



A Review:

Gay Marriage? Not So Fast!

by Howard Bess

Mark D. Jordan. *Blessing Same-Sex Unions: The Perils of Queer Romance and the Confusions of Christian Marriage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 258 pages. \$29.00.

I have been involved in gay acceptance in our churches for 35 years. I have a distinct disadvantage. I am as thoroughly heterosexual as a person can be. For gay perspectives, I have been totally dependent on information that has come to me from my gay friends. I have tried to be a learner. I have listened; I have read; I have

observed. There is always more to learn.

As a heterosexual, I am a part of the majority that ultimately must come to terms with the presence of the gay minority. I truly wish my majority partners would read and digest the contents of this book.

I picked up a lot of new information reading Mark Jordan. He is the Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Religion at Emory University. His academic credentials are extensive. He may well be our 21st century academic leader in the search for justice and full acceptance.

The recognition of gay couples by church and state has become central to public discussions. Much of the gay

population has naively embraced the recognition of gay marriage as *the* core issue. According to Jordan there are perils in that assumption.

The currently assumed model for gay relationships is Christian marriage. Substitute a same-sex couple for a heterosexual couple and proceed. The flaws of this kind of thinking are abundant, and Jordan lays bare the reasons.

The first hurdle is trying to define a Christian marriage. The Bible is of little help. In the Bible a variety of marriage patterns is easily identified. Polygamy was dominant. Concubinage was widely practiced. Female slaves were available to male owners for procreation. At no time in Old or New Testament history is marriage depicted as a coming together of two independent persons who freely choose one another. The roots of today's definition of Christian marriage are no more than 150 years old. They are entwined with the end of slavery and in particular with the roots of women's liberation from male ownership.

To complicate matters even more, there is wide disagreement about what

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Brokeback Mountain with a Happier Ending

by Steve Balog

In October, Florence and I went to our favorite place of seclusion in an official Wilderness Area, a small cabin at the 5800 ft. level, built in 1934. In 1997, there was a terrible forest fire and the cabin almost burned down. The U.S. Forest Service managed to get a foam truck into this remote area and to encapsulate the cabin in white foam. It is now surrounded by a ring of green trees and then acres of burned forest.

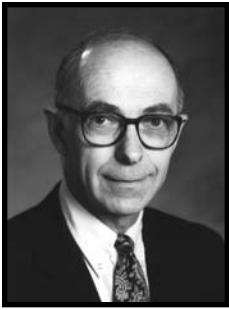
Florence and I were there this past October for some R&R and ten days of quiet reading, working, hiking and just a general period of reflection and recreation. The roads to the cabin are county roads but decent, except the last three miles are a very rough, dirt road with

very bad holes filled with water. We have an older truck. Once we get to the cabin, we are not inclined to drive in or out. We bring all our food and water so we don't have to leave. Besides, we just like the seclusion.

This year after six days, I told Florence I wanted to drive over the mountain crest to Anthony Lake and do some fishing. So early one morning, we got our fishing gear and started to drive out. But Florence looked and said, "Steve, we have a flat tire!" I got the truck jacked up and got the spare from under the truck and was going to take off the flat tire. But after jacking up the truck, my lug-nut wrench would not fit. There was no way to get that wheel off to change the tire!! I would have to get help!

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We offer tribute to
Dr. H. Darrell Lance
for his ten years of
outstanding service as editor
of *The InSpiriter*! Darrell's
editorials have nurtured,
inspired and instructed us.
Thank you, Darrell. Best
wishes for your retirement!
Love, Your AWAB Family



Editorial

“Behold the Days Are Coming...” Part 2

by H. Darrell Lance

In the preceding issue of *The InSpiriter*, I shared some uncharacteristically optimistic ruminations on the ways that I believe that “gay” liberation theology will eventually benefit the whole church. (By “gay” theology, I mean all the thought, reflection, and study that is arising out of the intersection of Christian faith and the experience of being different in sexual orientation or gender identity.) If space permitted, I could list several more – especially how it will help us achieve a clearer understanding of the nature of the Bible. But since I have written about the Bible on previous occasions, let me focus on another contribution of gay theology.

Potentially the most profound gift from gay theology to the church as a whole will be nothing less than the recovery of the gospel itself, the good news.

Christianity seems to go through cycles in which the gospel is rediscovered, only to be ossified by legalistic purity issues, becoming a burden rather than a joy. This is the old tension between what theologians call justification and sanctification.

Justification, simply put, is the good news of the gospel. You have been saved by grace through faith. Or as Paul wrote in Romans 3: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Or put another way, “God loves you just as you are, sinner though you be. You may not love yourself, but God loves you anyway. You may have done some hurtful things and may have caused a lot of grief and pain but God loves you anyway. God may not love the grief and pain that you have caused, but God

loves you and always will. Nothing will ever make God’s love for you go away.” This is the gospel. This is the good news. This is where the Christian life begins.

