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# STRICTS

R E P O R T

RELIGION AND SEXUALITY  
OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1997

# SIECUS

## R E P O R T

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THANKS FOR TELLING US WHAT YOU THINK

Mac Edwards

**N**early every day I receive dozens of phone calls, letters, and e-mail comments about articles that we have printed or ought to print in the *SIECUS Report*.

I was, therefore, not surprised when I received over 500 *Reader Surveys* this summer within weeks of mailing them with the June–July issue. (That’s nearly 20 percent of our subscribers!)

I was very pleased to learn that over 90 percent of you feel that we have an excellent publication. This is very gratifying and provides me with a daily challenge to bring you an even better—and more useful—journal.

READER RESPONSE

FYI, this is a summary of the *Reader Survey* analysis:

- **Your opinions.** Ninety-one percent of you rated the *SIECUS Report* as “very good” or “excellent.”

Your most frequent comments were that it is extremely useful in teaching and research; that it always provides up-to-date information; that it is concise and easy to read; that it is honest and based on fact, and that it is one of a kind. Some of your specific quotes were:

- “It is one of the most useful and interesting journals in the field. I really enjoy it.”
- “Well written and credible. Reflects a professional organization committed to truth.”
- “The *SIECUS Report* is the gold standard in the field.”
- **Your favorite sections.** Seventy-seven percent of you said that the most important section of the *SIECUS Report* was the original articles. This was followed by *Fact Sheets* (66 percent); *Public Policy Updates* (43 percent); *Bibliographies* (42 percent); and *Editorials* (21 percent.) Many of you said that “everything is important.”
- **Your feelings about renewals.** Over 99 percent of you said you would renew and over 98 percent of you said you would recommend the *SIECUS Report* to a colleague.
- **Your overall comments.** One of your recurring comments was that the *SIECUS Report* is a one-of-a-kind publication and that it is the best in the field. Many of you said that it keeps you motivated in your work on

behalf of sexuality education. Many others said that the journal is “current.” Many also said that the April–May issue on “Abstinence–Only Education” was especially valuable and helpful.

I hope that this summary will motivate more of you to send your comments and ideas about current and future *SIECUS Reports*. Thanks for sharing.

RELIGION AND SEXUALITY

I feel that this issue is a critical first step in bringing together the work of sexuality professionals and clergy to help people grow into responsible, caring, and loving adults. Such a partnership is both logical and important.

*SIECUS* President Debra Haffner, who was a Fellow at the Yale Divinity School last year, opens the discussion on religion and sexuality by reading the books of the Bible from the perspective of a sexuality educator. In her article, “The Really Good News: What the Bible Says About Sex,” she reaches the conclusion that Scripture is far richer and far more positive on sexual issues than most people assume.

Next, Maggi Ruth Boyer, a sexuality education consultant, and Ann Marie Donohue, a staff associate at the First United Methodist Church of Germantown in Philadelphia, PA, write in the “The Journey of Sexuality Educators to Faith Communities” about their accomplishments in developing a sexuality education program for the church’s congregation.

Sarah Conklin, a professor at the School of Physical and Health Education at the University of Wyoming, then points out the need to address sexuality concerns in theological education in her article “Clergy As Sexuality Educators: What Are Seminaries Doing? What Do They Need to Do?”

Finally, Elma Cole, who is a sexuality education consultant with the Salvation Army and a member of the *SIECUS* Board of Directors, provides an overview of denomination programs in her article, “The Sexuality Education Programs of Religious Groups and Denominations.”

UPCOMING ISSUES

I hope that your active interest in the *SIECUS Report* will result in your providing me with your insight on future issue topics. I appreciate hearing from you about both potential articles and stories (including topics and authors). I also welcome “Letters to the Editor” for publication.

# THE REALLY GOOD NEWS: WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SEX

Debra W. Haffner, M.P.H.  
SIECUS President and CEO

**D**uring the past two years, I have become a serious student and avid reader of the Bible. I started my studies believing, as many adults with whom I have worked over the years believe, that the Bible either disparaged or ignored sexuality.

As I began my research last year as a Yale University Fellow, I discovered something quite different. Both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament directly address sexuality issues and send messages that are quite different from what most people are taught in their religious groups and denominations. In fact, I now believe that a major function of Bible stories is to teach sexuality education: many of the stories and many of the laws contain information to help people understand the important role that sexuality plays in their lives.

Conversely, I was surprised to find that the Bible is absolutely silent about masturbation, abortion, birth control, oral-genital sex, and other sexual practices.

As I continued my work, I gradually realized that, by studying the Bible, readers can see how the people who created scripture understood sexuality. And, in the process, they can also gain personal insights into the Bible's ability to speak to all of us today on these moral issues.

There is no question that certain church traditions have provided justification for sexual oppression. From the writings of Paul to those of Augustine and Aquinas—and through the current work of the Christian Coalition—parts of the Christian church have attempted to control, define, and limit sexual expression. In fact, it is clear that the mind/body dualism that characterizes much of Christian thought is the lens through which both the Bible and church traditions are used to limit people's experience of their sexuality and, indeed, to promote systematic oppression of sexuality.

However, these same theological tools can help demonstrate a revised sexual theology. Both scripture and church history are far richer on sexual issues than most people assume.

## HEBREW BIBLE\*

The Hebrew Bible is replete with stories that have sexual themes. *Genesis* itself has more than 30 stories that deal with sexual issues.

\*The Hebrew Bible is also referred to as the Old Testament.

**Genders and biological sex.** The creation stories (*Gen 1 and 2*) explain biological sex and the reasons for two genders. *Genesis 1* says that God created "male and female, He created them" (*Gen 1:27*) and then God blessed them: "Be fruitful and multiply" (*Gen 1:28*). *Genesis 2* is the more familiar telling of the creation of a woman from Adam's rib. God recognizes that "it is not good for man to be alone" (*Gen 2:18*) and sets out to find Adam a companion. In fact, this solitariness is the first aspect of creation that God finds displeasing. Adam rejects all of the animals that God brings forward. It is only then that God puts Adam to sleep to create woman. The centrality of two genders and sexuality is emphasized: "Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh" (*Gen 2:24*). According to these passages, man needs not only a companion and a helper but also a lover. The goal of union in *Genesis 2:24* is sexual pleasure, not procreation. Side by side, the two creation texts reinforce that sexuality is both procreative and re-creative.

**Sexual intercourse and desire.** The importance of sexual intercourse and the role of desire appear numerous times in *Genesis*. Eve is told that despite the pain of childbirth, "your desire shall be for your husband" (*Gen 3:16*). Divine beings were said to desire the beautiful human women (*Gen 6:2*). Sarah describes sexual intercourse as "pleasure" (*Gen 18:12*). Isaac is noticed "fondling his wife Rebekah" (*Gen 26:8*). Leah and Rachel negotiate for Jacob's sexual favors (*Gen 30:14-16*). Potiphar's wife strongly desires

## Keep your Bible handy

*SIECUS Report* readers not familiar with the Bible should keep a copy handy while reading this article. Some good translations are the *Tanakh* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995) and the *New Revised Standard Version* (New York: Oxford Press, 1989). The latter was used for this article.

The Bible is divided into 66 books. Each is then divided into chapters and verses. The numbers in parentheses in this article refer to chapters and verses. For a good introduction to the Bible, readers may want to read *The Good Book* which is reviewed on page 23. —Editor

Joseph and asks him to sleep with her (*Gen 39:7*). Intercourse itself is also frequently and publicly accounted for in *Genesis*: Adam “knew his wife Eve” (*Gen 4:1*). “Cain knew his wife” (*Gen 4:17*). “Adam knew his wife again” (*Gen 4:25*). And so on.

**Physical beauty and love at first sight.** Physical beauty and love at first sight are also featured in *Genesis*. Rebekah “was very fair to look upon” (*Gen 24:16*). Rachel “was graceful and beautiful” (*Gen 29:17*). Joseph was “handsome and good looking” (*Gen 39:6*). Jacob and Rachel fall in love at first sight (*Gen 29*) and he happily waits seven years to marry her: “they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her” (*Gen 29:20*). Rebekah assuaged Isaac’s grief after the death of Sarah: “He loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death” (*Gen 24:67*).

**Fertility.** Fertility is referred to in *Genesis* as a gift from God. God’s first words to people are “be fruitful and multiply” (*Gen 1:28*). However, the matriarchs of the Hebrew Bible are all initially infertile: “God chose three infertile women and one woman [Leah] who was not desirable to her husband to bear children who would inherit the covenant.”<sup>1</sup> God’s direct intervention helps these women to conceive. Sarah has her son at 90 after lifelong infertility (*Gen 21:2*). God healed Abimelech’s “wife and his female slaves so that they bore children” (*Gen 20:17*); God resolved Rebekah’s infertility (*Gen 25:21*); “[t]he Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren” (*Gen 29:31*); but eventually “God remembered Rachel; and God heeded her and opened her womb” (*Gen 30:22*). The Hebrew Bible also recounts two stories where infertile women arrange for their husbands to have children with other women: Sarah sends Abraham to have sex with Hagar (*Gen 16:2*), and Rachel tells Jacob to “go in to” her maid Bilhah so that she may have children through her (*Gen 30:3*).

**Genitals and bodily functions.** *Genesis* also speaks directly about genitals and bodily functions. God asks the ancients to “circumcise the flesh of your foreskins” as the “sign of the covenant between me and you” (*Gen 17:11*). Circumcision assures that the “covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant” (*Gen 17:13*). In 1970, theologian and marriage counselor David Mace wrote that the penis was chosen for this mark because it was the most holy part of the body: “It was with this special organ that he became, in a special sense, a coworker with God.”<sup>2</sup>

It also speaks frankly about menstruation. The writers knew that the end of menses was likely to be the end of fertility (*Gen 18:11*). Menstruation is actually used as a plot device in the story of Rachel’s deception of Laban (*Gen 31:32–35*).

**Destructive uses of sexuality.** *Genesis* also contains numerous warnings about the potentially destructive uses of sexuality. There are references to rape (*Gen 34:1–4*), gang rape (*Gen 19:4–8*), incest (*Gen 19:31–39*), and prostitution (*Gen 38:15–17*). In the three versions of the wife/sister stories, Abraham and Isaac try to pass their wives off as their sisters and almost endanger peace in the land (*Gen 12, 26 and 20*).

