



Homosexuality used to be discussed only in small private circles. Now it is talked about in the most graphic terms in the public media. Articles by and about homosexuals appear not only in the secular press but also in many church journals and popular family magazines. There are homosexuals who consider themselves active Christians as well as active homosexuals. They, and others sympathetic to their cause, have challenged the traditional interpretation of the Bible that sees homosexual behavior as unacceptable for Christians. Such interpreters claim that the Scriptures do not condemn homosexuality as such, but accept it as an alternative, "natural" life-

of explicit threats that the gay-rights movement would disrupt APA conventions and research.<sup>2</sup>

This unfortunate politicizing of the scientific process is still in full swing today. It skews or biases some of the scientific research as well as reporting in the popular press. This is especially true of those who advocate the "nature theory."

Most individuals read skewed media reports rather than the original research findings of I. L. Ward,<sup>3</sup> or the more recent studies of Simon LeVay, Michael Bailey, and Richard Pillard. For example, the prenatal hormone theory researched by Ward and others states that deficiency of the hormone known as androgen, during the critical period of prenatal life when sex differentiation occurs, causes an otherwise normal male to develop a female differentiated brain. Furthermore, overcrowding and stressing of male rats and mice did produce distortion of the parts of the central nervous system that mediate sex-related behavior and demasculinized sex-related behavior. But as other researchers have pointed out, rats are not human beings.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, LeVay's findings<sup>5</sup> have been grist for the media mill, although the researchers themselves are honest about their biases and restrained about their claims.<sup>6</sup> LeVay found the area of the hypothalamus allegedly governing sexual activity to be smaller in homosexual men than in heterosexuals. He studied the brains of 41 cadavers, 19 of which were homosexual. LeVay himself admits that his findings do not establish a cause and effect relationship. The meaning of his study is consequently open to debate.<sup>7</sup>

In December 1991 gay-rights advocate Michael Bailey and psychiatrist Richard Pillard published a study about twins. In explaining his research, Pillard says he believes that finding a genetic component in sexual orientation implies that, "This is not a fault, and this is not your fault." He further believes the research will disprove homophobic claims.<sup>8</sup> Bailey and Pillard studied different types of twins: identical twins, who have identical gene codes, and fraternal twins, whose genetic codes are different. Their research showed that if an identical twin is homosexual, the other's chances of being homosexual are three times higher than among fraternal twins. This, they say, suggests a link between homosexuality and genetics. However, other researchers are skeptical.

# Homosexuality

## A Biblical Perspective

by  
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style. These and other related questions are of interest to many Seventh-day Adventist Christians who look to the Bible for moral and ethical guidance.

### Nurture Versus Nature

Supporters of the "nurture theory" frequently point to studies in psychology which imply that homosexuality is learned behavior or arrested development. They argue that whatever is learned can be unlearned, and arrested development is amenable to therapy.<sup>1</sup> Therefore homosexuality is an aberration with psychosocial etiology as well as psycho-social consequences.

Another argument refers to the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) decision to remove homosexuality from its list of pathological conditions. Many take this to mean that homosexuality is no longer a "mental illness." Perhaps the most cogent answer to this argument is that the vote was taken at a time of tremendous social upheaval in the United States, at unprecedented speed, and under conditions

Many homosexuals find the following implications in this type of research:

- Homosexuals are born gay.
- Homosexuality is therefore a normal, "natural" condition.
- What is normal cannot be immoral.
- Therefore prohibitions against homosexuals make no sense.

Other gays reject this line of thinking, asserting that they chose the homosexual life-style of their own free will. They view with scorn the search for the causes of homosexuality, saying that it tacitly implies that this orientation is abnormal, whatever its cause. This latter group of gays seems to realize that the research on genetic causes for homosexuality is thus far inconclusive. Also, studies are pointing up a considerable number of genetically caused conditions that no one would wish to label as "normal." The City of Hope research, for example, strongly suggests that alcoholism is a genetically related ailment.<sup>9</sup> The same is true for schizophrenia.

As Joe Dallas has rightly pointed out, "Rather than continue the 'nature versus nurture' debate on origins, we ought instead to be asking whether homosexuality is desirable, healthy and moral no matter what factors led to its existence."<sup>10</sup> We cannot conclude that having a genetic origin makes a condition "natural." Otherwise, birth defects would be considered natural and normal.

