



Thinking about Divorce

Grace: More than Forgiveness of Sins

by Kenneth Cauthen

Some years ago a prominent Christian educator proposed a ritual for use in church for those who had undergone a divorce. If memory serves me, the focus was on the confession of sin by the parties involved. I had just gone through a painful divorce. At the time I remember thinking that I would be willing to confess my sins publicly but not if that were all there were to it. I would insist on some acknowledgment that I tried my very best to do the right thing. I had agonized for years, spent time in prayer seeking guidance, had engaged in counseling, had frequently cried my heart out, had thought about

the alternatives for years. I finally came to the sad conclusion through “blood, sweat, and tears” that separation was the best solution, despite all the suffering it caused me, my wife, and my children. There was no ill will on anybody’s part, no intention to hurt anyone. On the contrary, I took everybody’s welfare into account as well as I could and sought for the optimal course of action under the circumstances. A sinner, yes. But is that all there was to it? No, there was more.

The moral situation of human beings is complex. Sometimes it is not enough to say that an act is right or wrong. It may be ambiguous, meaning that the best decision possible may cause harm and do good. More must still be said.

Good and evil, right and wrong may be involved but do not exhaust the reality. In these cases we must refer to the tragic. This is the dimension most missed when moral choices are analyzed.

The tragic is itself a complex reality. Here I want to focus on a particular aspect of the whole. Imagine a man we will call Sam who marries Marie, a woman he deeply loves. He wants a family life and to have children. He has some hesitation because he thinks he may be gay. But he is sure that marriage will relieve him of this anxiety, and he is deeply attracted to his bride in every way, including sexually. They marry and in time have children. All seems to be going well and they are happy. Then over a period of time Sam becomes strangely disquieted as he comes to realize that his homosexual tendency is deeper than he thought, that marriage has not resolved his uncertainties in the way he had hoped. Marie seems perfectly content, so he proceeds in good faith.

Then Sam meets Joe in a business meeting and is immediately attracted. The feeling is mutual, and over time they develop a friendship that evolves into something deeper with a strong sexual component. He realizes that he has found his authentic destiny. What will he do? What should Sam do?

Sam stood before a preacher and in all sincerity took vows to be faithful for better or worse until death. Marie is happy, knows nothing about the inner torment her husband is undergoing. Although his love for his wife remains as strong as ever, Sam is deeply troubled, anxious, depressed, begins to lose sleep, and eventually begins to fail at his

Perfect Love Casts Out Fear

by Kevin Rose

“No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and God’s love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in God and God in us.... There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear....” I John 4:12, 13 a, 18a

In a full theater on New Years Eve, we sat with anticipation for the showing of *Brokeback Mountain*. Little did I know that an emotional tidal wave would sweep off the screen and flood my heart and mind. Without warning I fell into a love story strong and passionate. But it was a love that was never perfected or brought to full fruition because of fear: external fear, internalized fear, taught fear, blatant fear, subtle fear, FEAR.

Oh the emotions! Making it out of the theater to the car was difficult. I sat in

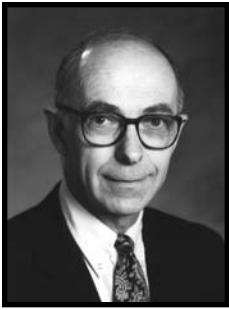


Kevin Rose

silence as my spouse drove, stunned by the deep sadness, an increasingly sick-to-my-stomach feeling, and finally the emotions all welled up into uncontrolled sobs. And then, slowly, the anger began to surface. Its source was deep. Its focus was wide, from self to the vast domination systems that rule the world. But this was a *LOVE* story – why were my emotions running through fields of sadness, fear, and anger rather than fields of daisies? Perhaps because this story spoke truth deeply rather than trite Disney. Running through emotional mine fields, I did reach the climactic point of embrace, but it was no clichéd rapturous hug. Rather, I found myself

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Editorial

“Behold the Days Are Coming...” Part 1

by H. Darrell Lance

Although by nature, I tend to a grumpy, curmudgeonly temperament, I find an uncharacteristic optimism invading my psyche these days. Assuming that the current opening to God’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (lgbt) people will not close in some cataclysmic social reversal (fears from my pessimistic side), I foresee a number of ways in which the whole church will benefit from the impact of gay liberation. So for my final two editorials, I thought I would climb out on a limb and look ahead at some of the ways that “gay” liberation will benefit the church as a whole.