The Bible does not, however, contain the negative sexual messages that people assume. For example, Sodom and Gomorrah is *not* a story against consensual same-gender sexual relations. Rather, the sin is about inhospitality and gang rape. Likewise, the sin of Onan is not about masturbation but about his ignoring the Levite Law to procreate with his dead brother’s wife. Onan does not masturbate to avoid procreation. He practices coitus interruptus: but “Onan knew that the offspring would not be his, he spilled his semen on the ground whenever he went in to his brother’s wife” (*Gen 38:9*), something he apparently did with some frequency.

**Sexuality in relationships.** The special role of sexuality in the first year of a sexual relationship is underscored in *Deuteronomy* in this translation from the Tanakh: “When a man has taken a bride, he shall not go out with the army or be assigned to it for any purpose; he shall be exempt for one year for the sake of his household, to give happiness to the woman he has married” (*Deut 24:5*). (Writing about this passage in the 16th century, Martin Luther wrote that it is “as though Moses wanted to say, ‘The joy will last for a year; after that we shall see.’”<sup>3</sup>) Proverbs also contains hope for ongoing sexual intimacy in a long-term relationship: “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. May her breasts satisfy you at all times; may you be intoxicated always by her love” (*Prov 5:18–19*).

**Same gender sexual relations.** The Bible contains only four verses about same gender sexual relations: two in *Leviticus* and two in the New Testament. *Leviticus* says that “you shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (*Lev 18:22*), and “if a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them” (*Lev 20:13*). The same scripture says that cursing your mother and father is also punishable by death (*Lev 20:9*) as is sex with the wife of a neighbor (*Lev 20:10*), one’s father’s wife (*Lev 20:11*), daughter-in-law (*Lev 20:12*), both a woman and her mother (*20:14*), or an animal (*Lev 20:15–16*). Other acts punishable by exile according to *Leviticus* are seeing family members naked and having sex during menstruation (*Lev 20:17–21*).

In the New Testament, the opening passages of *Romans* condemn pagan practices. The book then denounces sex with someone of the same gender: “For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural” (*Rom 1:26*), “and in the same way, also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error” (*Rom 1:27*). In addition, verses in *1 Corinthians* (6:9–10) and *1 Timothy* (1:10) equate “fornicators, idolators, adulterers, male prostitutes, and sodomites” with other sinners such as the “greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers” (*1 Cor 6:9–10*). But these two books never offer definitions for these terms.

It is, at best, inaccurate to use scripture to condemn committed, consensual same-gender sexual relationships. The fact that only four verses explicitly address this issue implies that this subject was of relatively little importance to the authors. In contrast, there are more than ten prohibitions in *Leviticus* against sexual relations during menses and 17 verses on how to make a grain offering. The Hebrew Bible also condemns eating fat (*Lev 3:17*), touching the bedding of a menstruating woman (*Lev 15:20*), and cursing one’s parents (*Lev 20:9, Deut 21:18–21*).

Most modern theologians believe that these passages about men having sex with men actually related to the rejection of nearby foreign cults (*Lev 20:22–23*). Such cults practiced sacred prostitution—often using male prostitutes—during religious observances. Prostitution was an accepted part of urban society during biblical times (see *1 Kings 22:38, Isa 23:16, Prov 7:12, and 9:14*); cultic prostitution (or prostitution as part of religious practice) was, however, clearly condemned. *Deuteronomy* and *Numbers* contain several prohibitions against such prostitution (*Deut 23:18 and Num 25:1–3*) but none on same-gender relations. Many theologians believe that *Leviticus* refers only to the use of male sacred prostitutes, a practice not completely eradicated in the Temple until the reforms of Josiah (*1 Kings 15:12–22:45; 2 Kings 23:7*)<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, there are several little quoted passages in the Bible that acknowledge sexual contact and love between men. For example, Abraham asks his servant to swear an oath by putting “your hand under my thigh” (*Gen 24:2*). David, speaking of Jonathan, wrote: “...greatly beloved were you to me, your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women” (*2 Sam 1:26*). Indeed, Jonathan and David seem to fall in love at first sight: “...when David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (*1 Sam 18:1*). And later, “Saul’s son Jonathan took great delight in David” (*1 Sam 19:1*).

**Adultery.** The Bible clearly condemns adultery. It is important to understand, however, that adultery is looked upon not as a sexual sin but as a violation of property rights. In Biblical times, adultery was defined as having sex with another man’s wife or concubine without his permission, not as having sex outside of one’s marriage. Indeed, *Proverbs* (6:26) urges men to seek prostitutes, whose fee is equal only to a loaf of bread, rather than be tempted by the wife of another. People in biblical times felt that a man who committed adultery was not violating his own marriage, but rather that of the other woman and her husband. During the period in which the New Testament was written, the husband was said to commit adultery if he divorced his wife (*Mt 5:32, Mk 10:11, and Lk 16:18*), and it was forbidden in several books (*Rom 13:9, Gal 5:19, and Jas 2:11*).

There are few restraints on men and sex in the *Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy* codes besides adultery. For example, there is no limit on the number of wives and concubines that a man could have (Solomon was said to have 700 wives and 300 concubines) (*1 Kings 11:3*), and male virginity is not discussed. The law is silent on sexual behavior for an engaged couple.

**Celibacy.** Celibacy is never presented positively in the Hebrew Bible. During the disorganized period of time in *Judges*, Jephthah’s daughter begs her father for two months’ reprieve before she is to die because she is still a virgin: “grant me two months, so that I may go and wander on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, my companions and I” (*Judg 11:37*). The daughters of Israel went out each year to mourn Jephthah’s daughter because “she had never slept with a man” (*Judg 11:39*). Similarly, the prophet Jeremiah remained single as an example of the disorganization that characterized Israel at that time (*Jer 16:2*).

**The Song of Solomon.** The most overtly sexual book of the Bible are the Canticles or the *Song of Solomon*. Throughout history, there have been attempts to understand the *Song of Solomon* as an allegory. In various books, the *Song* is described as a book about the love of God for Israel, or about the love of Jesus for the church, or even about historical battles. Modern scholars have, by and large, dismissed these interpretations, believing that they “do not explicate the primary level of the text, which is explicitly about human love and nowhere mentions God.”<sup>5</sup>

The *Song of Solomon* celebrates erotic love between a man and a woman in a remarkably mutual relationship. Marcia Falk in the *Harper’s Bible Commentary* says that “women speak as assertively as men, initiating action at least as often; men are free to be as gentle, as vulnerable, even as coy as women. Men and women similarly praise each other for their sensuality and their beauty, and identi-

cal phrases are sometimes used to describe lovers of both genders.”<sup>6</sup>

The *Song* does not talk about sex in the context of marriage or procreation: the woman in the *Song* is never “called a wife, nor is she required to bear children. In fact, to the issue of marriage and procreation, the *Song* does not speak.”<sup>7</sup>

The *Song* is remarkably explicit in its erotic descriptions. Consider, for example, these two passages:

My beloved thrust his hand into the opening,  
and my inmost being yearned for him.  
I arose to open to my beloved,  
and my hand dripped with myrrh,  
my fingers with liquid myrrh... (*Song* 5:4–5).

How fair and pleasant you are  
O loved one, delectable maiden!  
You are stately as a palm tree  
and your breasts are like its clusters.  
I say I will climb the palm tree  
and lay hold of its branches.  
Oh, may your breasts be like  
clusters of the vine,  
and the scent of your breath like apples,  
and your kisses like the best wine  
that goes down smoothly  
gliding over lips and teeth... (*Song* 7:6–9).

Interestingly, after *Genesis* and *Psalms*, the *Song* was the most frequently expounded book of the Old Testament in the middle ages. Denys Turner in *Eros and Allegory* observes this irony: “male celibates, priests and monks have for centuries described, expressed, and celebrated their love of God in the language of sex.”<sup>8</sup> (See the box on this page for ways that early theologians interpreted the *Song*’s descriptions of the woman’s breasts.)

Some early theologians warned against the text: Denys the Carthusian, for example, warned that the *Song* should not be read by anyone under 30, and that only people who are “reformed, purified of sensual desire” will not be harmed by its reading. Giles of Rome said that “the text here seems to be defective.”<sup>9</sup>

The Latter Prophets present a much more daunting picture of marriage and sexuality. The marriage metaphors of *Hosea*, *Jeremiah*, and *Ezekiel* all portray relationships gone awry: “Plead with your mother, plead—for she is not my wife and I am not her husband...” (*Hos* 2:2). “...I will hedge up her way with thorns and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths” (*Hos* 2:6). In these passages, Israel is portrayed as the adulterous wife and God as the husband who has deserted her.

Even in the times surrounding the exile, however, the love between men and women are still held as an ideal. For example, in *Jeremiah*, the Lord says to Israel, “I am going to banish from this place, in your days and before your eyes, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.” Numerous

## THE SONG OF SOLOMON: ALWAYS AN ALLEGORY?<sup>8</sup>

The *Song of Solomon* was described throughout church history as an allegory—not as a celebration of erotic love. Consider these interpretations of “may your breasts be like clusters of the vine” (*Song* 7:8).

### **Gregory in the 6th century:**

“...the teaching of the Incarnation nourishes in a way that the teaching of the Law cannot.”

### **Alcun of York in the 8th century:**

“...the sweetness of the Gospels teaching is preferable to the sour taste of the Law...the breasts are to be understood as referring to the teachers who give us the milk of knowledge to drink.”

### **William of Saint Thierry in the 12th century:**

“...but the Bride has two breasts, one of compassion, the other of praise. From the breast of compassion may be sucked the milk of consolation, from the breast of praise, the milk of encouragement.”

### **Alan of Lille in the 12th century:**

“...I can read this literally as referring to the Virgin’s natural breast...which breasts are more delightful, which can be better, than those which give milk to Christ, milk drawn not by the foulness of lust but from the rich store of virginity.”

### **Denys, the Carthusian in the 15th century:**

“...Breasts are to be read as the secrets hidden in Christ, treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”



analogies related to sexual abuse, rape, and adultery are used to indicate the coming destruction.

The promise of God to Israel is referred to in terms of intimate relationships. Consider this passage from *Isaiah*:

...but you shall be called My Delight Is In Her  
and your land Married.  
for the Lord delights in you,  
and your land shall be married.  
For as a young man marries a young woman,  
so shall your builder marry you,  
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride;  
so shall your God rejoice over you (*Isa 62:4-5*).