We are all born with inclinations and tendencies that future research may reveal as genetically related. But nowhere does the Bible imply that such inclinations or limitations negate its prohibitions against acting out these tendencies in immoral or unethical ways. As far as Scripture is concerned, inclinations and tendencies of whatever sort are not sins for which we are personally responsible. They are simply a part of the general depravity of humanity since the Fall. But we are all accountable for what we do in our depravity. On this principle hangs the basis of all justice—human or divine. Without it the common ground of human interaction becomes a social quagmire of uncertainty, guesswork, and speculation. From the biblical perspective, how one arrives at a condition, tendency, or inclination is really a moot point. The real issue is how one acts in the face of one's inclination to alcohol, same-sex attractions, drug addiction, or lustful thoughts and feelings.

## Homosexual Acts or Abuse?

Pro-homosexual publications frequently claim that homosexuality is not condemned in the Scriptures. What is condemned is homosexual abuse such as rape, exploitation, violence, and idolatry. (Within the limits of this article we cannot explore this question in detail. Those interested in further study may refer to "For Further Reading," below.) The pro-homosexual literature attempts to establish this thesis in three ways.

First, in texts clearly associating homosexual acts with rape and violence, these authors see only condemnation of rape and violence, not homosexual acts. Thus in the Sodom account, it is violence and other sins that are being punished, not homosexuality. Some of this literature even suggests that the word *know* does not here refer to sexual intercourse but simply means "get acquainted" (Genesis 19:4-10). The same argument is applied to Judges 19:22-25. These scholars assert, further, that the Mosaic laws such as Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 condemn idolatry but not homosexuality. The implication, then, is that loving, non-idolatrous homosexual acts would not be condemned by Scripture.

This brings us to the second argument in support of the homosexual life-style thesis: the Bible's recounting of numerous allegedly homosexual relationships that it does not explicitly condemn. This includes the supposed homosexual relationship of David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1; 19:1; 20:30) that receives no condemnation in Scripture, it is said, because it was a loving mutual situation unencumbered by violence and idolatry. This, it is argued, was also the case with Ishmael and Isaac (Genesis 21:9), Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16, 17) and Joseph and Potiphar (Genesis 39). Some would even include Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel (Daniel 2, 4).

We turn now to the third and final point—how to explain Bible texts that disapprove of homosexual acts and cannot be interpreted as involving violence, rape, or idolatry (for example, Romans 1:26-28). With regard to these texts, the pro-homosexual literature subtly distinguishes between inverts and perverts. The epistle of Romans, it is claimed, does not refer to the "natural," "normal," or "permanent" homosexual involved in a loving relationship. Paul is said to be talking about those who are not permanent homosexuals, because he states that those who do this go

against their nature. He is allegedly talking about perverted heterosexuals who engage in homosexual acts out of lust. So again the Scriptures are supposedly disapproving only of exploitation, prostitution, and unbridled homosexual lust. Paul, it is argued, was ignorant of the invert-pervert distinction, so tended to lump all homosexual activity together. Of course, one cannot have it both ways. How could Paul say they do it against their nature if he was ignorant of such a distinction?

It is here that the genetic argument becomes extremely important for some homosexuals. This approach allows them to assert that homosexual tendency is "natural." If this is true, then Paul only condemns what is "against nature."<sup>11</sup> A student of the Bible would answer that "natural" or "against nature" in Romans refers to God's original intention at Creation, not to any condition since the Fall (Genesis 1:27; 2:18, 24).<sup>12</sup> All human conditions are now tainted and more or less "unnatural."

Thorough students of Scripture will not be so easily convinced that the Old Testament texts against active homosexuality are invalid. The accounts of Sodom and Gibeah (Genesis 19:4-10; Judges 19:22-25) do depict violent homosexual rape. However, the Scriptures condemn *both* the violence and the homosexuality. This is clear from Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, where lying with males is clearly condemned. The fact that this is called an abomination does not indicate only a condemnation of idolatry. From the biblical point of view, both idolatry and the practices associated with it were condemned.<sup>13</sup> Some have suggested that Ham homosexually assaulted his father; however, Noah's curse on Ham certainly provides no basis to infer approval of such an act (Genesis 9:20-27).

In the New Testament, most of the anti-homosexual references appear in vice lists, such as 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. The majority of these passages do not involve either violence or idolatry. This is the case in Romans 1:26-28, where the homosexual act itself is described as a vice. The idea that Paul here condemns only perverts and not those whose homosexuality is "natural" cannot be sustained.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the consistent witness of Judeo-Christian

*Continued on page 24*

## Homosexuality

Continued from page 17

literature opposes the homosexual lifestyle.

### A Closer Look at Romans 1

The standard argument against New Testament texts is the invert-pervert theory, as described above. In Romans 1:24-28 Paul, it is said, opposes homosexual abuse, not homosexual acts, which are alleged to be natural to the individual. As already noted, the two key terms in these verses are the expressions *natural* and *unnatural*, and much depends on what Paul mean. The crux of the issue concerns the sources to which Paul alluded in asserting that homosexuality is unnatural.<sup>15</sup>

This context clearly demonstrates that Paul used Greek and, particularly, Stoic ethical terms. But the apostle does not use

### For Further Reading

D. Atkinson, *Homosexuals in the Christian Fellowship* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979).

P. Coleman, *Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality* (London: SPCK, 1980).

S. Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1980).