But inevitably we ask questions: “How can I express the joy that I feel at hearing and receiving the good news? How can I shape my life in imitation of Jesus and become his disciple? How can I show my love and gratitude to a holy, loving God?” When we ask these questions, we are now talking about sanctification – how we respond to the good news by reflecting God’s love in our own lives. And it’s at this point that as sinful, fallible, human beings, we invariably fall into error, as Christians have done over and over again through the centuries. Somehow the question subtly changes from “How can I become a loving disciple of Jesus Christ?” to “What can I do that will make me more pleasing to the divine parent than my wicked brother down the street?” Or “What is the correct behavior or ritual that will make me morally superior to my neighbor?”

Jesus taught and personified a different ideal, one that distinguished him from the Pharisees. The Pharisees weren’t depraved, wicked people. They were trying the best they could to observe the law of God as they understood it. But by worrying about the details of the law, they erected a more and more elaborate structure to separate themselves from those unwashed, unclean Jews who did not follow the law as strictly as they. Almost every time that Jesus came into conflict with the Pharisees, it was precisely at this point.

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Human Beings Are Not Rubik Cubes

by Julia Himes

“But genitalia, sexual desire, gender expression, identification with one sex or another – one does not determine all the others. Human beings are not Rubik Cubes.” Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*.

The church needs both to recognize the existence of and find ways to support the transgender community. There is research that proves the existence of more than two sexes and genders. As well as male and female, women and men, masculine and feminine, there exists a wide variety of both sex and gender identities that span and surpass the spectrum of human imagination. Considering the great sway that Christianity holds over society as well as its mission to provide care and support for the marginalized, the church has a duty to the transgender community. There are those who would use the Bible to oppress anyone who falls outside of traditional gender definitions. Christianity has a responsibility to show that not only did God not create people only male and female, but that God calls for our respect and nurture of the transgender communities. Just as the Church recognizes the need to give aid to the suffering, there are countless testimonies to the hurt experienced on a daily basis by trans individuals, as well as the great number of them who seek acceptance in the Christian church, but find instead only more pain. For these reasons and many others, it is imperative that the church at the very least no longer be a tool for the oppression of the trans community, if not actively become an advocate.

The transgender communities include not only those who have officially changed sexes, they have come to encompass many different gender variants as well. Transgender identities have expanded to include not only those who are born intersex, but those who don't

identify their gender with the physical sex with which they were born – transsexuals, gender deviants, gender queers, transvestites, cross dressers, drag queens and kings, and anyone who does not fit into a clear male or female box.

Even though it is clear that gender variation exists and trans communities are a reality, there are still those who will choose to disbelieve proof of this, or those who will claim that this goes against God's creation. These opponents to trans individuals will often cite Genesis 1:26-27 to prove that God only created two sexes. However, as many have pointed out, these same Christians proclaim God's omnipresence and omnipotence. If God is omnipresent, then God exists in the gay drag queen working the street of New York as much as the straight minister with eight children. God exists in the cross dressing man in Iowa as much as God exists in the televangelist. God exists in the FTM binding his¹ breasts as much as in the cheerleader with pigtails. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott points out that “this reference to Genesis 1:26-27 is ironic on the face of it, since naming God's image as both male and female actually depicts God as either androgynous or hermaphroditic – far more supportive of transgender identity than of the ‘opposite sex’ theory.”² It is also apropos to point out that the transgender exist in many of

Christ creates a place of acceptance for all ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, racial, gender, theological, and personal identities.



the communities to which the Christian church is currently ministering, yet those who feel the need, for various reasons, to remain closeted for fear of losing that aid are not truly recipients of ministry. They are “not just gay, lesbian, bi or trans people. Our populations include many oppressed nationalities,

people with AIDS, women, youths, elders, people who are unemployed, homeless, deaf, disabled, prisoners, people dependent on welfare, SSI, Medicaid, and Medicare.”³

Jesus was a man, yet he did traditional women's work of feeding and washing. He was at once servant and master.



As well as existing within the community currently being ministered to by the church, trans individuals and communities have many unique gifts to offer Christianity both through lay and ordained individuals. Jesus was both Man and God, not either/or. He managed to be both divine and mortal at the same time, bringing two distinctly separate conceptions of the ordering of the world together. He was a man, yet he did traditional women's work of feeding and washing. He was at once servant and master. Through the resurrection, he was brought into the world both alive and dead and neither, all at the same time. Moreover, Jesus refused to live in the world of societal norms. Through his radical egalitarianism, Jesus broke through the boundaries of what was considered clean and unclean. He ate with tax collectors and prostitutes. He worked on the Sabbath. He overturned tables in the temple. He raised a man from the dead. If we look at the tradition, “Christ becomes the trickster with transvestite sensibilities, for like many cross-dresser (sic), he breaks the binary cultural categories of pure/impure and male/female.”⁴ Christ can clearly be identified with the marginalized, especially those who like him crossed boundaries or cannot be easily defined.