This passage is reminiscent of the passage in *Deuteronomy* previously quoted; the special relationship of a couple newly in love is celebrated. The prophets recognized that a righteous relationship between a man and a woman is as holy as God's love for Israel.

### THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament includes little discussion of sexuality issues. However, *The First Letter of Paul to The Church at Corinth* (also known as *1 Corinthians*) is rich in such coverage. In fact, it contains many of the topics in current sexuality education programs and can be viewed as a form of sexuality instruction for the first century.

*First Corinthians* includes some coverage of at least 17 sexuality topics. In his letter, Paul briefly addresses anatomy, families, child-rearing, values, decision-making, communication, assertiveness, shared sexual behavior, and sexual desire. He also provides extensive information on bodies, love, marriage, gender roles, sexuality and society, law, and religion. *First Corinthians* recognizes the sacredness of the body and sexual relationships, reinforces that sexual desire is part of life, and respects the importance of mutual and egalitarian pleasure and responsibility in intimate relationships. It also affirms marriage and presents a brilliant description of love.

Paul believed that the "body is a temple of the Holy Spirit" (*1 Cor 6:19*). He also recognized the sacredness of all parts of the body: "God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body" (*1 Cor 12:18-20*). Although he unfortunately differentiated between more and less honorable parts of the body, he asserted that "...there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another" (*1 Cor 12:25*).

Paul underscored that sexual relations are sacred and not to be engaged in lightly. *First Corinthians 6:12-20* should not be read as condemning all sexual relationships as

some theologians have implied. Rather, it affirms that sexuality has the ability to profoundly affect one's life. Many scholars have written that *porneia* should not be translated as fornication but rather as *sexual immorality as delineated by the Torah*.<sup>10</sup> Paul was urging Christians to avoid using prostitutes—especially cultic prostitutes—because the physical act of intercourse involves the sanctity of becoming "one flesh." In the words of William Countryman, Paul "regarded sexual desire as a natural appetite though one too central to human identity to be treated casually."<sup>11</sup>

Paul recognized that adults experience sexual desire. He felt that people have the ability to make decisions about their sexual feelings, that sexual feelings are not uncontrollable, and that they should be acknowledged and acted upon only as they support one's values (*1 Cor 7:36-38*).

Paul did not suggest abstinence and celibacy for all. He believed that permanently abstaining from sexual relationships is a special gift: "I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind" (*1 Cor 7:7*). Indeed, in a surprising admission, he stated that his personal belief in celibacy was not from Jesus or God: "Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord" (*1 Cor 7:25*).

Paul clearly affirmed marriage as the context for sexual relationships and emphasized the mutuality of roles. "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to the husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body; but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body; but the wife does" (*1 Cor 7:3-5*).

Further, partners have a right to expect sexual relations on a regular basis: "Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time" (*1 Cor 7:5*).

Paul wavered in his understanding of the equality of both genders, but he did underscore the unique contributions of both. Although there are certainly lines in this text that are overtly patriarchal (*1 Cor 11:8-10*), other verses recognize the importance of both genders: "in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman" (*1 Cor 11:11*).

The centrality of the message of love is a basic component of all good sexuality education programs. And here, Paul is as relevant today as he was two millennia ago. Chapter 13 could be a central point of study for sexuality education programs from adolescence to adulthood:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.... It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (*1 Cor 13:4-7*)

## TOWARD A NEW SEXUAL THEOLOGY

Numerous religious denominations are struggling with sexuality issues, and the Bible is an important place to start these explorations. Jewish and Christian individuals who are seeking to understand the role that sexuality plays in their lives can look to scripture for insights and understanding.

Without a doubt, there is an urgent need for a new sexual theology that will help people recognize the value of sexuality. Theologian James Nelson has eloquently stated the goals of such a theology:

It will be strongly sex-affirming, understanding sexual pleasure as a moral good rooted in the sacred value of our sensuality and erotic power, and not needing justification by procreative possibility. It will be grounded in respect for our own and other's bodily integrity and will help us defend against the common sexual violations of that integrity. It will celebrate fidelity in our commitments without legalistic prescription as to the precise forms such fidelity must make. It will be an ethic whose principles apply equally and without double standards to persons of both genders, of all colors, ages, bodily conditions, and sexual orientations.<sup>12</sup>

To that, I add, "Amen." Sexologists need to take a new look at the Bible and its influence on many of the people we serve. We need to understand that the Bible teaches that sexuality is a central part of being human, that bodies are good, that pleasure is good, and that men and women experience a healthy desire of each other.

Just as it is today, sexuality in biblical times was a source of pleasure and intimacy as well as misery and distress. Bible stories and passages can help people identify and live according to their own values and to discriminate between sexual decisions that are life-enhancing or destructive. Those of us who are people of faith must spread the gospel, literally the "good news," that the Bible affirms a healthy and positive view of sexuality.

*Author's note:* I am grateful to the Yale Divinity School for the opportunity to participate in their Fellowship program and to its faculty for its assistance in my studies.

*Debra Haffner was a Fellow at the Yale Divinity School during the fall of 1996. Since that time, she has continued her biblical studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. She has written this article on sexual issues in the Bible to share with SIECUS Report readers some of her discoveries during her initial research at Yale. She welcomes your reactions to her work and her findings.*

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## THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO DISCUSSES USES AND ABUSES

*The Bible Tells Me So: Uses and Abuses of Holy Scripture* (Anchor Publishing, Division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, New York, NY, 1996, \$12.95) helps to illuminate historical and current events where religion, politics, and power collide and the Bible is used and abused to influence public opinion and policy.

Written by Jim Hill and Rand Cheadle, it is divided into six subject areas: "People and Their Places in Society," "The Power of the Church," "Behavior," "Guilt, Crime, and Punishment," "The Way Things Ought to Be," and "Science, Medicine, and the World."

# THE JOURNEY OF SEXUALITY EDUCATORS TO FAITH COMMUNITIES

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**F**or sexuality educators and clergy alike, the idea of working together on sexuality education in a faith setting can seem like traveling in a foreign country. Each speak a different dialect, if not a different language. The “geography, customs, traditions, and climate” may also seem very different. Each has probably made a number of assumptions—some undoubtedly unfair and incorrect—about the other’s culture and beliefs.

In many ways, foreign travel is an apt metaphor for sexuality educators new to working with faith communities. Such travel can be exciting, enlightening, and enriching as well as scary and filled with the unknown. It can also result in increased understanding and new, powerful connections with people who once were strangers. Travelers can make new discoveries and gain new insights about not just the country they visit, but about themselves and their own country.

## TRAVELING TIPS

When preparing for this “foreign travel,” sexuality educators can try these tips to make the journey more valuable:

**Read before you go.** Most people find that their travel experience is enriched if they learn a little about their destination before the begin. Advance reading can increase anticipation about weather and what clothes to take, geography, festivals, and landmarks. Prior to working with a congregation, a sexuality educator might want to read the denominational statement on sexuality-related issues. They can discuss this with the lay or professional leadership and begin a respectful dialogue and a sense of teamwork. These statements are generally available on the Internet.

**Travel with a tour guide.** This is especially helpful if the guide is a clergyman or lay leader. Each, the traveler and the guide, can contribute to the experience. The congregational leader can speak directly to the faith issues. (For example, what does this congregation believe about the place of sexuality in peoples lives? About sexual orientations? About contraception?) The sexuality educator can contribute accurate information and guide process questions. The tour guide can help the sexuality educator understand “local cus-

toms.” (For example, is it customary to start a meeting with a prayer? With a song? Are there certain symbols or metaphors that are important to include?)

**Appreciate the language.** If individuals are unfamiliar with the language of faith in this particular faith community, they can work with a “translator,” a person from the community. If possible, they can learn a few words the same way a traveler might learn to say, “Hello,” and “Thank you.” It is best not to pretend to be more fluent than one actually is.

**Understand the educator’s role.** Sexuality educators can think of themselves as tourists when working with a faith community. Most people don’t travel with the intention of telling people how to live in their own countries. Neither should sexuality educators. They can facilitate cultural exchange, saying, “This is what I know, based on my knowledge and experience. What do you know based on yours?”

**Represent the best of your “country.”** Remember that sexuality educators have been stereotyped, too. When working with faith communities, they have the opportunity to explain who they are and what they believe. They could say, “Yes, we do teach abstinence for these reasons. What else can I tell you? How does that differ from your beliefs and understandings?” Sometimes it can be helpful for sexuality educators to develop a personal list of basic assumptions about faith and sexuality and to publicly work from it. Such statements might include: “Sexuality is a great and good gift.” “Pleasure is a great and good gift.” “Both sexuality and pleasure can enhance an individual and a relationship and both can be misused. Sexuality and sexual behaviors have different meanings for different people.”

**Prepare for unresolvable differences.** Are there such powerful differences between the denomination and the sexuality educator that a visit would be unwise? Might it contribute to more harm than misunderstanding? Most people, after all, do not travel to countries about which the U.S. State Department has issued travel warnings. In such a situation, sexuality educators can decline the trip and choose a more reasonable destination.

**Know local history.** What are the significant moments in the history of this congregation? What have the “wars” been

fought over? Is this congregation experiencing new leadership? Has the issue of sexuality ever been raised? Is this a congregation that uses inclusive language and that recognizes the ordination of homosexual persons and/or women?

**Respect existing values.** For most people, faith issues are not negotiable. Information is valuable and dialogue is important. Both can help increase tolerance and awareness of attitudes. They will not, however, change the basic tenets of a person's faith.

**Travel with an open mind.** Go on this journey prepared to learn as well as to teach. Be eager to "be engaged" as well as "to engage." This can help a sexuality educator avoid being "pedantic" or (heaven forbid!) "preachy."

### TRAVELING NOTES:

#### ONE CONGREGATION'S EXPERIENCE

The First United Methodist Church of Germantown initiated a collaborative effort with a professional sexuality education consultant in 1992 to develop a new way to provide sexuality education for the congregation. This program, guided by the authors of this article and working with the senior pastor and a committee of lay people, demonstrates the usefulness of dialogue between two "cultures."

For background, the First United Methodist Church of Germantown is a metropolitan congregation with a membership of 1,000 and a worshipping congregation of approximately 250 on a typical Sunday. Many live within a four-mile radius, and many others come from other parts of the city, suburbs, and nearby New Jersey. The senior pastor, Reverend Theodore Loder, has served the congregation since 1962.