One of the major benefits for the church will be a healthier, more theologically astute attitude toward all of sexuality. A major reason that homosexuality is such a problem for the church is that sexuality in general is a problem for the church. If you ask most Christians about the relationship between sexuality and spirituality, they will stare back at you like the proverbial deer in the headlights. Christian sexual ethics, at least until modern times, has followed St. Augustine and rationalized the pleasure of sex by saying that it is necessary for procreation. It is permitted to enjoy the act since it is a sort of bonus on the way to achieving the *real* purpose of sex which is to produce the next generation. But what are we to think about the pleasures of sex when procreation is not involved? Before being chosen as the current Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams was a professor of theology at Oxford University. Speaking before the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement in Britain, he suggested that same-sex love can help all Christians

recover a sense of joy in sexuality. He proposed that one reason there is such obsession with same-sex relations in our culture is because same-sex relations “annoyingly pose the question of the meaning of desire in itself.” Does the pleasure of sex have theological significance? Why did God create women capable of orgasm? Reproduction is certainly possible without it, as I suspect many women can testify. Did God create sex as much for joy as for procreation? As shocking as these questions may sound today, I imagine that in a hundred years, thanks to gay and feminist insights, the church will be much more comfortable with them.

A second benefit from gay theology will be the strengthening of family values. Since the rhetoric of the traditionalist position is precisely the opposite, namely, that the gay movement is weakening the family, this may take some explaining.

I suppose every experienced counselor has had to confront the situation described by Dr. Cauthen in his article in this issue. A man or woman comes to the counselor in deep depression. They have realized that their true sexual orientation is toward their own gender. Although they love their spouse as a person, a physical relationship with the spouse has become impossible, to the deprivation of them both. The counselee is miserable, depressed, and – typically the husband – perhaps acting out their fantasies in surreptitious sexual encounters, putting themselves and their spouse in danger of contracting HIV or some other STD. What is to be done?

I’m not a therapist, but I am personally aware of so many cases of this sort

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A Plea for Mercy

by Beverly Ann Starling

Oh God of Mercy . . . Please don't let her be one of "them!"
Why didn't I see all those years ago when that stubborn child
so hated skirts and could not make a choice at 13 years
between a lacy bra and a B-B gun, and so we bought them both.

Oh God of Mercy . . . She was once engaged and had a ring
And then it was all over – she a Baptist, he staunchly raised
a Polish Catholic and baby of the family.
We thought it ideology – a conflict of theology –
And still I could not see that it was she, who loving him too much
to see him hurt on down the road, or children ruined
by the load of learning that the one who was their mother
was one of "them" who had rather been their father.

Oh God of Mercy . . . She believes in you, accepts your Son as Savior,
Was baptized and sang within our family as we traveled much
from church to church – The Singing Starlings –
blessing, praising, ministering to so many;
How can I now believe that she is doomed
because an X and Y genetic cross within my womb
condemn her now to hell?

Oh God of Mercy . . . She who sang Amazing Grace
at the funeral of my mother with her hand so lightly resting
on the shoulder of an atheistic cousin,
shook him from his head to feet with such a frightening power
that he had never felt before;
How can your power pass with such intensity
through one who now is destined to be
cast into the flames for an eternity?

NO GOD! Take me. I brought her to this world. Blame me.
Yet I believe that sexuality, be it hetero or homo
or a combination of the two
contain those who are evil and depraved and those
who are spirit-filled and try to lead a holy life.

Oh God of Mercy, God of Justice, Creator God,
Who knew us each before our birth,
Accept us who believe and keep us free from those
who would imprison us in legalism and willful ignorance.
Halt this Inquisition which would torture, maim and kill once more.

Oh God of Mercy . . . I implore you
to accept all souls who place their trust in You –
All who are reviled, who others call defiled;
Hold them in the circle of your love –
let them not be harmed while encircled in Your arms.

For You are God and Father of us all.
This I must believe, for I have heard your call
to defend these members of your flock, whom others mock.

This I must believe, or I cannot believe in You at all.

Rev. Dr. JoAnne Juett to Become Editor of *The InSpiriter*, July 1, 2006

by Kathy Stayton

It was the last weekend of October, 2005, when the executive committee of the AWAB Council met the Rev. Dr. JoAnne C. Juett for the first time in Madison, Wisconsin. Her personhood, energy, skills, and readiness to take on the responsibilities of editor of *The InSpiriter* (*TIS*) preceded her through the glowing excitement about her from our new executive director, the Rev. Ken Pennings. I thought to myself that she could not possibly live up to the image of her presented to us. Well, I was wrong.



Rev. Dr. JoAnne C. Juett

Dr. Juett quickly became JoAnne to all of us. She had shared her expertise in technical writing and use of the computer and the possibilities of ways to communicate to the AWAB membership and others with the communications committee of the Council before the rest of us met her. They really did not want to share her with us for time for an interview.

At dinner following the interview, her son, Jarred, joined us all in a dinner provided and presented with elegance by Ken's life partner, John Leonard. We were very impressed how articulately Jarred answered our probing questions to him and the obvious respect he had for his mother and father. The whole Council got acquainted with JoAnne and later unanimously voted to accept the Rev. Dr. JoAnne Juett as the next editor of *TIS*. She will assume her new duties

on July 1 with the first issue of Volume 11.

