convenience, I refer to these conservative religious institutions and agencies as the “religious right.”

22. In these circles, God is always referred to in the masculine form.

23. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” *The Holy Bible* (1953), John 3:16.

24. The Focus on the Family website offers links to Exodus International, “a coalition of Christian ministries that offers support to those seeking to overcome homosexuality” and the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) that claims to be “an organization of nearly 700 professionals who *treat* homosexuality” (italics added). This website also displays the story of Anne and John Paulk, the poster couple for reparative therapy, who through the services of Exodus International claim to have overcome their homosexuality and eventually married (“In 1982, Anne Paulk gave her life to Jesus Christ and began trying to leave lesbianism behind. This quest for answers led her to Exodus International in 1988. . . .”). They are the joint authors of *Love Won Out: How God's Love Helped Two People Leave Homosexuality and Find Each Other* (1999).

25. White, 2001, p. 134-149; Malina, 2001, pp. 152ff; D'Angelo, 2001, p. 193.

26. Boswell, 1980, p. 7; Nilson, 2001, p. 64, pp. 66-67; D'Angelo, p.178.

27. Wink, 1999, pp. 33-49; Nilson, 2001, p. 81; Grippo, 1988, p. 33-39.

28. Wink, 1999, p. 36; Hanigan, 1988, p. 40-41; and Di Vito, 2001.

29. *Good News Bible*, Leviticus 20:13. Interestingly, the “companion piece,” found in Leviticus 18:22, is satisfied to remark simply that “God hates that.” The death penalty is not mentioned.

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30. For example, in response to *Listening. . . Understanding Human Sexuality*, a study guide produced by The Presbyterian Church in Canada's General Assembly Special Committee on Sexual Orientation, the minister of St. Andrews Church, Moncton, New Brunswick, conveniently interpreted the recommendation for the death penalty metaphorically: "Asked if it wasn't "extreme" to quote Leviticus 20:13 which prescribes death for men having sex with each other, Rev. Martin Kreplin said the verse indicates the seriousness with which God takes the matter of homosexuality" (*The Presbyterian Record*, June, 2003)! Cp. Wink, 1999, p. 35.

31. The Biblical literalist has to come to grips with a long list of offences for which the God of the Old Testament seeks the death penalty. In Leviticus alone, death is prescribed for parents who offer their children to "Molech" (Leviticus 20.2), for cursing your mother or father (Leviticus 2:11), for incest with your mother, mother-in-law, or daughter-in-law (Leviticus 20:11-12), for bestiality (Leviticus 20:16-16), and for anyone who "consults the spirits of the dead" (Leviticus 20:27).

32. Malina (2001, fn. 7, pp. 172-73) demonstrates that in one place or another in the Old Testament "the death penalty attaches to all of the Ten Commandments; the one exception is coveting (i.e., stealing). The Book of Deuteronomy contains some of the more extreme recommendations to be found in the Bible. Moses was obliged to convey to the Israelites all that the Lord had commanded him to tell them. Among the examples is this one: If you have a son who is stubborn and rebellious, who wastes money and is a drunkard, and who will not obey you though you punish him, you are to take him to the leaders of your town where he is to stand trial. If found guilty, "the men of the city are to stone him to death" (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). In another passage (Deuteronomy 25: 11-12), if two men are fighting, and the wife of one of them intervenes by grabbing the genitals of her husband's adversary, you are to show her no mercy, and cut off her hand.

33. American Psychiatric Association, 1996.

34. The American Psychological Association followed suit in 1975 as did the American Medical Association: "AMA policy is unequivocal—discrimination based on sexual orientation is improper and unacceptable by any part of the federation of medicine" (American Medical Association, *Reports of Board of Trustees*, Annual Meeting of the House of Delegates, June, 1993). As to how homosexuality came to be classified as an illness in the first place, see Vern Bullough (1974).

35. For a survey of relevant research, see Crawford and Zamboni (2001) and, in particular, their judgement on the Cameron and Cameron studies (p. 242).

36. See "Dr. Dobson's Study" at <<http://www.family.org/docstudy/newsletters/a021043.cfm>>: "What do we know about this disorder? Well, first, it is a disorder, despite the denials of the American Psychiatric Association." Dobson, who heads Focus on the Family, charges that the APA succumbed to "great political pressure from gays and lesbians"—some of whom, he exclaims as if surprised, are psychiatrists! The language emanating from the Vatican is

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especially aggressive. In its “On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” (1986), homosexual actions are described as “intrinsically disordered,” and the tendency towards these actions is judged “an intrinsic moral evil.” Practicing homosexuals are “exclude[d] from the People of God” and in need of a “conversion from evil.” What is required of them is to “crucify all [their] self-indulgent passions and desires,” to “carry the cross,” and to lead a chaste life.

37. The fallacy of equivocation is committed when someone uses the same word in different meanings in an argument, in such a way that the argument would be correct only if the word actually meant the same each time around.

38. In a 1969 study, the American psychologist George Weinberg was the first to use the word “homophobia.” He employed it again in his *Society and the Healthy Homosexual* (1972) where he defined it as “the fear expressed by heterosexuals of being in the presence of homosexuals, and the loathing that [some] homosexual persons have for themselves.” The latter part of the definition refers to “internalized homophobia.” For an extended discussion of homophobia, see Martin Kantor, (1998). For definitions of homophobia, see Coleman, 1995, p. 134; Kosnik et al, 1977, p. 270, n. 146; Posner, 1992, p. 292; Berube, 1990, 264; and Hopkins, 1998, 172ff.