During the past 35 years, the congregation has had a strong history of commitment to, and involvement in, social justice issues and in the life of the surrounding and extended community. Such issues are addressed in the context of a perspective that views faith as relevant to all areas of life. This congregation has been among the first to hire an ordained woman as a staff member and use inclusive language in worship services. It supports local efforts in housing, education, and medical care, participating in the Public Sanctuary movement of the 1980s, providing shelter and legal assistance to a Guatemalan family seeking political asylum, rehabilitating houses to sell at low cost, joining with other churches to provide shelter and support for homeless families, and working for social justice in Central America, Haiti, and South Africa.

This history of involvement in social justice is an important element of the congregation's culture. It reflects a willingness to confront challenging and controversial issues and to explore these issues in the context of religious faith. How a congregation has dealt with difficult or controversial issues in the past gives valuable clues to its resources, processes, and strategies that might also apply to the issue of sexuality.

In this congregation, for instance, involvement in social justice issues has fostered the development of a culture where dialogue is important, in which all issues are part of the life of faith, in which justice is an expression of love, and in which there is an underlying commitment to the concept that "we all can take risks together."

In addition, the congregation has a strong commitment to the centrality of worship as the heart of its life, and to the importance of small groups for ongoing learning, mutual support, and personal growth.

When selecting a faith community with which to work, sexuality educators may find that whether the community has discussed sexuality in the past may be less important than whether it has developed a culture of dealing with controversial and challenging issues in constructive ways.

#### FROM HISTORY AND CULTURE TO SEXUALITY EDUCATION

The church began a two-year process of study and discussion in 1988 to decide whether to become a Reconciling Congregation, a grassroots movement in the United Methodist Church through which a congregation affirms inclusion of gay and lesbian persons in the life of the church, including ordained ministry.

It subsequently voted in 1990 to become such a congregation. The decision was a continuing expression of the congregation's concern with issues of justice. It was also consistent with a faith stance that included a willingness to address controversial or difficult issues.

During this time, it became apparent that it was not only sexual orientations that were difficult to discuss, but sexuality itself. People in faith communities can be uncertain about sexuality. They may struggle with aligning their values and behavior. They may celebrate and rejoice in the wonder of sexuality. People in faith communities reflect the secular culture in which they live, and they are not all of one mind, even within the same congregation.

Following its decision in 1990, the church's Administrative Board established a Committee on Religion and Sexuality whose mission was, and continues to be, to expand the focus of opportunities for continued study, discussion, and growing understanding of sexuality in the light of faith. This was accomplished through programs for young people as well as adults, with a focus on faith and values, ethics and relationships, and on understanding what it means to be fully faithful as well as a fully sexual person.

It was significant that Reverend Loder took a clear stand on the importance of addressing these issues. He spoke about sexuality from the pulpit as a part of the mystery, the struggle and the gift of being human, which gave the congregation a framework for further discussion.

As the Committee on Religion and Sexuality contin-

ued its work, the members decided that the issues were too vast and too specific. They also realized that they needed to learn how to create a context for addressing issues that are normally considered private and that most people are unaccustomed to discussing. They, therefore, sought the help of a professional sexuality educator.

At the recommendation of another pastor, the committee decided to invite a private consultant, who was also the director of training and education for Planned Parenthood of Bucks County, to work with them. The members had a preconceived image of a sexuality educator as someone who would emphasize facts at the expense of the deeper issues of identity, relationships, and values. They were surprised to find that the professional sexuality educator had worked with other congregations as well as clergy on the same issues and that she had demonstrated a sensitivity to faith contexts and issues.

All committee members and Reverend Loder attended an initial consultation session with the sexuality educator to make certain that all issues, fears, and concerns were addressed and to make certain that any course of action was congruent with the life and theology of the congregation.

#### **A NEW DIRECTION/MODEL**

Out of this lively session, an exciting decision emerged: to train committee and church members to become Sexuality Resource Persons for the whole congregation. These individuals would plan and lead discussions and programs in faith and sexuality and would have informal conversations with church members.

This decision was seen as an excellent alternative to having an "expert" drop by and conduct discussion sessions or work with the youth of the church. Such training would strengthen the confidence and skills of Resource Persons. Realistic limits could be identified and understood concerning what help Resource Persons could and could not provide. Training would also help them to clarify their own values and goals and to build trust with one another.

If the Sexuality Resource Persons were going to be accepted as facilitators of discussions about faith and sexuality it was important that they reflect the diversity of the congregation and that they include known and trusted individuals. An effort was made to invite participation by people of different ages, races, sexual orientations, family status, and ethnicity.

Since the committee had as part of its mandate to provide programs for the church's young people, it sought the involvement of the church staff member who worked with youth as well as a teacher in the church's junior high school age group. All who accepted the invitation to the training understood that participation was preparation for more active leadership in programs of faith and sexuality. Fourteen people accepted this invitation.

Two full-day training sessions were conducted for the Sexuality Resource Persons in 1992.

The first day focused on an exploration of sexual development and issues throughout the life cycle, an examination of personally held values and beliefs, and personal growth and development. Information was presented, on topics such as adolescent sexuality, sexual orientations, pregnancy prevention, sexually transmitted infections, talking about sexuality, barriers to effective communication about sexuality, male and female puberty experiences, and male and female gender issues. Teaching methodologies included small group work, male and female "fishbowls," crayon drawings, anonymous questions, and values voting.

The second day focused on the role of the Sexuality Resource Person, including identifying agencies and organizations appropriate for referrals; understanding appropriate limits of confidentiality; learning active listening skills; finding answers to difficult questions; identifying bibliographic resources; and developing strategies to support each other.

Participants reported that the training provided a uniquely helpful opportunity to discuss, question and reflect on sexuality in a safe and supporting climate. They pointed to a sense of mutual respect and comfort when evaluating the training experience.

#### **WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?**

While the group felt their training was helpful, they were still concerned about leading discussions on sexually sensitive issues with others. Two additional steps proved helpful and instrumental.

First, a discussion session was scheduled for the parents of teens. While the consultant helped design and facilitate this meeting, much of the leadership was provided by the Sexuality Resource Persons. This practice, with the assistance of a trusted "expert," helped these individuals bridge the gap between training participant and group facilitator.

Second, a session with the consultant was scheduled several months after the training sessions to allow the Sexuality Resource Persons to talk about issues, concerns, questions, and problems that had come up. Such meetings have continued once a year. In addition, the consultant has made herself available to the Sexuality Resource Persons and the committee by phone and in person when necessary or requested.

Finally, and perhaps most uniquely, the formation of the Sexuality Resource Persons group was affirmed in the church's worship service. Shortly after the training, a Sunday service was dedicated to the theme of "Faith and Sexuality" and members of the Resource Group offered their reflections as part of the sermon. The names of all the Sexuality Resource Persons were listed in the church bulletin, thus affirming the importance of the effort and inviting the congregation to participate in a continuing conversation about faith and sexuality.

## LESSONS LEARNED

In the five years during which the Sexuality Resource Persons have provided leadership, they have become instrumental in developing and implementing learning opportunities about faith and sexuality. They have:

- led discussions on “Faith and Sexuality” for young people in the fifth through twelfth grades.
- led discussions on “Sexuality and the Bible” and “Sexuality Over the Lifespan” for adults.
- designed and facilitated special congregational events, usually held in the evening, on “Faith, Sexuality, and Singleness” and “Faith and Sexuality in Films” (using such films as *The Priest* and *The Last Temptation of Christ*). Pastoral staff facilitated these discussions.
- implemented an event, “Why Is Sexuality So Hard to Talk About?” using guided imagery and small work groups.
- conducted small work groups to discuss readings from the book *Embodiment*.

Those involved in the sexuality education program also learned some lessons from mistakes. As a result of problems they have:

- incorporated the Committee on Sexuality with the Sexuality Resource Group. (Individuals involved with both groups had complained about too many meetings.)
- developed plans to immediately utilize the skills of newly trained Sexuality Resource Persons. (Many newly trained individuals dropped out of the program when they weren’t immediately called upon to participate.)
- developed a method to gather data about the relationship between affirming Sexuality Resource Persons by the congregation and the growth of requests for information. (Such data was not originally collected.)

- formed working groups of Sexuality Resource Persons interested in creating and implementing individual programs/series. (All individuals originally worked together to develop all programs.)

The success of these programs has not eliminated the congregation’s desire to have presenters or facilitators from outside the church. Such programs provide well-attended adjuncts to the ongoing work of the Sexuality Resource Persons, help to identify other areas of interest, and integrate the experience into the ongoing life of the sexuality program of the congregation.

## THE JOURNEY NEVER ENDS

The congregation’s decision to actively explore issues of sexuality in the light of their faith both reflects and affects the life of the congregation. The presence of a Committee on Religion and Sexuality, of Sexuality Resource Persons, and of a strong pastoral support for this effort work together to continually “lift up” issues of faith and sexuality as important and appropriate concerns for the church.

This is perhaps the single most significant aspect of this work, for the exchange between the two “cultures” or “worlds” of sexuality education and congregational life is not a final destination, but an ongoing cycle of planning, exploring, learning, reflecting, resting—and then beginning all over again by determining the next phase of the journey.

*Maggi Boyer, private consultant and director of training and education for Planned Parenthood of Bucks County when this collaboration began, is now on the Board of Directors of that affiliate and still meets with the Committee on Religion and Sexuality. Ann Marie Donohue continues in her leadership role as staff associate at the First United Methodist Church of Germantown. For more information on this program, contact Boyer at 215/340-1743 or Donohue at 215/438-3677.*

## RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY: RESOURCES FOR GAY MEN, LESBIANS, AND BISEXUALS

The Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Task Force of the American Library Association has just updated *Religion and Spirituality: Resources for Gay Men, Lesbians, and Bisexuals*.

The resource is a list of over 300 books followed by a directory of religious organizations and the publications they produce on gay and lesbian issues. It includes these book categories: (1) Christian traditions, (2) Jewish traditions, (3) Eastern religious traditions, (4) alternative viewpoints and journeys, (5) ceremonies and rituals, and (6) historical scholarship.

Order information: Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Task Force Clearinghouse, Office of Outreach Services, American Library Association, 60 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611. Cost is: \$6.00 postpaid.

# CLERGY AS SEXUALITY EDUCATORS: WHAT ARE SEMINARIES DOING? WHAT DO THEY NEED TO DO?

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**G**o Talk to your minister." "Seek the advice of your pastor." "The priest may have a suggestion." "Ask the rabbi." "The chaplain can help." These statements suggest seeking moral counsel and help from religious clergy.