JoAnne and we know that she cannot fill the shoes of Dr. Darrell Lance, but she shares with Darrell personal Christian integrity, high standards for *TIS*, the love for the mission of and support of AWAB, and proven writing skills. Sharing her vision for the future of *The InSpiriter*, she stated, "*The InSpiriter* ought to be a place where open dialogue can take place, where we can discuss what it means to be glbt-allied people, where we can discuss what it means to be AWAB.... I perceive AWAB as a thinking group of people, passionate about being Baptist, and committed to ministry.... I've been looking for a mission, a way to do what God calls me to do. AWAB is that mission. There's something about AWAB that everyone should know."

What is her background? I thank JoAnne for providing the following information for us.

Rev. Dr. JoAnne C. Juett was born and raised in Scottsburg, Indiana. She received her Master of Divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, in 1985 and was ordained as an American Baptist minister the same year. Rev. Juett earned her M.A. (1988) and Ph.D. (1994), both in comparative literature, from the University of Georgia. Her undergraduate degree (1982) in music is from Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana.

JoAnne is married to Dr. Samuel J. Juett, who currently serves at the Iraqi Police Training Academy in Jordan. They have two children, Jarred, a sophomore, and Jacqueline, a seventh grader. Jarred recently participated in the Day of Silence in support of lgbt people at his high school.

JoAnne currently serves as pastor of First Baptist Church, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. She has also served churches in Indiana, Georgia, Louisiana, and Washington, D.C. JoAnne has sponsored World AIDS Day programs at First Baptist and her previous churches. While in Louisiana, JoAnne provided pastoral support for GoCare (Greater Ouachita Coalition Providing AIDS Resources and Education), and her husband served as chair of the executive board of GoCare.

As a professor in the English Department at University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, Dr. Juett challenges students in her specialization of science and technical writing. She has worked throughout her career for inclusiveness in our society. At the university, JoAnne is involved in various activities and forums supporting the glbt community, and she is currently working with other professors in her department on research and writing projects in lgbt literature.

JoAnne humbly accepts the privilege of serving as editor of *TIS*. The challenge to follow Darrell Lance is daunting, yet she is excited to build on the excellent communication he provided for AWAB. JoAnne looks forward to a long, productive, and rewarding relationship with the AWAB Council and the membership as we share pertinent information, challenge one another with heartening and heartbreaking stories, and seek the higher thoughts that will one day make inclusiveness a reality for all communities.

Kathy Stayton is the chairperson of the Council of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists.

W&A Congregations in Profile: Lake Avenue Baptist Church, Rochester, New York

by Peter J. B. Carman

Each Sunday, people gather from all over at Lake Avenue Baptist Church in Rochester, New York. One person drives over an hour to get to church! Others walk around the corner in our urban neighborhood.



Rev. Peter Carman

We come from different places, with different histories and identities, bringing different beliefs as well. Rich and middle-class and poor together, we come from many nations and races and ethnicities. Some of us identify ourselves as gay or lesbian, others as heterosexual, and some don't identify ourselves. A few of us have doctorates.

Some of us haven't completed school – yet. It is a challenge learning to be one family. But we all are church together.

It started in a Sunday School Mission building, giving thanks for the return of peace on the basis of human rights, just after the Civil War. Ever since, Lake Avenue's members have had a persistent Christian commitment to address social issues, to seek peace, and to engage mission in our neighborhood and around the world. In the early part of the 20th century, more than half of the church's budget went to support mission on this continent and around the world. In those years, members like Helen Barrett Montgomery advocated for women's education; for the rights of children; and for world missions. In the early 1920s, Mrs. Montgomery, by then the first woman president of a major Protestant denomination in the U.S., was key in holding together the Northern Baptist Convention, poised to split.

The years since have been full of joyful challenge. In the 1960s, senior minister George Hill led in the struggle for racial justice. In the 1980s, the church took a controversial stand, becoming a Sanctuary Church, ready to welcome Central American refugees. And in 1995, after study and dialogue, the congregation voted to become Welcoming & Affirming.

The statement adopted at the time we joined the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists said in part: *Lake Avenue Baptist Church... is called to minister to all people. Our world is often a place where people feel excluded, and are oppressed, because of a variety of factors such as race, ethnic background, sexual orientation, economic circumstance, and other such categories. Christ, however, calls us to reconciliation and wholeness.... Therefore we at Lake Avenue Baptist Church pledge ourselves to be open to and affirming of all persons. All who affirm Christ in their lives are welcome into this community of believers, to share fully in its life, leadership and ministry. We rejoice in the worth and dignity of every person as a child of God.*

In the almost eleven years since the congregation adopted this statement, an increasing number of LGBT people have become part of our church's life and ministry. They come to us from every walk of life: seminarians, singers, childcare providers, a lawyer, a nurse, and nurse's aide – they are women and men of every background. At least one long-time member who initially was concerned about the vote has come to the place where he sees it as one of the most important steps the church has ever taken.

