

## OPINIONS

## Don't seek Scripture's counsel on homosexuality

By Msgr. William H. Shannon  
Guest Contributor

It is a sound principle of biblical interpretation that thought patterns and modes of expression found in the Bible will differ from one biblical period to another and also between the biblical period and contemporary times. Ways of writing and speaking are inevitably affected by time, history and culture. To give a simple example, in the New Testament the Greek word "presbyteroi" simply meant the "elders" in the community; today we use the word "presbyterate" to refer to the priests of a diocese, whether they are elderly or not. With the passage of time words do change and acquire new meanings.

This important principle for interpreting texts must be considered in discussing

any biblical texts that seem to refer to homosexuality. The biblical writers knew absolutely nothing of a homosexual condition that was not chosen, but given. They saw homosexual behavior at times in the context of temple prostitution; at other times (in an age when the dignity of the male was a primary consideration) as a way of demeaning captives taken in war; at yet other times in the context of gang rape. But in whatever context, it was viewed by them as sexual relations between persons of the same sex who were heterosexual.

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul writes: "Men did shameful things with men and thus received in their own persons the penalty for the perversity" (1:27). This certainly appears to be a condemnation of homosexuality. Yet Paul had no

knowledge of what the American Bishops said in their statement of 1973: "It can be said safely that man or woman does not will to become homosexual. At a certain point in life the person discovers that he (she) is homosexual..."

What is now known in our day about homosexuality was not known in Paul's day. Clearly, therefore, Paul had no notion of homosexuality as a permanent condition of a person's sexuality. Nor could he have envisioned the possibility of a homosexual relationship that could exist in a context of love, fidelity and mutuality.

The very simple point I want to make is this: Anyone who wishes to make a moral evaluation of such a relationship will find little help in biblical texts. They simply do not deal with the issue under discussion.



Kurt Brownell

During the Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral, an estimated 80 protesters prayed and marched outside with signs bearing such messages as: "God made Adam & Eve (Genesis) Not Adam & Steve."

## Parish staff struggles to understand uproar over liturgy

To the editors:

We are having a difficult time understanding all the controversy over Bishop Clark's Liturgy for the gay and lesbian community and their families.

As Christians it is difficult to reconcile excluding an entire group of people. Didn't Jesus come that we all may have life, and have life to the fullest? Was He not, in His ministry, continually reaching out to those whom society rejected?

Is the message of all this protest that Jesus ministered to everyone except gays and lesbians? How can that be?

As for the Scripture in Leviticus, if we take the words about homosexuality literally — which scripture scholars say not to do — and as divine law, then shouldn't we also be sacrificing small animals? Shouldn't we also be quarantining menstruating women and women who have just given birth, because they are unclean? Is it not just to buy and own slaves, provided we buy them from neighboring nations? It says so in Leviticus.

The reality is that we have more knowledge than we did thousands of years ago. Science has demonstrated that homosexuality is a genetic trait. Even if that were not the case, how can a particular child of God be less because of sexual orientation? If it is the person's behavior rather than orientation, that is being judged, how do you know? There are

married couples that don't have sexual relations, so how can you be sure about the sexual behavior of a particular gay or lesbian couple? Should we make assumptions about heterosexual couples and their private lives, and in doing so, exclude them from the sacraments? How can we deny anyone Eucharist by what we assume about them? It is the spiritual equivalent of capital punishment.

This is truly a complex and difficult issue, but would it not be easier to look Jesus in the eye having erred on the side of love and compassion to our brothers and sisters, than to have erred on the side of self-righteousness and exclusion?

Jesus continually crossed the line by touching lepers, healing on the Sabbath, breaking the social rules of the day to express to every individual that we are loved. Jesus again crosses the line profoundly at every Eucharistic celebration. How can we deny Jesus the opportunity to love and heal people who are seeking Him?

As for Bishop Clark, we commend him for having the courage to cross the line and minister to God's chosen ones.