For 153 million members of the Christian faith in the United States belonging to nearly 340,000 churches and served by over 475,000 clergy, religion is an integral part of life.<sup>1</sup> And clergy are often able to provide guidance in beliefs, practices, and moral codes of conduct.

For many people, sexual beliefs and religious beliefs are intertwined. So, too, clergy and laity are linked throughout the life cycle as sexuality issues underlie many of the events, passages, and relationships that religions ritualize and celebrate.

Yet, trends over the past 25 years seem to indicate that help from clergy on sexuality issues is sought less than in the past, and that the help they provide is less highly regarded.<sup>2</sup> These statistics suggest a need for seminaries to give more attention to the issues of sexual health.

According to minister and counselor David Richards: "There is still not a body of data or information that tells us how the seminaries themselves have adapted....A first step in this direction would be a well-planned and carefully designed study of seminary curricula to determine how much or how little attention is being paid to sexuality education, sexual issues, and sexual health among students in the various seminaries and schools of theology throughout the United States."<sup>3</sup>

This article explores the present status and definition of sexuality education within accredited U.S. institutions that provide post-baccalaureate education to students preparing for careers as ordained or licensed religious clergy, including priests, pastors, ministers, rabbis, chaplains, and pastoral counselors. Thirty-nine faculty members who have provided, or are now providing, such clergy training were interviewed in the process.

## SEMINARY SEXUALITY TEACHING TODAY

Sexuality education was broadly defined by the participants to include interpersonal relationships and intimacy; human sexual development; sexual identity (including sexual orientation and gender roles); sexual behavior, and human repro-

duction. Study for clergy also included sexual theology, sexual ethics, clergy roles, ordination, celibacy, and sexual justice.

In general, the participants viewed sexuality education as part of a lifelong process that included not only the learning of facts but the development of attitudes, beliefs, and values from physical, social, emotional, psychological, and spiritual viewpoints.

Specifically, the participants said that sexuality content was not usually identified by name in course titles and descriptions. In fact, such content was often integrated into other courses taught within various disciplines. The sexuality courses were viewed as essential, yet risky, with many institutions and individuals within the various denominations and religions voicing both support and concern.

Some of the participants were reluctant to acknowledge their sexuality teaching experience, and usually identified their courses under such broad headings as ethics, pastoral theology, biblical studies, or liturgics. Those who taught courses with sexuality in the titles were less reluctant than those who incorporated sexuality issues or content into other courses. Some felt that sexuality courses should stand alone. Others felt such content should be integrated throughout the curriculum.

## SUPPORT FOR SEXUALITY EDUCATION

There has been a significant shift in the composition of seminary student bodies over the past 20 years. In general, the current student body is older (with many working full-time while taking courses leading to a career change), more gender balanced and ethnically diverse. Topics now openly addressed include sexual orientation, clergy misconduct, and sexual abuse.<sup>4</sup>

These characteristics were discussed by faculty in relation to their implications for improved sexuality education programs. In fact, the faculty frequently pointed to these demographics when talking of classes that look closely at gender issues as well sexual orientation, sexual violence, ethics, justice, and moral absolutes.

On the negative side, participants indicated that the tendency of their academic communities to follow trends on what is important to teach has caused some reduction in

the number and frequency of courses, more emphasis on biomedical ethics, and a guardedness in responding to student concerns. In addition, curriculum decisions are often based on maintaining faculty positions and the status quo. And, finally, denominational education requirements have increased—often hurting sexuality education’s place in the curriculum.<sup>5</sup>

### A SEARCH FOR REALITY AND BALANCE

A theme of many of the interviews was the search for balance or “some sort of middle ground” from which students could examine both the negative and positive aspects of human sexuality. This “both/and” approach (acknowledging both the need for affirmation concerning sexuality as well as recognizing negative effects of widespread sexual abuse) was a prominent goal.

**Faculty:** What I would want in a course is to deal with definitions. “What is sexuality?” And with social and psychological data about special populations, the disabled...the elderly. There are a lot of seminary students who want to jump...to the value side or to the analytical side. I think we ought to look at both the way sexuality defines healthy existence and at how sexuality becomes negative and destructive. And I also think we ought to spend time on what we hope will be and ought to be and that will affect social policy or churches’ policies or the way we rear children, the way we relate to our spouses or our partners....

One faculty member, who worked with candidates for the priesthood, spoke of students “entering unknown territory” in a sexuality education class and said that, as a result, she provided steadfast guidance.

**Faculty:** I try to downplay the absolute focus of our society on sexuality. We are much more than sexual persons. *But* our sexuality informs every aspect: our ways of being, relating, praying, serving. Toward the end of the course, we began to speak of their role as ministers. There are two things that I weave right through the course—along with love and justice—and that is a sense of one’s own security...built on wholeness and integrity. Is a person secure in his own skin? And how does he relate with individuals as well as groups? What is the space he occupies? Is there fear of his body? Fear of his ego or whatever? Because that’s going to be so important if he is going to lead. To be able to come to his *own* freedom, clarity, and integrity as an individual.

**Faculty:** I really believe there is a fear of letting people process. It’s so much easier to say do this and do that. As many will say to me in the course, “My fear is that you are

going to open a Pandora’s Box.” And I say, “Well, there is going to be somebody here to help you sort it out. But, if you don’t open it now, it *will* open. Mark my words.” I also include many insights about “what is intimacy?” ...to have them own that they are celibates. But [that doesn’t mean that they] give up intimacy. What forms of intimacy are needed for effective ministry, for very supportive friendships? But what are the boundaries of that intimacy? It’s never “I alone” but rather “I...in relationship.” Those are some difficulties I see very clearly.

In her ongoing dialogue, this faculty member eventually identified *fear* as the major cause for resistance to sexuality education, as the profound place from which restrictions and limitations come. However, other participants saw fear (of litigation, of financial loss, of human pain, and of disruption within congregations) as a strong impetus to take action.

**Faculty:** Right now, I feel there’s an almost teachable moment *because* of all the fear related to sexuality these days. The *need* rather than the resistance has been brought to the fore. There’s still plenty of resistance but with more women and others who maybe don’t have quite the resistance as previous generations of seminary faculty...I’m a bit more hopeful.

In this faculty member’s overall view, however, there is an institutional reluctance to provide sexuality education, even in the face of great need. The following participant, who has both written and taught about sexuality throughout his career, framed the issues of resistance around an unwillingness to accept human experience as a valid source for theological reflection.

**Faculty:** I think that some faculty and some institutions are still very wary of admitting experience on the ground floor, and particularly wary of admitting sexual experience because that has all of the additional baggage—volatility, guilt, shame, hurt, as well as ecstasy. You know all the stuff that sexuality brings up.

**Faculty:** If institutions—seminaries and their faculties—cannot see the wisdom of including sexuality education in a very vigorous, up-front way, both theologically and methodologically, maybe they can see it out of institutional survival and self-interest.

### COMPARING PAST AND PRESENT

In the following excerpts, the participants reflected on changes in sexuality education in the course of their careers. Though they all identified an increased emphasis on negative aspects of sexuality, others spoke of the effects of rigid



ideologies, of a focus on problem solving (relating to traumas), and of an effort to develop realistic approaches to sexuality education.

**Faculty:** I think there used to be more optimism about defining images of sexual health. We seemed to be working together—it was a cooperative venture, we learned from each other, we traded strategies, and we felt like we were in it together. Gender politics have made it very difficult to proceed as we were earlier. Men are withdrawing. Women [are not getting] direct feedback about how they're being perceived....gays and lesbians are at a point where the hostilities are sometimes greater than the possibilities. Ideology has become the enemy in many ways. People come to the sexuality course and may never deal with sexuality in terms of images of sexual health. They come with an ideology to impose. There is lots and lots of blaming.

**Faculty:** My sense of what the mission of teaching sexuality ought to be came when I first began. A lot of the students were very inhibited, from somewhat sheltered backgrounds, and I needed to simply help them get in touch with their own sexuality. I really was trying to liberate some of the uptight attitudes that many of them brought to the class. But the longer I worked the more I became aware that, for most people, there's a whole set of problems quite apart from uptight attitudes and inhibitions. There is so much pain and real human agony around sexuality in the average marriage. Not just the dysfunctional relationships, but problems all over the place. The church had a pretty bad record of not responding very realistically, of putting people down who didn't follow the party line. The result was that I gradually moved toward more emphasis on *healthy* versus *unhealthy* and, over the years, toward balancing the two sides. There is now more emphasis on how a pastor can respond. There are horrendous problems that one runs into in parish ministry.

This professor recognized that negative aspects of sexuality have become more prominent in his own awareness and also as a focus for teaching pastors to respond appropriately in ministry. The next excerpt echoed that awareness.

**Faculty:** I think perhaps the most obvious and significant change over the almost 25 years in this particular sexuality course has been our growing awareness of issues of sexual abuse and sexual violence and boundaries. When we first started, our consciousness of sexual abuse issues was pretty low. It has been a gradual kind of thing. We began to incorporate more material, more media, more discussions about sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sexual violence, sexual boundaries—issues around professional clergy responsibility and so forth.

**Faculty:** First, I think one reaction from women students, from gay, lesbian, and bisexual students is relief...that the course shows some care and awareness that these issues are widespread and [that] they are very important. Second, in relating to coming out, we have had an increasing number of personal self-disclosures. Third, my colleagues in leadership and I have tried very hard to say that sexuality is still God's gift. Sexuality—the body—is still sacramental. We can ill afford to be pushed back into an earlier era of fear and silence about sexuality itself. If anything, we need to redouble our efforts to celebrate the incarnate goodness of sexuality. To me, we've got to give a lot of attention to that so that in no way does it—the positive aspect of sexuality—get clouded over or compromised.

### RAISING AWARENESS

One faculty member described activities she used with clergy students to raise their awareness of the political nature of sexuality issues.

**Faculty:** A lot of people would say, "Oh, it's personal. There is nothing political." But then they see how abortion could be legal or illegal by a whim of Congress or a court's order. Sharing by class members indicated some people had abortions but went to other states, whereas others had abortions just after they became legal. There was much awareness that the personal *is* political and vice versa. We can't just say, "It is a private matter and has nothing to do with religion."