The acceptance and integration of transgender communities into the church would in effect lead to the break-

–continued on next page

ing down of gender stereotypes as well as the many oppressive institutions which silently exist within Christianity. The Christian church has often stood as a tool of oppression. Yet many of these same oppressions have been echoed in the gay/lesbian/bisexual community, where for some, transgender communities present a threat. It represents a threat to those who have chosen to defend their sexuality by taking on traditional gender expressions. It threatens the definitions of “gay” and “lesbian” when a person’s attractions to another may no longer be based on sex, but on gender and gender representation. Leslie Feinberg makes a point of addressing the fact that those who are trying so hard to tell the world that they are not representative of trans identities are pushing themselves even farther into the rigid gender expectations of society. In effect, people are punishing themselves in an attempt to avoid outside punishment and discrimination.⁵

These ideas are being combated by those gay/lesbian/bisexual people who actively seek to include trans and other sexual and gender minorities into their communities. In the church they are supported by queer theologians who push the boundaries of the understanding of God’s grace and creation. One of the

most radical theologies is that of Marcella Althaus-Reid who proposes a Bi/Christ and a Trans/Christ.⁶ This theology arises out of the subjugation of many Latin American countries, and the liberating power of Christ (and Mary). Not only does the Bi/Trans/Christ speak to those who are a tyrannized sexual minority, but also to those in religious, economic, or ethnic communities bearing the full brunt of despotism. This idea of a Bi/Trans/Christ goes beyond simply the inclusion of all sexual identities.

Christ creates a place of acceptance for all ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, racial, gender, theological, and personal identities. This in effect breaks down the barriers of a racist, sexist, homophobic patriarchy. With this in mind we see that through inclusion of trans individuals into both glb communities and the church, these injustices, which are often the same injustices that the church purports itself to be against, can be brought to an end. The church is called to open itself to all people creating a safe space for the whole body of God. We hear the voice of God asking us to widen our boundaries and love our fellow travelers on this journey. Let us answer and create the community God wishes to see here on earth.

1. “Hir” is a non-gendered term replacing him and her. FTM refers to someone transitioning from female to male.
2. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Omnigender: A Trans-Religious Approach*, (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), p. 92.
3. Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), p. 103.
4. Robert Goss, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up*, (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2002), p. 181.
5. Feinberg, p. 99.
6. Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*, (London: Routledge, 2000).

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Want to Talk to Someone? AWAB Listeners Now Available

The vision statement of AWAB reads, “We envision that the day may speedily come within Baptist Churches when no one shall feel excluded from God’s love in Jesus Christ because of their sexual orientation.” Sadly, that day has not yet come. Therefore, AWAB has formed a pastoral care team to connect persons and groups who feel excluded, injured, or betrayed with a compassionate heart, a listening ear, and a word of comfort, welcome, and hope.

You may request a contact by calling 608-255-2155 or e-mailing at mail@wabaptists.org.

The pastoral care team includes the following:

The Rev. Mary Hammond

The Rev. Steve Hammond

Dean Jenkins, Minister

The Rev. Sandi John, AWAB Council member and team leader

Jill McCrory, Minister

The Rev. George Melby

The Rev. Brenda Moulton

The Rev. Susan Vanderburgh

W&A Congregations in Profile:

Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

"Every Member a Minister"

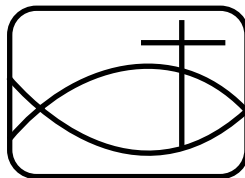
The 500-member Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, was founded in 1958 during the national struggles for civil rights. Charter members understood their calling to be a fellowship of ecumenically minded Christians who would respect the dignity and sanctity of every human being. Named after a pastor and seminary professor/president whose prophetic voice inspired such openness, the church continues to be a progressive Baptist voice as it approaches its 50th anniversary.

The five principles inspiring the original Binkley vision were all understood as outgrowths of a joyful, worshiping, spiritual community of faith:

1. Racial inclusiveness.
2. Ecumenical membership.
3. A spirit of caring for each other in times of need.
4. A commitment to expressing faith through social concern for the community and the world.
5. Taking the Bible seriously but not literally.

The worship of God is central to the congregation's life. In worship we are recreated in God's image and challenged to put our faith to work in the world. With a free pulpit, preaching is expected to be biblically based, intellectually relevant, nurturing, and prophetic. Inclusive language is honored. Music, including choirs for all ages, bells, and brass, is a hallmark of congregational life. Inspired by the Earth Ministries Committee, Binkley celebrates a fall liturgical "Creation Season," aware of the role faith must play in addressing the overwhelming issues of ecology and the goal of a sustainable future for the Earth.

A major principle of Binkley Church throughout its history has been inclusiveness, including an open-membership policy honoring all Christian baptism. Women have served at every level of lay and ministerial leadership and have been licensed and ordained to the ministry. In 1992 the decision to license for ministry an openly gay divinity student resulted in significant membership loss and the disaffiliation by the Southern Baptist and the North Carolina Baptist Conventions. With clear self-definition, however, new growth has more than made up for numerical losses. The church had been dually aligned with American Baptist Churches USA and continues to be active in the ABC, the Alliance of Baptists, and the North Carolina Council of Churches. In 1997 Binkley officially joined the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists and looks forward to hosting an area-wide AWAB gathering in September 2006.