The Staff of  
Sacred Heart/St. Ann Parish, Auburn  
Father P. Paul Brennan, Pastor  
Father James C. Enright,  
Maureen Collins, Vincent J. DeWitt,  
Joan Gurak and Judith Nichols



Matthew Scott

Bishop Matthew H. Clark gives Communion to one of the approximately 1,300 people who attended the diocese's first Mass for gays, lesbians, their families and friends March 1 at Sacred Heart Cathedral. Bishop Clark told the gays and lesbians attending the service, "We are the weaker to the degree that we are not enjoying the wonderful gifts God gives you for the sake of the community."

## Debate shows need for teaching

To the editors:

The Catholic Church and the Bible teach that it is a grave sin to receive the Body and Blood of Christ when one is already in the state of serious sin. The Church and the Bible also teach that sexual activity between homosexuals is a grave sin.

It is probably safe to say that many members of the homosexual community are sexually active. I don't make this comment in a judgmental way but rather in the same way that one would say that many members of the heterosexual community are sexually active. It is simply a fact of life.

Therefore, Bishop Clark's invitation to homosexuals to partake in a special celebration of the Eucharist is not simply a call to come back to a Church who loves them, but the invitation also has other repercussions in that it is likely an invitation for many to receive the Body and Blood of Christ while in a state of sin, thereby committing yet another sin against God; a sin which seems to be tacitly condoned in this instance.

The underlying issue however, is not really a homosexual or heterosexual issue as it seems to come across in the media which surrounds this event. This event just happens to be the catalyst. When you look beyond the rhetoric, you can clearly

see the issue which needs to be addressed. That issue is the failure of this Diocese to effectively provide teaching and guidance, regarding what is sinful and what is not, on most matters that affect us each day; not just this one.

This failure has many aspects to it and reasons for it; but I believe the main reason is that there is no final authority in this Diocese who sees to it that the "cacophony of teachings" that we encounter from individuals like Father James B. Callan, Father Robert Collins, Father Richard McBrien, Sister Patricia Schoelles, etc., are sorted out and explained in light of authentic Church teaching. Instead, we are left to flounder about on our own with a conscience that is continuously influenced by the secular media and by the opinions of those that have received authority from the Church to teach and yet choose to teach contrary to what the Church teaches.

Until the truth is presented and represented to us authoritatively on a regular basis, clearly and in its entirety as taught by the Church, I guess we are relegated to choosing from a wide variety of moral relativisms: just as sheep wander from field to field without a shepherd in a world full of wolves.

Michael A. Gallagher  
West Church Street, Fairport

## Controversial historical figure would smile at attempt to welcome alienated individuals

To the editors:

I have not read anywhere that our Bishop is honoring gay and lesbian Catholics or a homosexual lifestyle. He is conducting a Mass for people who feel unwelcome or alienated from the church. The parents of these people are also hurting and need the healing of Eucharist. But for the grace of God go any one of us!

If as Christian Roman Catholics we turn away anyone needing Eucharist then our religion, our faith, is in a sorry state

of affairs. We are taught that our God is a God of unconditional love. Are we giving that in return?

I commend Bishop Matthew Clark for sticking out his neck to face the issues of our times. A long time ago a very controversial figure would have done the same thing and will be looking down on this Mass with a BIG smile on His face!

Gail Phillips  
Coykendall Hill Road  
Springwater

## Thanks bishop for setting a loving example

To the editors:

I am writing to thank (Bishop Clark) for your example of compassion, non-judgment and welcome to others.

Your columns in the *Catholic Courier* and other newspapers, your talks on TV and the radio demonstrate your unconditional love towards all people, even those who disagree with the Christ-like way you are modeling for us.

When you speak of your family, you

show the love that binds families together. Thank you for that same love shown last week at the special Mass for gay and lesbian people. We are all on a journey toward the fullness of our Kingdom.

You are indeed a perfect example of what has been said often: if you are right with God nothing else matters.

Thank you for being that example.

Patty Genco  
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