Even as new LGBT participants have become part of our life together, we have been joined as well by others. These have been as diverse a group as one can imagine, having in common a yearning to be one in Christ. As the ministry of welcome and affirmation has been important, so has the outreach to neighborhood children, our partnership with other churches locally, and our continued work through organizations like Cameron Community Ministries, a local neighborhood action program. We continue to offer strong support for missions. We continue to be a Sunday School. And we continue to stand for peace.



Lake Avenue
Baptist Church

At a recent gathering of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists from around the northeastern U.S., eleven Lake Avenue representatives helped lead worship and organize discussion. Our members prayed, sang gospel hymns, and designed a process for helping others share openly about their needs, hopes, and dreams for ministry. Only two of us

had been part of our church the day in 1995 when the welcoming decision was made.

As we begin a new century, many of us wonder where we would be today without the gifts and insight of those we love who have become part of us because of the decision to be a W&A church. Those who dared to affirm the gifts of sisters and brothers not yet met have been found by courageous, extraordinary loving children of God. Together, by grace, we are a new creation.

The Rev. Peter J.B. Carman is the senior pastor of Lake Avenue Baptist Church, the husband of the Rev. Lynn Carman Bodden, a UCC pastor, and the father of Luke and Benjamin. He chaired the search committee which recommended the Rev. Ken Penning as the new executive director of AWAB. He currently serves as the convener for Let Justice Roll—Rochester, an inter-faith anti-poverty coalition.

Twelve-Stop Welcoming-Church Tour Expands in 2006

by Ken Pennings

In October 2005, AWAB's Council launched a strategic plan for 2006, which includes twelve regional gatherings of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists throughout the country. We praise God for four successful gatherings, which have already taken place:



Michigan Gathering: Back Row - Jack LeSage, Ron Fader, Norm Stong, Ken Pennings, Steve Blinks. Front: Jeff Springgay

February 17-19, Michigan Area Gathering, Woodside Church, Flint, Michigan.

February 23-26, Northeast Gathering, at Madison Avenue Baptist Church, New York, New York.

March 18-22, San Francisco Bay Area Gathering, in Oakland and Berkeley, California.

April 21-23, Southern Gathering (in conjunction with The Alliance of Baptists Convocation), at Southside Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama.



Northeast Gathering: From left to right - Jim Singletary, Shelley Dugan, Alice Bacher Howard, Gus Vinajeras, Ron Carthen, Alarice Radcliffe

Positive outcomes of the first four gatherings include:

- Lots of positive energy and participation in worship, fellowship, storytelling and information-sharing, visioning, and strategizing;
- Face-to-face connections among 350 W&A Baptists;
- Strong participation of AWAB pastors in the events;
- A plan for a fund for planting new AWAB churches;
- A plan for a fund for professional placement of glbt clergy;
- Education and support for congregations considering AWAB membership;
- Support for lgbt Christians in the process of "coming out;"
- Promotion of Tapestry 2006, the joint summer gathering of the welcoming programs of Baptists, the Disciples of Christ, and the United Church of Christ, (www.tapestry2006.org);
- Promotion of Institute for Welcoming Resources, (www.welcomingresources.org);
- New programming;
- Distribution of resources on ministries of inclusion;
- Four new individual members of AWAB;
- Offerings of money to help cover costs.



Bay Area Gathering - Jan Bass & Jesús Portillo

Eleven members of one of AWAB's newest member congregations, Drexel Hill Baptist Church in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, attended the northeast gathering in New York City. Their experience was so positive, they offered to host a Philadelphia Area AWAB gathering later this year!

A number of folks at the Michigan gathering expressed desire for more frequent opportunities for W&A Baptists to convene. Some of them have registered for AWAB's national gathering, Tapestry, in June.

The Bay Area gathering began with an exclamation from local coordinator Jesús Portillo, "We call ourselves the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists. I think it's high time we start associating!"

There is immeasurable value in meeting other W&A Baptists face to face! Plan to attend one or more of the regional gatherings later this year:

June 2-4, Chicagoland Gathering. Contact Ken Pennings, ken@wabaptists.org, 608-255-2155. For child-care, contact Ann-Louise Haak, alhaak@lakestreet.org.

July 21-22, New England Gathering. Hosted by First Churches, 129 Main St, Northampton, MA, 01060, 413-584-9392. Contact Bruce Baker, bpenke@aol.com, 617-669-2974.

September 22-24, North Carolina Gathering. Hosted by Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church, 1712 Willow Drive, Chapel Hill, NC 27514. Contact Ken Pennings, ken@wabaptists.org, 608-255-2155.

September 29-October 1, Upper Midwest Gathering (Minnesota/Wisconsin). Contact JoAnne Juett, jcjuett@sbcglobal.net, 715-832-0642.

October 13-15, Northwest Gathering. Hosted by Seattle First Baptist Church and University Baptist Church, Seattle, Washington. Contact Craig Darling, craigdarling@compans.org, 206-328-6155, or Tim Phillips, tim@ubcseattle.org, 206-632-5188.