From its beginning, Binkley has made involvement in social ministries a priority. It was a founding congregation of the Inter-Faith Council for Social Services which houses a homeless shelter, soup kitchen, and food pantry and offers financial aid for low income citizens. Binkley continues a refugee resettlement ministry, presently sponsoring a group of Montagnard refugees. Meals-On-Wheels is housed in Binkley. Habitat of Orange County was founded in Binkley. A partnership in racial reconciliation ministry since 1993 with Barbee's Chapel Missionary Baptist, an African-American church, includes construction of three Habitat homes and shared Sunday worship twice a year. The church motto, "Every Member A Minister," inspires all members to be involved in community ministry as well as within the church, leading a number of members to serve in public, elected offices.

The church facility is understood as a community center, one of God's resources for community service. It has recently been renovated and will be improved in 2006 with a modest addition including a new entrance, administrative offices, storage, choir room, chapel, and site plan. More than 70 community groups call Binkley "home," including AA, Alanon, Girl Scouts, English Language Classes, Peer Learning for Senior Citizens, Senior Kiwanis, Parkinson's Disease Support Group, Christmas House, Mental Health Associations, Habitat, and many others. The Binkley Pre-School welcomes 80 children 5 days a week and is celebrating its 40th anniversary this June.

The church is currently interviewing for a minister of education. Christian education is a major priority for all ages. It includes church school for children, youth and adults during the academic year with Vacation Bible School and special adult learning opportunities in the summer as well as a "Worship With Children" program. The Youth Fellowship features beach, rafting, and ski retreats as well as weekly programs, service projects, and a summer Baptist Youth Camp which the church helped to found.

The staff of the church includes a senior minister, associate minister, minister of education, minister of music, organist, and office and business managers. Former pastors include Robert Seymour, who served the church for 30 years and is still a prophetic voice in Chapel Hill, and Linda Jordan, now bereavement coordinator for Hospice. The church is in the midst of an eight-month discernment process called "Our Church Mission for the 21st Century." The present pastor, Jim Pike, who came in 1996 and has given his "retirement alert" for June of 2007, likes to quip that Binkley is truly ecumenical: "At Binkley, basketball fans from Duke, UNC, Wake Forest, and NC State all get along!"

Helping Congregations Engage in Dialogue: A Review

by JoAnne C. Juett

LeDayne McLeese Polaski and Millard Eiland, editors. *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Resource for Congregations in Dialogue on Sexual Orientation*. The Alliance of Baptists, 1328 Sixteenth St. NW, Washington, DC 20036 and Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, 4800 Wedgewood Dr., Charlotte, NC (2000) 264 pp.; loose-leaf binder. \$25.00.

Six years ago this spring, the Alliance of Baptists and the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America produced *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, an informative resource from a Christian perspective for dialogue on sexual orientation. This resource was born out of separate, but significant and concurrent internal dialogues on Christian faith and sexual orientation taking place in the early 1990s in both organizations. As both the Alliance and the BPFNA produced documents affirming gay Christians among their numbers, they saw the need to collaborate on a process to encourage other Baptist groups to engage in similar dialogue, hoping to expand their inclusive vision.

Polaski and Eiland affirmed Baptist tradition by bringing together representatives of 13 congregations to engage in conversation about the explicit inclusion of persons of same-gender orientation in their congregations. *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, then, emerged as a compilation of biblical and spiritual resources, along with personal and congregational stories, to help other congregations on the same journey. The purpose of this resource is clearly two-fold: to help facilitate reconciliation ministries and to help congregations engage in a process of discernment toward

explicit inclusion of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (lgbt) community. Although the resource certainly fosters deeper understanding of the issues involved, one should use it knowing that the intent is indeed change – which is a much needed goal in our current culture of complacency.

Polaski and Eiland are quite careful to note both the benefits and the costs of undertaking a study and dialogue about sexual orientation. They forthrightly acknowledge that not only must individuals within a congregation be interested and willing to engage in difficult dialogue, but the entire congregation should be open to the possibilities of where such dialogue can take its people, how the dialogue can shape its purpose and vision, and how the dialogue holds the possibility of loss at various levels. Beginning the resource with an honest assessment of the spectrum of possibilities lends sincerity and an air of hope to such a divisive topic.

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth is one of the most versatile and helpful tools currently available for congregations to engage in meaningful and purposeful dialogue about sexual orientation.



The rest of the resource is a collection of articles on various topics by authors ranging from noted scholars to Baptist leaders to writers who were not prepared to fully disclose their identity. Sections of the resource include resources for Bible study, spiritual and psychological resources, and several collections of stories. I find that *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* has an overabundance of emotional appeal, which, while engaging and moving, tilts the balance of this resource toward argu-

ments with less substance than congregations often need in discerning their position and visions. Furthermore, although the rational arguments included in the book are substantive, there are few references to strong arguments against including glbt persons in congregational life. Although a challenge for the authors, such additional material would liven the dialogue possibilities and place the congregational discernment process on firmer and broader ground.

Polaski and Eiland are to be commended for putting together a resource that isn't bound by one or two particular uses. Each section can be utilized as a source of study itself, without reference to the rest of the resource. For instance, I highly recommend the sermons section; they are inspiring reading, and they serve as models of what clergy can do for their congregations and perhaps even in community forums. Also, the stories can be incorporated into sermons and other studies, and they hold the possibility of sharing even in personal conversation or counseling situations. As a whole, the story and sermon sections help illustrate the other more academic portions of *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*. A definite plus for this volume is the extensive annotated bibliography. There is ample material to choose from to further highlight and inform any of the studies possible with this resource.