39. Quoted from the Focus on the Family website at  
<<http://www.family.org/fofmag/pp/a0024031.cfm>>

40. Quoted from the Culture and Family Institute website at  
<<http://cultureandfamily.org/about/>>

41. Thomas B. Edsall, *The Washington Post* (10 June 1998). Patty Silverman, a Christian Broadcasting Network spokeswoman, confirmed the accuracy of the transcript of Robertson's text for Edsall and supplied a page from Robertson's *Answers to 200 of Life's Most Probing Questions* in which he wrote: “The Bible says that because of certain abominations such as homosexuality, a land shall vomit out its inhabitants. . . . From a biblical standpoint, the rise of homosexuality is a sign that a society is in the last stages of decay.”

42. For a brief summary of recent research, see Tori, DeAngelis, “New data on lesbian, gay and bisexual mental health: New findings overturn previous beliefs,” *Monitor on Psychology*, 33(2), (February) 2002 (available at <<http://www.apa.org/monitor/feb02/lgtoc.html>>). The pioneering work was done by Evelyn Hooker in “The adjustment of the male overt homosexual,” *Journal of Projective Techniques*, 21, 1957, 18-31. For a more recent, extended discussions, see J. Gonsiorek (1991) and J.S. Bohan (1996).

43. The most extreme example would be the utterances and antics of Rev. Fred (“God hates fags”) Phelps, minister of Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas.

44. Posner, 1992, 296-97.

45. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Personae Humanae—Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*, *Origins* 5, 1976, VIII.

46. *Ibid.*

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47. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," 1986, 12.

48. "No one can say definitely what causes a person to be homosexual. We have to acknowledge that there could be inheritable tendencies . . . in some individuals. There is no proof of such influence to this point, but we can't rule it out in specific cases. . . . While homosexuality and lesbianism [sic] are not exclusively induced by heredity, it is important to emphasize that it often occurs in those who did not choose it." Dr. James Dobson, "Website of Focus on the Family," <<http://www.family.org/docstudy>>.

49. Elsewhere, Dobson *does* claim to know what causes a man to be attracted to the same sex: "Chapter 9 of my latest book, *Bringing Up Boys* (2001) provides a definitive explanation, I believe, regarding the origins of homosexuality." He then quotes at length from Joseph Nicolosi who in Dobson's estimation is "the foremost authority on the prevention and treatment of homosexuality today." Nicolosi (2002) believes the role of the father in his son's development into heterosexual masculinity is [ ] critical ("Mothers make boys. Fathers make men."). Nicolosi claims that there is "a high correlation between feminine behavior in boyhood and adult homosexuality." Thus,

*. . . the boy's father has his part to do. He needs to mirror and affirm his son's maleness. He can play rough-and-tumble games with his son, in ways that are decidedly different from the games he would play with a little girl. He can help his son learn to throw and catch a ball. He can teach him to pound a square wooden peg into a square hole in a pegboard. He can even take his son into the shower, where the boy cannot help but notice that Dad has a penis, just like his, only bigger.*

All quotations are taken from <<http://www.family.org/docstudy>>.

50. See, for example, Joseph Nicolosi (1991). Dr. Nicolosi is also president of the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) which is based in Encino, California. See also Exodus International at <<http://www.exodusintl.org>>.

51. ". . . God is infinitely just. I don't believe he would speak of homosexuality in the Scriptures as an abominable sin and list it among the most despicable of human behaviors if men and women bore no responsibility for engaging in it (see Corinthians 6:9-10). That is not how He does his business." Dr. James Dobson, "A Website of Focus on the Family," <<http://www.family.org/docstudy>>.

52. Esterberg and Longhofer (1998), p. 194. For extended discussions of the essentialist and constructivist positions, see Davison (1991) and Stein (1999), as well as Haldeman (1999) who claims that "[e]ssentialism is the very cornerstone by which LGB people have defined and protected themselves" (p. 58).

53. This is much oversimplified, but it is sufficient to make the point about the religious right. Human sexuality is much more variegated than is represented by postulating simply two orientations.

54. Carlin, 1990.

55. *What We Wish We Had Known* (2001), p. 18.

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56. To fill out the syllogism, one would have to provide a major premise—something like, “Everything I find disgusting is morally wrong” or “Everything anyone finds disgusting is morally wrong.” While these premises would ensure logical validity, they create very serious problems for moral argument. See also, Posner, 1992, p. 300ff. Quinton (1998, p. 252) rightly regards the “argument from disgust” as the “argument of last resort.”

57. Kolnai, 2004, p. 83.

58. Quinton (1998), p. 253.

59. For the texts Boswell would refer to, see the Old Testament: Job 8:13; 13:16; 15:34; 17:8; 20:5; 27:8; 34:30; 36:13-14; Psalms 35:16; Proverbs 11:9; Isaiah 10:6; 32:6; 33:14; and Jeremiah 23:15; and the New Testament: Matthew 6:2, 5, 16; 7:3-5; 15:7-9; 16:3; 22:15,18; 23:13-33; 24:50-51; Mark 7:6-13; Luke 6:41-42; 11:44; 12:56; 13:15; I Timothy 4:2; James 3:17-18; and I Peter 2:1-2.

60. Boswell, 1980, p. 7.

61. *Ibid.*

62. Compare, for example, the almost endless studies that have been conducted on gays and lesbians with those conducted on their oppressors. Why this is so would be an interesting study in the sociology of knowledge.

63. Farley, 1998, p. 102.

64. For a useful, if brief, exploration of some starting places, see Hopkins, 1998.

65. See Rueda, 1982, p. 242 ff.