October 20-22, Texas Retreat. Hosted by University Baptist Church, 2130 Guadalupe St., Austin, TX 78705. Contact Bill Cox, bcoxal@yahoo.com, 512-619-4909.

November 3-5, Philadelphia Area Gathering. Hosted by Drexel Hill Baptist Church, 4400 State Rd., Drexel Hill, PA 19026. Contact Harry Rickards, rickardsh@msn.com, 610-259-2356.



Worship at Northeast Gathering: From left to right: Richey Jackson, Deborah Hughes, Ken Pennings, Gus Vinajeras.



Ken Pennings preaching at First Baptist Church, Berkeley, California



Northeast Gathering: From left to right Steve Parelli, Terri Allen, Mildred Portela, Rick Mixon.

Perfect Love

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embracing a truth about love that finds its fullest manifestation – **perfect love casts out fear**. But where does one find this kind of love?

Brokeback Mountain raised my awareness of how many poison pills I've swallowed in my life, blatant and subtle messages that as a man who is gay, I'm not "normal" or okay. And this internalized poison has often been prescribed by the very institution that is to lift up the message "God is love." Even in its *oh so magnanimous* message of "loving the sinner but not the sin," the message I accepted for too many years was "You're defective, you're sinning, you are evil." I guess this shouldn't be such a shock, but this movie took me to the gut level of this truth, intensely feeling its effects. I've not emotionally comprehended my own complicity in swallowing the poison. Nor have I acknowledged the many fear-full ways "love" is consistently perpetrated. **Perfect love casts out fear**. But where does one find this kind of love?

The passage from I John 4 suggests where this kind of love *should* be found.

Perfected love, love that is fully developed is to be the mark of the Christian community. Why? Because God is love and we are born of God, the sure sign of this being that we love one another. Yet this early faith community was not perfected. How do we know? "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen." There was a problem of mixed messages, disparate realities. I wonder if it was blatant? Or perhaps bite-sized morsels of subtle disapproval, non-acceptance, fear, and hatred were served up at the agapé meal? **Perfect love casts out fear**. But if not in the Christian community, where does one find this kind of love?

Perhaps it is a Quixote quest: chasing windmills, dreaming the impossible dream, still believing in the Sunday School truth that God is love. Yet this scripture text won't be silenced. The gentle breeze of the Spirit lifts from the page and spins the windmill once again. We know deep in our hearts that genuine love dispels fear, brings the full fruition of community, and reflects the very

nature of God. So I, we continue our pursuit of being a person, a people, a place where **Perfect love casts out fear**.

It is this pursuit and passion that calls people into the ministry of AWAB. Here is a community of lovers of God who seek to embody the full inclusion of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (lgbt). Perfectly? No. We are still working out our own fears, exorcizing our own spirits, and trying to embody a love that is not easily expressed toward those who actively seek to oppress, exclude from membership, remove earned credentials, and even unconsciously incite violence through their teachings and pronouncements. Yet we strive on in our local faith communities and with a united organizational voice to bear bold witness to the truth **Perfect love casts out fear**.

The Rev. Kevin Rose is minister of discipleship and mission, First Baptist Church of Cumberland in Indianapolis, Indiana. He served on the planning committee for the Denver Biennial of the ABCUSA and is former member of the Council of AWAB.

Grace

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job. Marie notices, presses him to tell her what is wrong; and Sam feels compelled to pour out in tears and anguish the whole story. What should they do? No matter what Joe does, or Marie does, or what they decide together, suffering will result.

I will not prescribe what they – he and she – should do, but I will make the case that unless we include the dimension of the tragic as part of the situation, our understanding will be sadly deficient.

We are redeemed by being enveloped, surrounded, and renewed by a gracious acceptance that is merciful and compassionate.



True to my professorial nature, I must provide a definition. In *The Many Faces of Evil: the Sinful, the Unjust, the Demonic, and the Tragic* (CSS Publishing Co., 1997), I suggested that by the tragic we mean a situation that involves suffering to the extent that it is (1) unavoidable and/or (2) pointless and irredeemable. In both cases it can be a matter of degree. Seldom is any situation totally unavoidable or completely irredeemable, but to the measure that it is, tragedy is present. The tragic includes not only suffering undergone but also suffering that is caused by what we decide or do.

By this definition tragedy is involved in the example I gave. Both Sam and Marie will experience misery, anguish, and probably terror as well. Despair may overwhelm them, since there does not appear to be a good way out. But was this torment really unavoidable? Was it not a result of their own past choices? Yes, of course. But remember that at each stage they made decisions that seemed right and good at the time knowing what they did at the moment. Every act was done in full integrity, and the vows they made were honest commit-

ments they fully intended to keep. Yet now they find themselves in a situation neither could have foreseen. Yes, they acted in freedom. They are responsible for their choices. They are not passive victims of some ineluctable fate or destiny beyond their control. But that does not settle the question as to what they should do in the here and now.