A congregation might consider utilizing this resource in two or three separate sessions, perhaps four to six weeks each, giving participants an opportunity to synthesize the information and inevitable dialogue, which could be intense at times. To help facilitate congregational process, the introduction to the book gives examples of planning and follow through in the "trial" congregations, but any outlines or guidelines are noticeably, perhaps purposely, absent from this

resource. If a congregation does not have skilled leaders or planners, they may want to consult some of the resource persons for more information and guidance.

Finally, the reader should note that there is dated material in this resource. Yet, this resource has historical significance for many of us at this crucial juncture in Baptist history, when the name “Baptist” is being co-opted by some into doctrinal positions and statements borne out of prejudice and exclusion, with particular regard to the LGBT community. For instance, one should take some time to ponder the group pictured in Mahan Siler’s introduction (p. 21) – the group of Baptists whose experience and expertise contributed to the wealth of information in *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*; and yet many have moved on, feeling forced to do so because of sexual orientation and even gender issues. We all know the stories, but we seldom name them or dialogue about them.

Even more telling is the section of “Official Statements.” There is obvious disparity among the Baptist groups

included; one would expect that, especially as this affords more opportunity for dialogue. Yet, much has changed within these Baptist bodies from the time these chosen statements were made (most are from the mid-1990s). Of particular note would be recent changes in the ABCUSA. In 2005, the ABCUSA added to their statement, “We Are American Baptists,” “We Are a Biblical People . . . who submit to the teaching of Scripture that God’s design for sexual intimacy places it within the context of marriage between one man and one woman, and acknowledge that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Biblical teaching.” This statement was introduced from the Indiana/Kentucky Region expressly so that it would “in effect, void the Compromise of 2002, and provide specific basis for the exclusion of Welcoming and Affirming congregations by ABC regions” (www.abc-indiana.org). I would strongly urge anyone using this resource to update the statements so as to initiate current and timely discussion regarding recent national and denominational trends.

Despite some of its dated material and less academic material than I would have preferred on the topic of homosexuality, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* is one of the most versatile and helpful tools currently available for congregations to engage in meaningful and purposeful dialogue about sexual orientation. With a little research on the part of congregational leaders, this resource can help congregations make significant strides toward open declarations of their inclusiveness and reconciliation from families to entire communities. *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* is much more than a resource of helpful information; it is a change agent, providing insight, inspiration, and hope for inclusion in a wrongly divided world.

The Rev. Dr. JoAnne C. Juett is the former pastor of the First Baptist Church of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. She is a member of the faculty at the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire. She becomes the editor of The InSpiriter with the next issue.

Happier Ending

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There are some days when absolutely no one drives by on this remote road. And I did not look forward to walking three miles to the county road where there may only be a few more cars going by. Later that day, we were sitting outside pondering this problem. And down the dirt road comes a large, Dodge Ram truck!! It looked like your typical, Eastern Oregon “red-neck” resident with two guns on a rack in the back of the cab.

We could have sat there for days waiting. So, I ran from the cabin to the dirt road carrying my useless lug nut wrench and waving it. The guy stopped his truck. He was a very large man in his 40s. Well, he had one of these big toolboxes that runs the width of his truck with more tools than your local Sears tool department. He had exactly what I needed.

I opened the gate to the cabin grounds and he drove in and watched as I got the flat tire off with his wrench. I put the spare on and lowered the jack. Wouldn’t you know, the spare tire was flat. So this guy says, “No problem, I will go back to our hunting camp and get my partner. He has a pump.” Of course, we thought he meant his hunting partner. About an hour later, here he comes with “his partner” – as in a real partner. They fixed the spare, pumped it up, and told us that they would drive by tomorrow morning just to make sure it holds air and that we are all right. The second fellow is bigger than the first; both twice the size of me and both out elk hunting. One was a nurse in a small Eastern Oregon town. I’m not sure what his partner’s occupation was.

Talk about miracles! We could have sat there for days waiting for someone to come by with the right tool. The chances of two gay men from Eastern Oregon who were out elk hunting being the first people to come by were about like finding two Republicans who want to raise taxes to give more to the poor! I thought this was a bit of whimsical chance or design on the part of God. Maybe God does have a sense of humor and thought this would be a bit of wonder. It was wonderful being at the receiving end of loving and care-filled ministry.

Used by permission from the newsletter of the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian & Gay Ministries.

Gay Marriage

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happens when a Christian clergyperson blesses a couple and pronounces them husband and wife. The entanglement with the state makes it even more confusing. When Jordan began his journey

In the Bible a variety of marriage patterns is easily identified. Polygamy was dominant. Concubinage was widely practiced.



toward understanding, he was interested in church blessings of same-sex unions and not in civil recognition of them. Everyone agrees that the two are not the same thing. But try to separate them! Against his will, Jordan came to the conclusion that “marriage remains the great testimony to the inseparability of church and state.” A minister who officiates at a wedding ceremony delivers a state-prepared form to the local recording office. Without that bit of state sanction, the general public does not recognize that anything happened at the church.