**Faculty:** In a workshop on teaching sexuality within church settings, I was saying that we need realistic guidelines people can follow. If people are sexually mature for more than a decade before they are supposed to be sexually active, then we have to teach them about masturbation. I frankly was totally naive about how that would be received.

**Faculty:** Right. I still am very appalled that people have that view—unaccepting of masturbation. I don't know really what they want. Another thing in that workshop...there were three ministers attending who said that they had pregnant teenagers in their churches and they felt partially responsible because they had provided no education. They said they would definitely do sexuality education in their churches the moment they knew that they were moving. That really lit a fire underneath me, and I decided to say to people—and in anything I've done since then—that we should, when we come into a church, say, "When do you have your coffee hour? When do you have your sexuality education? When do you have your bicycle trip?" You know. To treat it as normally as everything else, and to do it coming in, rather than sometime in the middle. I think it is people protecting themselves, willing to let women, basically,

and children suffer huge sufferings because they can't risk a little dip in their popularity as pastors.

Near the end of each interview, faculty members were asked to describe their vision of ideal sexuality education for clergy students. The final question was, "Why isn't the vision happening now? What's keeping it from occurring?"

**Faculty:** Well, one limitation that really doesn't relate to sexuality at all is just the cumbersomeness of having many disciplines teaching a class...gender issues in New Testament, sexuality and the Bible in Old Testament. It is just cumbersome. Now another resistance is the sense of being embarrassed about saying that I want to teach it. I still feel a little odd when I teach sexuality. I say that I am doing this now because there is a need, but I think men should do it because they have avoided talking about it for so long. One barrier is getting people to feel the urgency and the seriousness that it really is a discipline, that it isn't frivolous.

### CONCLUSION

Implications of this study point to the need for balance between the positive and negative aspects of sexuality, and to the integration (rather than the separation) of concepts, methods, and disciplines. Such efforts should probably avoid developing a single unified model of sexuality education for all clergy. Rather, educational efforts should acknowledge varied providers, methods, and resources. Finally, there is a continuing need to legitimize sexuality education as a necessary and useful part of seminary and theological school training for both personal enhancement and effective performance of clergy roles. The goal of ongoing interaction among involved experts may lead to openly naming and articulating the pervasiveness of sexuality concerns for all theological education.

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### CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The *SIECUS Report* welcomes articles, reviews, or critical analyses from interested individuals. Detailed instructions for authors appear on the inside back cover of this issue. Upcoming issues of the *SIECUS Report* include:

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*February/March 1998 issue.*

Deadline for final copy: December 1, 1997

#### **Sexual Orientation**

*April/May 1998 issue.*

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#### **Sexuality Education Worldwide**

*June/July 1998 issue.*

Deadline for final copy: April 1, 1998

#### **Sexuality and the Law**

*August/September 1998 issue.*

Deadline for final copy: June 1, 1998

# THE SEXUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAMS OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND DENOMINATIONS

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**B**ecause Americans hold few things more strongly than faith in God<sup>1</sup>—with 95 percent believing in God, 82 percent considering themselves religious, and 44 percent attending religious services each week<sup>2</sup>—it is only logical that they look to their churches and synagogues for leadership on moral and ethical issues, including sexuality issues.

Yet many young people do not go to their parents or their clergy when they are seeking information on sexuality issues. They say that asking parents is “not a comfortable fit,” that “she wouldn’t know what to say,” that “he’d kill me if I asked.” They also reject the idea of going to clergy because they only respond with unhelpful comments like “be careful,” “just say no,” or “don’t do it.”

With increasing frequency, many religious groups and denominations are developing sexuality education curricula specifically for young people and their families. They are all based on the Bible, individual doctrines, and a shared belief that sexuality is God’s good gift to use with reverence and joy. They often differ, however, on such issues as nonmarital sexual intercourse (especially relating to gays and lesbians), abortion, contraception, and other issues.

Most of the curricula are not mandated within congregations. Without such a mandate, they are of value only if they are incorporated into the local congregations’ programs. As a result, coverage is spotty and often depends on the interest of the clergy and the availability of qualified leaders.

Selected sexuality education curricula and studies that are currently available are reviewed in this article.

## **American Baptist Churches, U.S.A.**

*Family Life Education, A Course for Parents* is for parents of children between the ages of three and 12 and is also suitable for grandparents, child care workers, and teachers. The plan calls for 12 hours of instruction to help young people explore and understand their own sexuality. The Bible is used to help them gain an understanding of God’s hopes for people as sexual and spiritual beings. There are lesson plans, handouts, discussion tools, and guidelines for talking with children.

Judson Publishing, P.O. Box 851, Valley Forge, PA. 19482-0851. Phone: 800/458-3766.

## **The Assemblies of God**

*The Bible and Sexuality Program* is designed for younger and older teens. Lesson plans for the younger group include:

“How Fearfully and Wonderfully We Are Made,” “Dating As Fun or Frustration,” “Love As More Than a Feeling,” and “Christians and Sexuality.” Factual information about sexual development is not included. Marriage is seen as the only venue for sexual intimacy. Lesson plans for the older group include: “Watching Out for Lust,” “Immorality Destroys,” “When Two Become One,” “Dating 101,” and “Saying No Under Pressure.” Each session is based in scripture. Anatomy is not discussed. Homosexuality is seen as a practice against nature that has resulted in the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

*The General Council of the Assemblies of God, 1445 Boonville Avenue, Springfield, MO 65802. Phone: 800/641-4310.*

## **Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

This denomination has no national sexuality education program. Instead, each local congregation decides what it wishes to teach. Upon request, the national office will distribute bibliographies and will assist local congregations in finding speakers and discussion leaders.

130 East Washington Street, P.O. Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46201-1986. Phone: 317/635-3100.

## **Episcopal Church**

*Sexuality: A Divine Gift—A Sacramental Approach to Human Sexuality and Family Life* is a guide for leaders that covers such subjects as values, gender roles, sexual behaviors, options open to Christians, and decision making. The premise is that sexuality is a good and essential part of a person’s being and that individuals must make responsible choices in expressing it. The guide states that the church has until now emphasized sin and morality rather than accepting sexuality as a gift and that, as a result, it has created barriers against some families.

Education for Mission and Ministry Unit, The Episcopal Church Center, 815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017. 212/867-8400

## **Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod**

*Learning About Sex: A Series for the Christian Family* is for parents who are defined as the primary sexuality educators of their children. *How to Talk Comfortably with Your Children About Sex...and Appreciate Your Own* emphasizes the importance of a personal understanding of adult sexuality and behaviors. *Why Boys and Girls Are Different* is for ages three to five. *Where Do*

*Babies Come From?* is for ages six to eight. *How You Are Changing* is for ages eight to 11 as well as for parents. *Sex and the New You* is for ages 11 to 14. *Love, Sex and God* is for ages 14 to young adult. Each of the books in the series cites specific scripture as the basis for the content.

Concordia Publishing House, 3558 South Jefferson Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63118-3968. Phone: 800/-325-3040.

### **Mennonite Church General Conference**

*Sex: God's Great Idea* includes seven sessions that start with two teenagers interviewing characters in a Bible story. Adam and Eve are examples of God's goodness. Samson and Delilah are examples of the betrayal of trust when overcome with lust. The plan is to connect the stories to student experiences and apply them to real life. *Teens and Sexuality: Resources for Working with Youth in the Church* covers eight areas of human sexuality. The goal is for parents to become comfortable in helping their children make decisions about their sexual behaviors. Topics include self-acceptance, relationships, values, sexual relations outside marriage, choosing marriage or singleness, unwanted pregnancy, and sexual abuses. Each unit includes related Bible study, worksheets, a glossary, and definitions of key terms.

Faith and Life Press, Box 347, Newton, KS 67114. Phone: 316/283-5100

### **Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and Reformed Church in America**

*God's Gift of Sexuality* is referenced to specific scripture passages and to official statements of each of the two denominations. It includes six sessions for fifth through eighth graders starting with anatomy and physiology and moving to puberty, relationships and intimacy, sexual crises, values and decision making, and, finally, to communication between parents and youth. It also includes ten sessions for ninth through twelfth graders including sexuality, intimacy, identity, reproduction, contraception, STDs, parenthood, sexualism, and decision making. *God's Plan for Growing Up Wonderfully Made* is for children in grades two and three, and *Amazing Stuff* is for those in grades four and five. Both are designed to help children see sexuality as a natural and healthy part of God's plan for their lives, and to help parents gain confidence for, and understanding of, their role as primary sexuality educators and role models for their children. All are designed for at-home use. An additional resource, *Listening In*, is a tape to help parents talk with their children about sexuality.

Presbyterian Publishing House, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202. Phone: 800/227-2872.

### **Roman Catholic Church**

*Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning* is designed to guide diocesan leaders in

their work with parents and church-related institutions related to human sexuality. It includes a framework for building programs for different age levels from early childhood to adulthood. The five chapters discuss sexuality as a wonderful gift and awesome responsibility. Special issues include responsible parenthood, celibacy, singleness, masturbation, homosexuality, sexual abuse, and sexual dysfunction. The message is to recognize the church's vision of each person as sexual and chaste. *Parents Talk Love: The Catholic Family Handbook About Sexuality* discusses myths and realities with practical suggestions for parents. *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education Within the Family* discusses love, chastity and marriage, and outlines the different stages in child development. Parents are held responsible for their children's sexual development whether taught at home or in educational centers.

United States Catholic Conference, 3211 Fourth Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20017. Phone: 202/541-3000. Paulist Press, 997 MacArthur Boulevard, Mahwah, NJ 07430. Phone: 201/825-7300.

### **The Salvation Army**

*Bridging the Gap Between Youth and Community Services: A Life Skills Education Program* is based in the belief that young people will make good decisions about their lives if they have help from caring and supportive adults. Although designed for young people 12 to 18, these lessons are also used by older and younger age groups. The program centers on the skills young people need to reach their goals. It places their sexuality in the total context of their lives and asks such questions as: "Who am I?" "How do I relate to my family and to others?" "What about my health?" "My education?" "Employment?" "Parenthood?" "Marriage?" "Sexual intimacy?" They also learn about community resources. *Getting to Know You: Personal Relationships with the Opposite Sex* is a peer leadership program where older teenagers help younger ones understand their sexuality and sexual behaviors. Discussion covers such subjects as what to look for in a friend, where to turn for help, dating, marriage and children. *Sex: A Christian Perspective* is a four-session program for teenagers to help them understand their sexuality, the virtues of abstinence until marriage, how to say no, and the dangers of promiscuity.