R. F. Lovelace, *Homosexuality and the Church* (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1978).

E. A. Malloy, *Homosexuality and the Christian Way of Life* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1981).

E. R. Moberly, *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1991).

J. I. Yamamoto, ed., *The Crisis of Homosexuality* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1990).

the terms and concepts the same ways as the Stoics did. Like the Stoics, Paul probably did define *nature* as the providential ordering of the world. However, for the pantheistic Stoics, nature was God. They believed that existence went on forever in endlessly recurring cycles following a fixed "law" or "formula" called *logos*. On the other hand, Paul's God was above, beyond, and separate from nature. For Paul, nature since the Fall is not determinative for human essence. From his perspective, appealing to nature in a fallen world to determine what a person should or should not do or be is at best relative and at worst useless. Within nature, only relative distinctions can be made between the natural and the unnatural.

Paul does not share the Stoics' concepts about the absolute authority of nature and determinism. For him there is no nature that is either detached from God or that can be identified with Him. Paul taught that only God's original intention for humanity can be considered determinative in defining their essence, and that God revealed His will in Scripture. It is difficult to see what else Paul could mean by "nature" in this text if not the world and humanity as intended and created by God; the "unnatural" being a consequence of the Fall and, therefore, not God's intention for human sexuality. The cosmic sweep of the Fall and degradation of humanity described in the first chapter of Romans includes both Jews and Gentiles. In this context homosexuality is not treated merely as an expression of cultic idolatry. Rather, both are traced back to the consequences of disregarding the Creator's design and intention. As D. Field states:

*In writing about "natural relations," Paul is not referring to individual men and women as they are. His canvas is much broader. He is taking the argument back, far more radically, to man and woman as God created them. By "unnatural" he means "unnatural to mankind in God's creation pattern." And that pattern he clearly understands to be heterosexual. So the distinction between pervert and invert (which Paul could hardly have made anyway) is undercut."<sup>16</sup>*

### Who Is My Neighbor?

Thus far we have spoken about homosexuality mostly in the abstract. In

real life it never appears that way; there is always a person or persons involved. Many Christians talk at great length about homosexuality as if it were something on another planet. This occurs largely because such people fail to distinguish between the active and possibly the promiscuous homosexual and the person with homosexual inclination who is not sexually active. Therefore, the thought of meeting an Adventist homosexual is, to put it mildly, very discomfoting. When we meet the homosexual we discover that he or she is us—a human being with hopes and plans and dreams and wishes. For many people this is too close for comfort. It often reveals the ambivalence and vulnerability of their own sexual impulses. So-called homophobia is often fear of self, or fear of the unknown. Fear builds walls—but love builds bridges.

In my first year of pastoral ministry I was approached by a young man about my age who confided to me his homosexual inclinations. He was a teacher at a boys' boarding school. He wanted to be morally and ethically responsible to the teenagers in his charge, but confessed that it was a struggle. Although I cannot remember ever previously forming an attitude about homosexuals, I must have stereotyped them as stupid, nasty, and dirty. My first reaction was disbelief. Here was a devout, conscientious, intelligent, well-educated young man just beginning his professional career. He could not be a homosexual—he was too much like me! I was too young and inexperienced to offer him professional counseling or advice. I remember we just stood under the trees, out of the drizzling rain, and discussed his options, as friend to friend. One possibility was to train as a minister, so he could serve other groups of people than young boys. This he eventually did. He became and still is a successful Seventh-day Adventist minister.

The young lawyer in Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan wanted to know how to gain eternal life (Luke 10:25-37, RSV). Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." The young lawyer wanted to make himself look good, so he asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus's answer, the parable of the Good Samaritan, illustrates that one's neighbor may be someone against whom our society and church has long been prejudiced. When

Jesus finished His story he asked the young lawyer, "Which of these three do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" The prejudiced young man still would not take the name Samaritan on his lips, so he said, "The one who showed mercy on him." Jesus said, "Go and do likewise."

As Adventist Christians, we exalt the inspiration and authority of the Bible. We do not accept the active homosexual life-style as a Christian alternative. We reject it not simply because of the negative statements in Scripture condemning it. We also disavow it because of the many statements in the Bible depicting the heterosexual life-style as God's plan for human sexuality. If Creation and the Fall, as described in Scripture, accurately depict our situation, then to affirm homosexual relations as "natural" is to affirm the Fall as good. Then we would have no need for redemption, and we could throw away the Scriptures as irrelevant.