What then is the value or significance of the blessing of the relationship of two same-sex persons without state validation? For Jordan the question of blessing same-sex unions has gotten too big. It has gotten too big at the expense of details and the real needs of gay persons. Facing the details and the real needs of gay persons is what the book is all about.

Jordan has organized his book around the processes that mark heterosexual romance. It is in this context that the differences between gay romantic experiences and heterosexual experiences are exposed. Becoming aware of romantic needs and sensitivities is a distinctly different experience for a gay person. The gay person must develop these sensitivities against society’s expectations and

training. There is no “going steady” and there is no ritual for coming out. Dating can be dangerous, and for safety’s sake gay dating is conducted in the shadows. Gay persons are not conditioned to expect their “special day.” There are no engagement rings or announcements. There is no institutional attempt to share a marriage theology with gay couples.

With these realities, can same-sex persons realistically and suddenly embrace an ill-defined Christian marriage? Is it even desirable for gay persons to embrace Christian marriage?

Jordan recognizes the value of rituals that mark special commitments and experiences. He urges gay persons to develop rituals that are meaningful to their own experience of finding satisfying intimacy and long-term relationships. He advises that the advocates of same-sex rituals and blessings will gain most in their theological understandings by refusing to play the standard game rather than merely adjusting to heterosexual practices.

A part of the muddied waters of Christian marriage is the churches’ insistence that procreation and children are a

Can same-sex persons realistically and suddenly embrace an ill-defined Christian marriage? Is it even desirable for gay persons to embrace Christian marriage?



necessary part of the marriage package. Churches have had a difficult time embracing the joys of sexual expression and the relational tenderness that is involved. Gay persons have taken a bad rap for sexual promiscuity and revelry. There is certainly anecdotal evidence that points to that reality. What is not usually admitted in the discussions is that heterosexual sexual life is rampant with the same promiscuity and revelry.

Against this background, Jordan discusses two phenomena in gay life,

friendship relationships and polyamorous relationships. There are many friendship same-sex relationships that are long-term or life-long. They are without genital sexual expression and little activity that could be called romantic. These friendship relationships are stable and obviously satisfying to the participants. Ought they not be recognized by ritual and blessing? The polyamorous relationships are more difficult for many of us to understand. But they are a reality. There are gay persons who live in stable households of more than two persons with active sexual expression. In the history of marriage, definitions have adjusted over time to actual practice. Can we imagine churches blessing such relationships?

Jordan is not opposed to churches’ blessing gay relationships. They should do it if for no other reason than justice. And as he points out, every serious theology laughs at itself: Will queers get married in a real church with a real minister? Just like everyone else – unless they are very careful.

A concluding note: Have no doubt, this is a book with important facts and insights. However, I suspect few people will read it. The language and writing style of the book are beyond the typical high-school graduate and many college educated folk. Reading it is hard work. Jordan’s influence in future discussions is assured. He is a first-rate scholar and is writing about important stuff. In some ways he is not just preaching to the choir but to a select portion of the choir. Possibly someone in the choir will write a popular version with fewer complex sentences and simpler vocabulary.

The Rev. Howard Bess is pastor of Church of the Covenant (W&A) in Palmer, Alaska, an American Baptist Church and a founding member of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists. He is the author of Pastor, I Am Gay and a frequent contributor to The InSpiriter.

Worship, Fellowship, and Good Food Mark Regional AWAB Gatherings in 12-Stop Welcoming Movement Tour

A fabulous luncheon for 65 people hosted by Southside Baptist Church of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship began the Southern Gathering of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, April 23, in Birmingham, Alabama. Other highlights included a tribute presented by Rev. Jim Hopkins (Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church [W&A], Oakland, California) to Dr. H. Darrell Lance for his ten years of faithful service as editor of *The InSpiriter*; and a spirited discussion with 30 Baptists facilitated by Rev. April Baker (Glendale Baptist Church [W&A], Nashville, Tennessee).



Revs. Sandi John and April Baker opening the AWAB luncheon in Birmingham, Alabama.

Highlights of the Chicagoland Gathering of W&A Baptists, June 2-4, included a delightful icecream social for 40 people at Lake Street Church (W&A) in Evanston; a powerful sermon by Rev. David Gregg who recently completed an interim pastorate at Community Church of Wilmette, Wilmette, Illinois; a special welcome to the members of Community Church of Wilmette, which recently joined AWAB; an intimate time of sharing for the 11 who gathered on Saturday; and a celebrative time of worship, food, and fellowship for the 40 who gathered at Grace Baptist Church (W&A), Chicago, on Sunday evening.

Thanks to all who made the first six "stops" of the tour such a huge success! Events have taken place in Michigan (Feb. 17-



Progressive Baptist partners, Evelyn Hanneman (BPFNA) and Ken Pennings (AWAB), connecting at the Alliance of Baptists Convocation.