The Salvation Army Social Services Department, 440 West Nyack Road, West Nyack, NY 10994. Phone: 914/620-7383.

### **The Southern Baptist Convention Sunday School Board**

*The Christian Sex Education Set* includes programs for four age levels plus one for married adults and a guide for leaders and parents. All are designed for use at home after an orientation session at church. *Boys and Girls—Alike and Different*

is for ages four to seven. *My Body and Me* is for grades one to three. *Sex! What's That?* is for grades four to six. *Sexuality: God's Gift* is for adolescents. *Celebrating Sex In Your Marriage* is for adults. The information in each is age specific and includes the physical aspects of sexuality, responsibility for one's body, and moral values and decision making. The stress is on abstinence, chastity, sexual discipline, and self-respect. The parents' guide includes information about contraception for optional discussion with children. *True Love Waits* is for teenagers and college students. The message is abstinence until marriage. There are posters, logos, T-shirts, rings, pendants, and mugs to announce and support the pledge signers. There are lesson plans for family worship, for forming a campus club and ideas for church worship.

*The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 127 Ninth Avenue, Nashville, TN 37234. Phone: 800/LUV-WAIT.*

### **Union of American Hebrew Congregations**

*Love, Sex and Marriage: A Jewish View* is a supplemental guide for local congregations to use in religious schools and with youth groups. *Looking at Sexuality: Educating for Life Style Choices* is another useful guide. It includes a glossary of Jewish values and guidelines for parents and teachers when talking with children. Topics include self esteem, homosexuality, child abuse, assertiveness training, and moral and practical issues in birth control. Sexuality is seen as a gift from God to be used responsibly as part of a committed, caring relationship.

*Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 838 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021. Phone: 212/249-0100.*

### **Unitarian Universalist Association and United Church of Christ, Board for Homeland Ministries**

*Our Whole Lives (OWL): A Lifespan Sexuality Education Series* is a new comprehensive program for use in religious settings. It is for grades K-1, 4-5, 7-9, senior high, and adults. It is currently undergoing field tests and is scheduled for availability in 1999-2000. The programs call for specially trained leaders as well as parent involvement. Grades 7-9 is the centerpiece calling for 30 two-hour sessions with a comprehensive approach to participants' needs and preparation for a healthy and meaningful future. The senior high program has six to eight sessions, and the adult program has 12 sessions. All are based on a holistic—including physical, spiritual, emotional, and cultural—view of sexuality. They call for respect, compassion, justice and action—all needed to combat the impact of shame- and fear-based curricula. The national office does not mandate programs but will help local congregations as they develop sexuality education programs. The new curricula reflect the religious traditions and heritage of both denominations. Each will issue supplemental materials specific to their religious faiths.

*Unitarian Universalist Association, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108. Phone: 617/742-2100.*

*United Church of Christ, Board for Homeland Ministries, 700 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115. 216/736-3282.*

### **The United Methodist Church**

*Before They Ask: Talking About Sex From a Christian Perspective* is for parents of children from birth through age 12. It stresses the importance of the family as primary sexuality educators and suggests ways to build self-esteem in each child. It covers sexual development, often-asked questions, sexual abuse, language, homosexuality, media portrayals, and STDs. *Created By God: About Human Sexuality for Older Boys and Girls* is for fifth and sixth grades. It stresses that sexuality education starts at home and encourages parents to discuss the course content with their children. The program begins with the story of Jesus. Adam and Eve are the example of the differences between male and female and of the need for companionship. It also includes discussions on masturbation, homosexuality, abuse, STDs, teenage pregnancy, the media, and prostitution. *Our Sexuality: God's Good Gift* is for ages 12 to 15 and includes information about biology, decision-making, sexuality, and feelings. Additional optional sessions are about dating, erotica, the media, sexual abuse, and STDs. *Male and Female Blessed by God* is for young people in grades 10 to 12. It includes six sessions and four optional ones on dating, the media, pornography, the family, and seeking help. *Sexuality: Stewards of God's Good Gift* is for adult discussion. The program focuses on people learning to enjoy their sexuality and each other.

*The United Methodist Church Publishing House, 201 Eighth Avenue, Nashville, TN 37202. Phone: 800/672-1789.*

### **STUDY GROUPS**

Issues related to human sexuality—including questions on abortion, ordination of women, gays/lesbians, and sexual behaviors outside marriage—are on the agendas of many Christian denominations.

Special study committees or commissions prepare reports and suggest recommendations for their governing bodies. This process is in itself an education program in human sexuality as congregations take part in the discussions. There are no quick answers, with reports generally returned for more study.

### **The Episcopal Church**

*Continuing the Dialogue: A Pastoral Teaching of the House of Bishops to the Church As the Church Considers Issues of Human Sexuality.* Started in 1976 when questions of recognizing or advocating for practicing homosexuals were first raised at the General Convention, this study committee has since added other topics including divorce and remarriage, the

ordination of women, and sex outside marriage. In agreeing to continue the dialogue, the current report notes the need “to respect both the unity and the diversity of our communion...[and to] hold paramount the belief that we are all loved equally by God and are called to love one another.” As one contribution to the continuing dialogue, the Society of St. John the Evangelist published *Our Selves, Our Souls, and Bodies* in 1996 as a collection of 17 essays written by church leaders. Each includes questions for more discussion. As the church moves toward dialogue through ongoing study and discussion with local congregations, some bishops are proceeding with the ordination of women and of gays and lesbians in keeping with the accepted authority of bishops.

### **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

In response to requests from the Churchwide Assembly, the Division for Church in Society has prepared a series of reports as the denomination seeks consensus. The 1996 report, *The Message on Sexuality—Some Common Convictions* is more limited in topics than earlier documents. It addresses consensus on the need for information and understanding, singleness, marriage, children, divorce, adultery, erotica, and the media. It has not, however, reached such consensus on homosexuality. Plans now call for discussion and debate throughout the church.

### **Mennonite Church**

The Triennial Session of 1980 called for a study of human sexuality. A report, *Human Sexuality in the Christian Life*, was presented at the General Assembly in 1985 as a working document for study and dialogue among local congregations. The charge was “to face issues and questions regarding our understanding of sexuality which is consistent with the Bible,” including intimacy, marriage, singleness, heterosexual and homosexual relationships, and ethical decision making. Based on this, resolutions were passed at the Triennial Sessions in 1986 and by the General Assembly in 1987. They each affirmed that “sexuality is a good and beautiful gift of God, a gift of identity, and a way of being in the world as male and female.” The resolutions called for openness and honesty, repentance for judgmental attitudes, and reservation for sexual intercourse to a man and woman married to each other.

### **Presbyterian Church U.S.A.**

The study *Presbyterians and Human Sexuality* started in 1988 to review and update previous General Assembly studies of human sexuality dating from 1967. Local congregations were encouraged to take part in finding answers to a series

of questions: “Can we trust the Bible’s teaching on sexuality matters?” “Why did God make two sexes?” “With all of the changes in society, how can the church even think of limiting sexual relations to marriage?” “If sex is God’s good gift, why are so many people troubled by it?” “What does the Bible say about homosexuality?” “What does modern science teach about sexual orientation?” The 1991 report to the General Assembly is thoroughly documented with a review of church history and tradition, official and other studies and reports, Bible citations and various interpretations, and an extensive bibliography. Succeeding General Assemblies have continued the discussion—particularly on questions of ordination of persons who are sexually active outside a heterosexual marriage.

### **OTHER RESOURCES**

Although not denominationally identified, two books from religious writers are extensively used in church study groups and elsewhere: *Sex Is NOT a Four Letter Word, Talking Sex with Your Children Made Easier* (Crossroads Publishing, New York, NY, \$14.95), and *Sex for Christians, The Limits and Liabilities of Sexual Living* (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, \$12.00).

In the first, Patricia Martens Miller calls on parents to help children with their sexuality within “a framework of spirituality, values, morals, and loving relationships found within faith-filled families, a sexuality that is God-centered rather than self-centered.”

The second, by Lewis B. Smedes of the Fuller Theological Seminary faculty, is for individual and group study. The three units of the book cover human sexuality—its goodness, sinful distortions, and redeemed potential; specific problems of right and wrong; and marriage. The book gives a Bible-based “Christian perspective for a truly human sexual life.” It also deals with adultery, extramarital sexual relations, masturbation, and sexual orientation. Dr. Smedes calls for knowledge, discernment, and love.

*Elma Cole has long worked for the Salvation Army—first as a staff member and later as a consultant on sexuality issues. She is a member of the SIECUS Board of Directors.*

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## ADOLESCENCE AND ABSTINENCE

**A**dolescents should be encouraged to delay sexual behaviors until they are physically, cognitively, and emotionally ready for mature sexual relationships and their consequences. Comprehensive sexuality education programs offer them a wide range of information while abstinence-only programs focus exclusively on abstinence until marriage. This Fact Sheet presents current statistics on adolescence and abstinence as well as research on both education approaches.