Before going further in search of some resolution to this perplexing predicament, some other questions must be examined. Christians will want to know how a biblical view of marriage fits in here. For that we must examine what Jesus has to say about marriage and divorce. Unfortunately, this is not a simple matter either. There is not space here for an exhaustive exegesis of the relevant texts. Risking oversimplification, the texts (Matthew 5:31-32, 19:9; Mark. 10:2-12; Luke 16:18) seem to say two things. (1) Divorce is available only to men and for them only on grounds of adultery (Matthew). (2) Divorce is not permitted for either party on any grounds whatsoever (Mark and Luke). Note that in neither (1) or (2) is divorce legitimate for cruelty, abandonment, or other equally serious faults – a principle that is rightly ignored in both secular law and Christian practice.

After finding some way to deal with the Matthew texts, the typical way out of this maze is to say that Mark and Luke give us the truest picture of Jesus. He is stating an ideal, the norm, but that we in our human weakness may fall short and that in extreme cases, divorce may be the best course of action. Leaving aside the fact that there is no justification in the texts themselves for this interpretation, at least it is workable in practice, although it leaves a lot to judgment about what circumstances justify breaking up a marriage.

In light of this I can make a case for Sam and Marie to stay together on Christian and pragmatic grounds. The basis for this option is that their marriage was their original choice and therefore has priority. It honors the Christian ideal. Consequences have followed over the years that create practical reasons for

preserving the relationship. There are children involved. In addition, there are legal, financial, and other considerations that must be taken into account.

I can also make a case for divorce that allows Sam to pursue his new relationship. A choice to stay together is not without difficulties. It cannot be fully satisfying to either party. Sam will miss his true destiny in a relationship that fulfills his nature. Marie cannot be content knowing that Sam is gay and that he prefers to be with someone else, in this case, a man. While deeply painful in the short run, perhaps everybody will be better off in the long term.

In the end that is a decision that they must make for themselves. Only they know what they can live with, how much they can stand, what they are capable of doing. It is quite possible that they may come to different resolutions, which further compounds the tragedy. But the main point of this essay is elsewhere. I want to call attention to the fact that this sort of real-life situation refutes any simple moralism that sees life as involving clear-cut choices between right and wrong. More profoundly, the solution to moral questions involves more than morality.

Paul Tillich once wrote that we finite beings cannot be expected to make absolute commitments. Our knowledge is limited. We cannot foresee the future

We all know in our hearts that choice involves risk and that we can sometimes decide wrongly with disastrous consequence, despite our best intentions.



and how that may change things. “New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth” (James Russell Lowell). I think there is truth here. Perhaps the rhetorical excess in our marriage vows and in proclamations of our highest ideals serves a purpose and therefore can be justified. We all know in our hearts that choice involves risk and that we can sometimes decide wrongly with disastrous consequence,

Barbara Hulsing Joins AWAB Council



Guidance for AWAB between biennial business meetings of its member churches is provided by a Council of elected and appointed representatives. When a vacancy occurs on the Council between biennial meetings, the Council is empowered to make a substitute appointment, following the guidelines for the composition of the Council provided in our by-laws.

We are pleased to welcome the Rev. Barbara Hulsing to the Council to succeed the Rev. Diane Hooge. Barbara is pastor of Good Shepherd Community of Faith (formerly Good Shepherd Baptist Church) in Buffalo, New York. Good Shepherd's congregation voted to become Welcoming & Affirming in 2003, is now affiliated with American Baptist Churches of the Rochester/Genesee Region, and has recently dually aligned

with the United Church of Christ. Barbara has been with Good Shepherd since September of 1999. The church ordained her in 2000 after her graduation from Christ the King Seminary (M.Div.).

Barbara has been married for 37 years, has three sons and four grandchildren. Barbara's husband, Russ, served in the U.S. Navy for 23 years. Russ and Barbara lived in Brazil and Japan (as well as throughout the U.S.) during their Navy tenure. Barbara is presently studying for her Doctor of Ministry in transformative leadership at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. The focus of her study: being allies to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community.

despite our best intentions. Finite freedom is experienced as anxiety. The main point here is that we are not only free moral agents who can choose between right and wrong, good and evil; we are also frail and weak, limited in knowledge, insight, foresight, and moral capacity to do what we ought. This is why I said before that the issue of morality cannot be resolved by morality alone. Freedom and finitude, moral responsibility and moral limitation – that is our lot in this wonderful, sometimes terrifying world.

The issues raised by morality must be finally resolved in religion, i.e., in light of the ultimate facts in relation to God. We stand before God as both free and finite. We are sinners but sinners who are restricted in vision, wisdom, and moral capacity. Both Augustine and Pelagius must be heard on this question. Yes, we are sinners who sin in freedom, but we labor against formidable challenges; and because our freedom is limited, we are not always up to the task that the moral ideal prescribes. We harm others sometimes because of self-interest but at other times bring suffering on ourselves and others despite earnestly wanting to do right and to love God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves.

My favorite Psalm is 103. It comes to our aid at this point:

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.