19); New York City (Feb. 23-26); San Francisco Bay Area (Mar. 18-22); Southern States (Apr. 21-23); Chicago (June 2-4); and Indianapolis, Indiana (Jun. 26-29).

Plan to attend the upcoming "stop" nearest you! Check www.wabaptists.org for flyers and registration information.

July 21-22: New England Gathering. Hosted by First Churches, 129 Main St, Northampton, MA, 01060, 413-584-9392. Contact Bruce Baker at 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 Tonya Hamm at 919-732-5170, tonyasusan@aol.com.

September 29-October 1: Upper Midwest Gathering to be held in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Contact JoAnne Juett at 715-839-7038, jcjuett@sbcglobal.net.

October 13-15: Northwest Gathering. Hosted by Seattle First Baptist Church and University Baptist Church, Seattle, Washington. Contact Elizabeth Patrick at lizpatrick2@comcast.net.

October 20-22: Texas "Open Circle" Retreat. Hosted by University Baptist Church, 2130 Guadalupe St., Austin, TX 78705. Contact Bill Cox at 512-619-4909, bcoxal@yahoo.com. (The first element ends in the letter "l", not the number "1.")

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



AWAB's Council meeting before the Alliance of Baptists Convocation. From left to right (standing): Ron Grose (guest), Darrell Lance, Brian Dixon, Sandi John, Barbara Hulsing, Chris Boisvert, Bill Cox, Kathy Stayton, C. Burton Bagby (guest); (kneeling): Jim Singletary, Ken Pennings, Heather Rittenhouse. Missing: Mikhail Mashudi.

Editorial

—continued from page 2

A good example is the story in Luke 7 of the woman who washes Jesus' feet with her tears and dries them with her hair as he is reclining at table in the house of Simon, the Pharisee. Simon thinks to himself that Jesus could not be a prophet; otherwise, he would know that this woman is a prostitute and would not allow her to touch him. The goal of religion, as far as the Pharisee is concerned, is to keep oneself pure and undefiled, to make oneself more and more holy as God is holy. But for Jesus, issues of purity and holiness take second place to issues of human love and compassion, and thus he allows the woman to touch him and minister to him, receiving her precious gift and therefore receiving her.

We can see the same dynamic at work in the theology of Paul, especially in his letter to the Galatians. For these insights, I am indebted to David Bartlett's writing on the Galatian letter.

Paul had founded the church in the region of Galatia in about the year 49. The Galatians were Gentiles, and when Paul preached the gospel to them, he did not require that they first become Jews through circumcision of the males. This was the most profound break imaginable with Judaism. Circumcision was so important in Judaism that no uncircumcised male could approach the altar in Jerusalem on pain of death. So in not requiring the Galatian Gentiles first to be circumcised, Paul was clearly stating that the Gospel is open to all, not just to those who conformed to the practices of Judaism.

After a while, Paul left the Galatian church to continue his journeys, but reconstructing from what he says in this letter, he left behind some trained people to continue to preach the gospel as he had taught it to them. Then one day, along came some other Christian teachers with a very different take on things. They were Jewish Christians, people who believed that Jesus was truly the Messiah but who taught that to be

authentic followers of Jesus, the Galatian Gentiles would have to enter into the original Mosaic covenant and be circumcised, in other words become Jews so that they could then become truly Christian. Judging from Paul's indirect references, these new teachers were apparently having considerable success; some of the Galatian Christians apparently had even gone so far as to undergo circumcision in accordance with this new teaching.

When Paul hears what is going on, he writes the angriest of letters: "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" He then asks a question that makes his case in a nutshell: "Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law? Or by believing what you heard?" The Galatians had experienced the joy and the fruits of the Spirit that come with salvation in Christ by believing the gospel; it was not by living under the law. Now they want to negate what Paul preached and what they know from their own experience by going backwards, by renouncing the freedom they have in Christ. "For freedom Christ has set us free," says Paul. "Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery!"

Poor confused Galatians! "Are we to believe Paul and our own experience, or these other teachers who seem so sincere and so confident in their teaching? These teachers say they are only telling us what is for our own good. They are concerned for our salvation. They say it is because they love us that they are teaching us the truth, that we must be circumcised to be truly Christian. What are we to do?" Paul answers, "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (5:6).

There you have it. "Faith working through love." Not religious purity. Not circumcision. Not even – dare we say it? – heterosexuality. If one reads Paul's letter to the Galatians and substitutes the word "heterosexuality" for "circumcision," one has an almost exact parallel. To accede to the traditionalist position on the gay issue would be to say that the

Pharisees of Jesus' day and the circumcision party of Paul's day were right after all. It would be to deny that we are saved by grace through faith. So nothing less than the nature of the Gospel itself is at stake in the battle over homosexuality. One day when all the social and political dust that currently swirls around the debate has settled, perhaps the truth of the pure gospel will once again be allowed to shine forth.