Many Christians resent the attempts of homosexual literature to revise the biblical witness. As Jones observes, "the only way to neutralize the biblical witness against homosexual behavior is either grossly to misinterpret the Bible or to undermine its authority. The apologists for the 'gay Christian' movement tend to do both."<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, the Bible gives the church no mandate to treat the individual with homosexual orientation as a worse sinner than anyone else. If someone with a drug or alcohol problem has a relapse, we are prompted by Christ's love to intensify our help and nurture for this individual. The same should be true of the homosexual.

None of us should ever underestimate God's power to change lives and to heal. Our morbid and sometimes exaggerated fear and hatred of homosexual sins should never be transferred to the individual struggling with homosexuality. If the church is to minister to homosexual sinners as it does to other sinners, then it must become a place where those who experience homosexual desire can be welcomed. It must become a "sanctuary" for them, where they can receive prayerful support, help, and acceptance. □

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## Notes and References

1. Elizabeth R. Moberly, *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1991).
2. R. Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 167. While the deletion of homosexuality from the professionally authoritative *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness* was a response to a minority vote of the APA, it appears that the majority of APA's membership still view homosexuality as pathological. Some four years after the vote, a survey found that 69 percent of psychiatrists believed that homosexuality "usually represents a pathological adaptation."
3. I. L. Ward, "Prenatal Stress Feminizes and Demasculinizes the Behavior of Males," *Science*, 175 (1972), p. 82.
4. I. L. Ward, "The Prenatal Stress Syndrome: Current Status," *Psycho-neuroendocrinology*, 9 (1984), p. 9. Ward herself concluded, "Whether or not this model holds as one moves up the philogenetic scale remains to be determined. The optimistic conclusion of Dorner, and others, that this syndrome provides a direct explanation of homosexuality in human males should be greeted with some caution."
5. S. LeVay, "A Difference in Hypothalamic Structure Between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men," *Science*, 253 (August 1991), pp. 1034-37.
6. *Newsweek* (February 24, 1992), pp. 46 ff. LeVay is a neuro-scientist with the Salk Institute of La Jolla, California. He told *Newsweek* that after his lover died of AIDS he wanted to do science relevant to being gay; i.e., to find an inborn cause for homosexuality. For him this was a quest so important that he would give up his scientific career altogether if he did not find it.
7. *Ibid.* Scientists do not even agree on how this portion of the brain should be measured—by size or number of neurons. Another scientist at the Salk Institute points out that we do not know if homosexuality caused the different brain structure or if it caused the homosexuality. Also, the only evidence that the 19 cadavers were homosexual was from information gleaned

from their files. This leaves open the question about the sexual orientation of the other subjects in the study. Strictly speaking, it is unknown but for the purpose of the study assumed to be heterosexual.

8. J. M. Bailey, R. C. Pillard, "A Genetic Study of Male Sexual Orientation," *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 48 (December 1991), pp. 1089-1095. See also C. Holden, "Twin Study Links Genes to Homosexuality," *Science*, 255 (January 1992), p. 33.
9. This is an important piece of research that has received scant coverage from the press compared to the homosexual research. No one is promoting the alcoholic life-style, however, neither are there any advocates for alcoholics' rights. No one considers this a normal condition because it is genetically caused.
10. Joe Dallas, "Born Gay?" *Christianity Today*, 36 (June 1992), p. 23.
11. D. S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1975), pp. 1-5.
12. Other authors would counter this argument by pointing to 1 Corinthians 11:14, "Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him." "Nature" here seems to mean no more than prevalent social custom. The word *nature*, of course, has many meanings and each must be interpreted in its context.
13. See Deuteronomy 23:17, 18; 1 Kings 14:23, 24.
14. This would also be true of 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 and 1 Timothy 1:8-10.
15. Paul uses the terms *para phusin* (against, beside, or contrary to nature), and *kata phusin* (according to nature). These Greek words are commonly used to express an ethical judgment on homosexuality. This is true of Plato (*Laws I*, 636; VIII, 841). In the Hellenistic literature homosexuality is usually referred as unnatural; e.g., Diodorus Siculus, *History*, 32, 10, 8-11; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 4, 2-3; Musonius Rufus, *Frag. XII*; Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, II, 273, 275. For a more detailed treatment see R. M. Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1988), pp. 126-131.
16. D. Field, *The Homosexual Way: A Christian Option?* (Bromcote, Notts., England: Grove Books, 1980), p. 16.
17. S. L. Jones, "The Loving Opposition," *Christianity Today*, July 19, 1993, p. 24.