10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.

13 As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

14 For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust. (NRSV)

Yes, he remembers that we are dust, that we are finite, weak, limited, while at the same time free and responsible moral beings. This is the message of grace and love. Grace saves us from our sins in forgiveness. But there is more to salvation. Grace also redeems us from the mess we make of life when we are

trying to love our neighbors and want desperately to do what is right, good, and best, but cannot always do so even when we try with all our might and are in despair when we cannot. Grace saves us in our tragic circumstances by embracing us in an all-compassing love that knows, cares, and understands. We are redeemed by being enveloped, surrounded, and renewed by a gracious acceptance that is merciful and compassionate. If we relax ourselves totally in that ocean of healing love, accepting our acceptance, we can be at peace. Forgiveness for our sins arising out of misused freedom, peace for our troubled souls arising out of the terror of being free but finite – these are the gifts of grace that save us.

Just read that Psalm over and over, for there is to be found a resolution to our human predicament of anxious finite freedom in a marvelous grace that recognizes our sins but goes beyond them in an embracing love that “knows how we were made, ... remembers that we are dust.”

Dr. W. Kenneth Cauthen is the John Price Crozer Griffith professor emeritus of theology at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. He is happily remarried to the Rev. Gloria Fish.

Editorial

—continued from page 2

that I know what usually happens: divorce, and another case of children deprived of two available care givers. (Those who have seen the film *Brokeback Mountain* will recognize the pattern.) Heterosexism is so much the norm for our society that lgbt kids equate conforming to the binary, male-female, heterosexual pattern with fulfilling the will of God. They mistake the friendship and affection they feel toward someone of the opposite sex with what the culture calls love, not realizing that the erotic attraction they have toward members of their own sex is something quite different and that they will never have it with their legal spouse. However, when young people growing up in the church have role models of loving, stable, same-sex couples, they will see that there are viable alternatives to heterosexual marriage. They will find a partner of the same sex and avoid the all-too-common mistake of trying to deny their inner orientation and to live according to the heterosexual pattern. And one more divorce will be avoided and family life will be strengthened.

Another beneficial result of gay liberation theology: It will deliver the church from an increasing self-contradiction and hypocrisy. The way in which cultural homophobia has caused some Baptists to abandon the freedom of the gospel in order to turn to authoritarian patterns is a sufficiently familiar story that I'll give some examples from other Christian traditions.

According to a Roman Catholic theologian friend, the following is a true example of Roman Catholic policy. Suppose there are two Catholics who are homosexual. One is as sexually promiscuous as an alley cat; the other is living in a faithful, monogamous, long-term relationship. The first one, the promiscuous one, can go to confession, confess his homosexual acts, receive absolution, and participate in the Eucharist. The second may go to confession but will not

receive absolution and will not be able to receive the sacrament. Why? By living in a permanent relationship with someone of the same sex, the second is in a state of "intractable sin," whereas the promiscuous one has the possibility of reforming and becoming celibate. So the practical result of official Catholic policy is to encourage promiscuity and discourage stable, loving relationships. To be fair, other Catholic friends tell me that enforcement of this policy can vary from parish to parish; some priests see

If you ask most Christians about the relationship between sexuality and spirituality, they will stare back at you like the proverbial deer in the headlights.



the absurdity of the official position and quietly admit those in stable relationships to the sacrament, but in so doing, they violate official Catholic policy.

Here is an example from the Presbyterian world. The gay issue first hit the Presbyterians full force at their General Assembly in 1978. The issue was the ordination of openly gay or lesbian elders. In the Presbyterian tradition, not only are pastoral ministers ordained, but also the elders who are the lay persons who perform the normal tasks of running a church. At this and subsequent meetings of the General Assembly, Presbyterians went on record as condemning discrimination against glbt persons in secular hiring but forbade the ordination of open gays and lesbians. Also, like the Catholics, they accept the fact that sexual orientation is part of a person's innate personality structure and not something that is chosen. Thus they have no problem with lgbt persons being members of Presbyterian churches, but glbt people are not supposed to hold office, since that requires ordination.

The self-contradictions here are easy to point out.

Self-contradiction number one: Presbyterian polity condemns discrimination

in hiring on the basis of sexual orientation for everyone else, but not for themselves. They reserve for themselves the right to discriminate that they condemn for everyone else.

Self-contradiction number two: In Presbyterian polity, congregations have the right to choose their own leadership, and they accept the fact that many present members of Presbyterian churches are gay or lesbian; they just will not allow glbt persons to be ordained as leaders. Now let's suppose that there is a Presbyterian congregation that is composed entirely of glbt persons. Immediately we see the "Catch 22" situation: a congregation may choose its own leaders but since everyone in this congregation is lgbt, it cannot choose its own leaders. No organization can go on indefinitely with this kind of absurd inconsistency at its core. This is a sure sign that their present policy is based on faulty premises and will only be resolved by abandoning their current position and accepting glbt people into the full ministry of the church.