### STATISTICS

- More than half of teenagers are virgins until they are at least 17 years of age.<sup>1</sup>
- By the time they reach the age of 20, 20 percent of boys and 24 percent of girls have not had sexual intercourse.<sup>2</sup>
- The largest study of adult sexual behavior found that only 6.9 percent of men and 21 percent of women aged 18 to 59 had their first intercourse on their wedding night.<sup>3</sup>
- Many virgins are sexually involved. In one study of urban students in the ninth through the twelfth grades, 47 percent were virgins. More than a third of virgin male and female adolescents had engaged in some form of heterosexual genital sexual activity in the past year:
  - 29 percent of virgins had engaged in masturbation of a partner of the opposite gender.
  - 31 percent had been masturbated by a partner of the opposite gender.
  - 9 percent had engaged in fellatio with ejaculation with a partner of the opposite gender.
  - 10 percent had engaged in cunnilingus with a partner of the opposite gender.
  - 1 percent had engaged in anal intercourse with a partner of the opposite gender.<sup>4</sup>

### COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION

- Helping adolescents to postpone sexual intercourse until they are ready for mature relationships is a key goal of comprehensive sexuality education.<sup>5</sup> Such education has always included information about abstinence.
- Interventions that are effective in encouraging teenagers to postpone sexual intercourse help them develop the interpersonal skills to resist premature sexual involvement. Effective programs include a strong abstinence message as well as information about contraception and

safer sex. For interventions to be most effective, teenagers need these programs before initiating intercourse.<sup>6</sup>

- In a 1993 study, SIECUS found that abstinence was among the topics most often covered in state curricula and guidelines along with families, decision making, and sexually transmitted diseases and HIV. The topics least likely covered included sexual identity and orientation, shared sexual behavior, sexual response, masturbation, and abortion.<sup>7</sup>
- Sexuality education does not encourage teens to start having sexual intercourse, increase the frequency of intercourse, or increase the number of sexual partners.<sup>8</sup>
- Teenagers who start having intercourse following a sexuality education program are more likely to use contraception than those who have not participated in a program.<sup>9</sup>

### ABSTINENCE-ONLY EDUCATION

- To date, six studies of abstinence-only programs have been published. None found consistent and significant program effects on delaying the onset of intercourse. At least one provided strong evidence that the program did not delay the onset of intercourse. Thus, the weight of evidence indicates that these abstinence-only programs do not delay the onset of intercourse.<sup>10</sup>
- A study of 7,326 seventh and eighth graders in California who participated in an abstinence-only program found that the program did not have a measurable impact upon either sexual or contraceptive behaviors.<sup>11</sup>
- Nearly two-thirds of teenagers think teaching “Just Say No” is an ineffective deterrent to teenage sexual activity.<sup>12</sup>
- The National Institutes of Health’s Consensus Panel on AIDS says that abstinence-only education “places policy in direct conflict with science and ignores overwhelming evidence that other programs (are) effective.”<sup>13</sup>

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## RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AFFILIATED WITH HIV/AIDS SERVICE GROUPS

Over 2,000 community-based HIV/AIDS service organizations are affiliated with religious communities. These may direct you to local affiliates and resources.

**Buddhist AIDS Network** provides resources and pastoral counseling to people with HIV/AIDS.

15 Washington Place, #4E, New York, NY 10003. Phone: 212/674-0832. Fax: 212/998-1898. Web site: <http://www.itp.tsoa.nyu.edu/~faculty/pato/index.htm>

**The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National AIDS Clearinghouse** publishes a resource guide with information concerning religious communities and HIV/AIDS.

Phone: 800/458-5231. Fax: 301/738-6616. Web site: <http://www.cdcnac.org>

**Committee on AIDS of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations/Central Conference of American Rabbis** provides referrals to local congregations.

2027 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Phone: 202/232-4343. Fax: 202/483-6550.

**DIGNITY/USA National AIDS Project** provides referrals, advocacy, spiritual companionship and healing services for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics with HIV/AIDS.

1500 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20005. Phone: 800/877-8797 or 202/861-0017. Fax: 202/429-9808. Web Site: <http://www.dignityusa.org>

**Islamic Wellness Institute of North America** provides wellness and nutritional counseling and referrals about natural treatments for AIDS. It also provides individual and family counseling.

P.O. Box 39, Rego Park, NY 11374. Phone: 718/271-8520.

**National Catholic AIDS Network** provides referrals, education and support services for people with AIDS.

P.O. Box 422984, San Francisco, CA 94142. Phone: 707/874-3031. Fax: 707/874-1433. Web site: <http://www.ncan.org>

**Unitarian Universalist Association AIDS Action and Information Program** provides educational materials, general AIDS information, and referrals.

25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108. Phone: 617/742-2100. Fax: 617/523-4123.

**United Methodist HIV/AIDS Ministries Network** offers pastoral support, referrals, and worship/liturgical resources.

475 Riverside Drive, Room 350, New York, NY 10115. Phone: 212/870-3909. Fax: 212/749-2641.

**Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches AIDS Ministry** provides spiritual guidance, comfort and practical support.

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**THE GOOD BOOK:  
READING THE BIBLE  
WITH HEART AND MIND**

Reverend Peter Gomes  
William Morrow & Company Inc.  
New York, NY  
1996, 383 pp.  
\$25.00/hardcover

*The Good Book* is a thought-provoking explication of the Bible. In it, Reverend Gomes, who has been the Plummer Professor of Christian Morals at Harvard University since 1974, introduces the reader to the world of semantics, theories, and interpretation as they relate to the Bible. He sets the stage for this discussion by stating that biblical literacy is extremely rare in our country and that there is a real need to reconceptualize how the Bible fits in our modern lives.

Gomes explains that the Bible is an essential document dealing with the intimate relationship between human beings and God. He discusses the ever-evolving role of the Bible in American politics and culture and how the interpretations of the Bible have changed over the centuries. He urges the reader to understand the culture and climate of the time in each interpretation. In the process, he warns the reader about literalism, fidelity to the written word; bibliolatry, raising the Bible to the status of an idol; and culturism, a term he coined to explain biblical application to support current cultural biases.

He urges readers to remember theologian Malcolm Tolbert's message: that one of the most fundamental mistakes people make in reading the Bible is to assume that the structures and the systems it describes are as sacred and authoritative as the principles it affirms.

*The Good Book* is divided into three sections: "Opening the Bible" relates the Bible to interpretations and the usage of those interpretations in America; "The Use and Abuse of the Bible" is an historical account of the application of the Bible to explain how it has been used to oppress certain groups; and "The True and Lively

Word" approaches issues such as wealth, the good life, evil, science, and joy. It explains to the reader how to make the Bible part of everyday living.

Reverend Gomes offers readers an opportunity to consider the Bible as an instrument of inclusiveness, opening the door for those who have suffered discrimination at its hands through its misuse.

The publication extends an invitation to gays, lesbians, African-Americans, and women who are trying to make sense of the Bible to embark in the search of a good life while using it as a guide.

*The reviewer is Felix Gardon, SIECUS outreach coordinator.*

**SEXUALITY AND  
THE SACRED, SOURCES  
FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

James B. Nelson and  
Sandra P. Longfellow, editors  
Westminster/John Knox Press  
Louisville, KY  
1993, 406 pp.  
\$24.99/paperback

I have long searched for a validation of my beliefs that sexuality is a God-given gift and that churches throughout history had been responsible for many misunderstandings that have caused people to disconnect and to unfairly judge issues related to sexuality.

This book, *Sexuality and the Sacred, Sources for Theological Reflection*, is a series of essays by theologians who examine issues related to sexuality. It has helped me in my search.

The writers first discuss balancing the sources of the Bible to reach an understanding of sexuality. In the process, they introduce the concept that sexuality and spirituality are inseparable since both are avenues for people to connect in relationships.

They then discuss how, over time, sexuality and spirituality have separated from each other even though, at the present time, people are struggling to bring them back together. Eros, the personification of

love in all its aspects, is distinguished from sex and erotica (described as only one paradigm for Eros). Sexism is compared to racism in interesting ways.

There is then a discussion of the sexual issues most divisive within churches today—those related to gender and sexual orientation. They point out that *all* people should receive full human affirmation and respect within their churches. They also suggest that there is difficulty in "hating the sin but loving the sinner."

In discussing AIDS, the writers show God as caring and sharing in pain and suffering. They say that ministries to people with AIDS, if they claim to reflect God's concern, must tangibly show that God will not abandon people or a world in distress.

This book is an excellent resource for those still struggling to fit their personal sexuality into the context of a religious group, or those who are challenged by conservative religious families or acquaintances who are not open to new insights into the nature and will of God.

*The reviewer is Elaine L. Edge, M.S., a private consultant with Cutting Edge Educational Associates in Hot Springs Village, AR.*

**WE WERE BAPTIZED TOO:  
CLAIMING GOD'S GRACE  
FOR LESBIANS AND GAYS**

Marilyn Bennett Alexander  
and James Preston  
Westminster John Knox Press  
Louisville, KY  
1996, 139 pp.  
\$17.00/paperback

In his introduction to this excellent book, Desmond M. Tutu, Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, says:

"...we claim that sexuality is a divine gift, which used properly, helps us to become more fully human and akin really to God, as it is this part of our humanity that makes us more gentle and caring, more self-giving and concerned for others than we would be without that gift...."

“Why should we want all homosexual persons not to give expression to their sexuality in loving acts? Why don’t we use the same criteria to judge same-sex relationships that we use to judge whether heterosexual relationships are wholesome or not?...

“I was left deeply disturbed by these inconsistencies and knew that the Lord of the Church would not be where his church is in this matter. Can we act quickly to let the gospel imperatives prevail as we remember our baptism and theirs, and be thankful?”

The authors—Marilyn Bennett Alexander, a consultant on community building and spiritual renewal at Southern Methodist University, and James Preston, an

outreach coordinator for the Reconciling Congregation Program in Chicago—are gay and faithful to their churches. Yet, they have written a searing indictment of those churches that pledge to accept, love, forgive, and nurture their newly baptized members while selectively forcing their lesbian and gay members into silence, alienation, and doubt. In the process, they have challenged churches to take seriously their understanding of baptism and communion as a means of grace, justice, and liberation.

The book is divided into five sections: “We Remember Our Baptism” (the authors talk about their faith); “Silenced: Stories of Exclusion and Pain” (others tell their stories); “Strangers: Stories of

Judgment” (others discuss their isolation); “Do This in Remembrance of Us” (the authors talk about the importance of open gays and lesbians belonging to their church); and “And Be Thankful” (the authors talk about ways to work toward a church of inclusion).

One verse from the Bible describes the feeling of inclusion that the authors want from their church. It is: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God...” (*Eph. 2:19*).

*The reviewer is Rachel T. Schroeder, a writer and consultant from Washington, DC.*

## SIECUS BIBLIOGRAPHY ON RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Religion can play a significant role in promoting an understanding of sexuality as an affirming expression of equality, mutual respect, caring, and love.

Religious groups and spiritual leaders can become more involved in sexuality education and in promoting the sexual health of their constituents, including those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, young, elderly, ill, or with physical, cognitive, or emotional disabilities.

SIECUS’s “Religion, Spirituality, and Sexuality: An Annotated Bibliography of Organizations and Available Materials” is designed to provide information that they—as well as parents, educators, and the general public—can use to better understand the positive relationship between religion, sexuality, and spirituality.

The bibliography is divided into these categories: (1) general information, (2) ethics, (3) parents, (4) youth, (5) sexual orientation, (6) curricula for religious settings, and (7) organizations/Web sites.

The bibliography is available at no charge on the SIECUS Web site (<http://www.siecus.org>) or for \$2.00 each by writing to SIECUS Publications at 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 350, New York, NY 10036-7802.