A Personal Note:

With this issue, my tenure as editor of *The InSpiriter* comes to an end, and I yield that responsibility gladly into the willing and capable hands of Dr. JoAnne Juett. To serve in this position has been one of the most fulfilling and rewarding periods of my ministry. As one who reached maturity in the 1940s and '50s, I had no way to understand why a merciful God would call me to ministry but would not "cure" me and make me "normal." Having lived through the times when "gay Christian" was an oxymoron, I can scarcely believe how things have changed. And from what I have heard from our readers, I know that our publication has helped that change to occur. Nothing can match the joy of being an evangelist in the true sense, to proclaim release to the captives and new life to the dead in spirit. To the Council of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists who called me to establish and edit this publication, I express my profound gratitude.

The InSpiriter

Established in 1996 as a ministry of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, *The InSpiriter* is distributed free of charge. Although there is no subscription fee, contributions are always needed. Please send your tax-deductible gift, payable to AWAB, to AWAB, P. O. Box 259257, Madison, WI 53725. To be added to the mailing list – or deleted – contact Ken Pennings, mail@wabaptists.org, or write him at the above address.



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

by Ken Pennings

When I speak with pastors of Baptist congregations about the possibility of joining the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists (AWAB), some explain that the only resistance is from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (lgbt) members.

As an openly gay man who joined a Baptist church precisely *because* it was a member of AWAB, I find this curious, ironic, and perplexing!

Why would resistance to joining AWAB come from glbt people who, from my point of view, stand to gain the most from such a decision?!

Fear of Change?

It's possible that some feel joining AWAB is arbitrary and unnecessary. If lgbt's are *already* welcomed and affirmed in the life, ministries, and leadership of a church, what difference would it make to join AWAB?

Fear of Exposure?

Or some, possibly, have joined a Baptist church without identifying themselves openly and publicly as glbt. They may feel that the church's joining AWAB forces a question not being asked, gives undue attention to people who may wish to keep their private lives their own, labels people who don't wish to be labeled, or "outs" people who do not wish to be "outed."

Fear of Attack?

But I wonder if the primary reason some lgbt people are resistant to their church's joining AWAB isn't love and concern for their straight allies. They don't want their straight allies to experience the kind of rejection, stigmatization, marginalization, pain, and abuse that they themselves have experienced.

Think of how some African-American church members resisted participation in the civil rights movement. They knew that they would be attacked personally for raising the question of equal rights and privileges for African-Americans and that their loved-ones would be attacked also. Many suffered silently hoping to protect the ones they loved.

Similarly, lgbt people living in a violently repressive culture may hesitate raising the question of full inclusion of glbt people in the life and ministries of the church and the question of joining AWAB because they want to spare the church the attacks, rejection, pain, abuse, and losses they themselves have experienced. They may suffer in silence hoping to protect the ones they love.

Recently, I asked a lesbian, "What's it like for lgbt people who attend this church?" In her response, I heard suffering in silence: "We're welcome here, as long as we're silent and invisible."

I wanted desperately for her to experience the grace, freedom, and safety of life in an AWAB congregation!

It seems to me that resistance from glbt persons, whatever the reasons – whether fear of change, fear of exposure, or fear of attack – may be overcome by education and compassionate discourse. Congregations considering membership in AWAB wisely:

- listen carefully to all the concerns of lgbt persons and their straight allies;
- balance all concerns with the moral imperative of compassion and justice for all who are marginalized and oppressed; and
- stand in solidarity with one another in the face of the criticism, attacks, and losses, which inevitably will result from such a decision.

The congregation that eventually joins AWAB has lgbt members who say, "We'd do anything to spare this congregation the kind of pain and abuse we've suffered," and straight allies who say, "We'd risk everything for the full inclusion of lgbt people into the life, ministries, and leadership of this church!" Isn't joining AWAB all about people caring more for each other than for themselves?

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A Story of Hope

by Sandi John

Jesse listened intently and respectfully while the adults at his church's forum on "How Can we Become More Welcoming to the GLBT Community?" discussed their perceptions of the differences among being welcoming, affirming, and advocating.

"Here's what I think advocacy is," Jesse spoke up. He said yearbook pictures had been taken that day at his high school. He had chosen to be a bit late for his play rehearsal because he for sure wanted to be in the Gay Straight Alliance picture. "I think it is very important that my gay friends (he's straight) see me standing beside them and showing I support them by being in that picture."

Then he wondered out loud about another issue of advocacy. His concern was for one of his lesbian friends who he felt was being harassed by a teacher. While he understood the importance of not outing her (she had already told the teacher she was not gay when the teacher had asked), he wanted to go advocate for her and try to educate the teacher.

As the adults continued talking about further steps they can take in being more welcoming, it was clear there was hesitation

by some as well. It was then that Jesse preached his homily. Gently and firmly he said, "Every time in the Bible when an angel comes to talk to people, he says, 'Don't be afraid.' I think we should just not be afraid and do what is right."

Amen! Preach it, Brother!

Thanks be to God for such youth!

The Rev. Sandi John recently completed nearly nine years as the pastor of the Washington Plaza Baptist Church (W&A) in Reston, Virginia. She is a member of the Council of AWAB.

Explore AWAB's web site at
www.wabaptists.org

Read *Associational*, the newsletter from executive director Ken Pennings.
Read commentaries, thoughts, and stories at
Voice of the Turtle Online