The point of these examples — Baptist, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian — and unfortunately, I could add many more — is to show how homophobia has caused these Christian bodies to distort or abandon their most central beliefs and practices, just so they can accommodate the homophobia of American culture. (In fairness, I should point out that there are strong welcoming movements in both the Roman Catholic and Presbyterian communions working for change.) These churches have tied themselves up in knots and in self contradiction over this issue. No system can persist with this much internal distortion and cognitive dissonance. Only by realizing and accepting the fact that God welcomes all people regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity will these churches be able to reestablish congruence between their theology and their internal practice. More on this point in Part 2 next time.



From the Executive Director: **Ken's Pennings**

by Ken Pennings

The Gospel of Jesus reveals that God is a God of nonviolence, justice, liberation, reconciliation and radically inclusive love and not of violence, oppression, vengeance, and retaliation!

We're basking in the afterglow of our contemplative journey through Lent, Holy Week, and Easter and have entered into the mystery of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus fully embodied God's nonviolent love. Not a single living person was outside of Jesus' moral perimeter, outside of his circle of concern. Living that radically inclusive love so enraged and threatened the imperial and religious authorities, they killed him.

Jesus voluntarily submitted to violence as the ultimate resistance to violence. As Jesus faced death, could he have been thinking, "I'm willingly laying down my life for the building of a society where no one is excluded, victimized, or killed for ANY reason?" Jesus' death and resurrection affirm that there is no cause no matter how noble that will support the taking of a single human life.

Gandhi said, "Jesus was the most active resister of violence in the history of the world." Do we take Jesus as seriously as did Gandhi?

If so, we will live inclusively, compassionately, and nonviolently. We will resist the temptation to vilify, demonize, or victimize another human being. The measure of our spirituality, of our Christianity, IS our active creative nonviolence.

First, we will allow God to disarm our own hearts, and root out every trace of violence within us. As Thich Nhat Hahn teaches, "We will radiate personally the peace we seek politically."

Second, we will extend disarmament to our families, communities, cities, and nations. Our task as individuals, churches, and, more importantly, as cultures, is constantly to be expanding the moral perimeter, to be recognizing increasingly that there isn't anybody who lies outside of our circle of concern.

The president of the Institute for Global Ethics, Rushworth M. Kidder, said, "We started out as a nation that defined in our constitutional papers an African-American as three-fifths of a person. It took us a hundred years and a war to expand that

moral perimeter and say, wait a minute, they count just as much as anybody else. We did that with women a hundred years ago, and had to expand the moral perimeter there. And so it keeps going, to people with disabilities [*and to people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender*]" (*Zion's Herald*, March/April 2006, pg. 45).

AWAB's ministries of inclusion join us to the larger God-Movement in which many of our sisters and brothers are:

- repenting of the idolatry of using God and religious faith to justify militarism, the dismantling of environmental protections, the undermining of social security, and the demeaning and devaluing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (lgbt) people;
- working to eliminate white racism, classism, sexism, ageism, able-ism, and heterosexism;
- saying hard things like "Bring the troops home now! End the war in Iraq! Stop funding the war in the Middle East! Support human rights for both Israelis and Palestinians! Let the UN resolve international crises nonviolently! Lift the Third World debt! Close the School of the Americas! Uphold international law! Join the world court! End the Star Wars program! Cut military spending! Dismantle nuclear weapons! Take the billions of dollars saved by eliminating war to feed every last starving child!"

May we break through the complicity of our culture and silence of our religious communities regarding flagrant violations of human rights and human dignity in our nation and world.

As early Baptists learned from their experiences of religious persecution to practice religious tolerance toward others, may lgbt-allied Christians bring our stories of being stereotyped, scapegoated, scorned, and maligned to the work of creative nonviolence! May we share our stories and gifts with other groups that are so violated, including Muslim-Americans and undocumented residents!

May AWAB become a prophetic community of active creative nonviolence on behalf of all the children of the God of Peace!

The InSpiriter

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Calls for Altar Call

We have received a number of queries about how to obtain a copy and/or the rights to produce the play *Altar Call* which Melissa McBain, its author, described in the last issue of *The InSpiriter*.

With her permission we are publishing here her contact information:

Dr. Melissa McBain, Augustana College, 639 38th St., Rock Island, IL 61202.

E-mail: edmc bain@augustana.edu.

AWAB Online...

Explore AWAB's web site at www.wabaptists.org. You will find there a complete list of all member churches and organizations.

Read *Associational*, a periodic newsletter from executive director Ken Pennings at www.wabaptists.org/associational.htm. To subscribe, send an e-mail to e-subscribe@wabaptists.org with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line.

For commentary, thoughts, and stories, read *The Voice of the Turtle*, at www.wabaptists.org/voto.htm. Or go to www.wabaptists.org and click on *Voice of the Turtle Online*. Also, some back issues of *The InSpiriter* are posted online.

The InSpiriter

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