

Thoughts on the Ordination of Sexually Active Gay Men and Lesbians

By Christopher H. Rosik, Ph.D.

A version of the following essay was sent by NARTH member Christopher Rosik to a web site that monitors news of the Presbyterian Church-USA, a religious denomination which has for several years been debating the homosexual issue.

Dr. Rosik points out that as the "born that way" argument recedes in importance, many lesbians (as well as a minority of gay men) now attribute their sexual identity to personal choice. But what is the church to do about this? If sexual identity is fluid, and if homosexuals agree that they are not (at least in a certain proportion of cases) "born that way," how would the church distinguish between those "created homosexual" by God, and those who simply chose to expand their sexual options through a personal social-political decision?

And what about bisexual clergy—should they be allowed to marry two people? Should transgender clergy "celebrate" their condition as part of "God's rainbow of creation," or consider their conflict a defect? All of these questions must be faced by the church as it ponders the blessing of gay relationships.

Lately I have been reading many letters containing *pro* and *con* arguments for overturning the Presbyterian Church's ordination standard. That standard now limits positions of leadership to those who maintain fidelity in heterosexual marriage or chastity in singleness.

Social and theological liberals tend to argue from biology and/or theology that the biblical prohibition against homosexual conduct is antiquated. According to their argument, certain homosexual sexual behavior among religious leaders should be exempted from this exclusion.

In response to this, I have offered some observations and related questions that I believe need to be answered by anyone who argues for such an exception to the historic religious standard—i.e., that sexual contact is reserved for heterosexual marriage.

When Sexual Identity is a Choice

First, we should not treat gay men and lesbians as a monolithic group. In fact, a good body of research provides a convincing rationale for differentiating between lesbians and gay men in terms of erotic plasticity (Baumeister,

2000). For example, Whisman (1996) found a higher percentage of lesbians (31%) than gay men (18%) who described their sexual orientation as being a conscious, deliberate choice. Similarly, Rosenbluth (1997) found that 58% of 90 lesbian couples reported choosing their current sexual orientation.



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This raises an interesting question. If equal access to positions of religious leadership is predicated on homosexual orientation being *created by God* and not chosen, then what do we do with those (primarily) lesbians whose same-sex involvement is consciously chosen? To be consistent with the premise, these lesbians would need to be singled out for exclusion. If they are not, then the creation argument is given the appearance of being disingenuous.

Of course, individuals who experience some same-sex attraction but remain committed to fidelity in heterosexual marriage or chastity in singleness may still be perfectly able to serve in an ordained capacity.

The Problem of Bisexuality

How we treat bisexuality discloses a great deal about the philosophical consistency of our position regarding homosexuality. Zinik (1985) defined the bisexual person as having:

"the capacity for sexual arousal by members of both sexes, sexual activity or sexual desire for sexual contact with both men and women, and self-identification as being bisexual."

This definition remains fairly well accepted today.

Much emphasis is placed by social liberals on affirming faithful (and, I assume, sexually monogamous) homosexual relationships, since it is assumed that God created the homosexual attraction. But bisexuality poses a serious challenge for adherents of this line of thinking, since bisexuals are typically considered to have, by nature, sexual inclinations toward both sexes between which they can simultaneously choose.

What would one do if a candidate for ordination indicated that he or she was bisexual? Should they be required to limit themselves to faithful sexual activity with only one

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person of the opposite (or same) sex? Would this not be a denial of their true nature?

In addition, if we mandate that bisexuals deny their nature in order to be ordained, then wouldn't this policy support what traditionalists having been saying all along—that biblical faithfulness may legitimately require sexual self-denial?

Or, perhaps bisexuals should be allowed to have "faithful" sexual relationships with two people—one man and one woman. This would appear to be consistent with the premise of bisexuality as God-given...but then, having two partners clearly violates the biblical mandate of sexual monogamy. Such a solution suggests that ultimately, sexual monogamy is unimportant in either homosexual or heterosexual relationships.

It seems clear to me that any religious leader arguing in favor of ordaining sexually active homosexual persons *simply must indicate how they will resolve the problems posed by bisexuality*. Indeed, the plight of bisexuals appears inextricably linked to that of gay men and lesbians within the sexual-minority community.

Is Transgenderism the Creator's Intent?

The situation with transgendered individuals raises still further questions. Transgender is a term used to describe persons who have a persistent and distressing discomfort with their assigned gender. They are born anatomically as one biological sex, but live their lives to varying degrees as the opposite sex. The limited number of gender-dysphoric persons who I have seen clinically (prior to any sex reassignment surgery) take it as a "given" that their condition is due to some neurobiological problem. The scientific literature generally supports this notion, at least for a group of "core" gender dysphoric people, although psychosocial factors probably play a greater or lesser role in any individual case. But if we accept this conclusion, then clearly the origins of transgenderism are not part of God's creative intent.

So then if a transgendered person seeks ordination, it appears that the logical argument in support of ordination would be that the person was born with a biological defect for which they were not responsible and which sex reassignment surgery corrected. Again, this is very different than celebrating transgenderism as part of the intended rainbow of God's sexually diverse world.

If we are told the church must ordain practicing homosexual persons because the homosexual was "born that way," then shouldn't the church also accept into leadership transgendered persons only on the basis that they are "designed that way" by their maker as well?

How does one resolve this inconsistency without undermining the rationale of those in the church who now say it is God's intent that we bless homosexual relationships? Or is their whole argument a smoke screen?

Generally, when I ask these questions, I am struck by the silence that I receive. Only a few people respond with counter views, and those few do not seem able to grasp my point.

I invite religiously oriented readers of the *NARTH Bulletin* to try out these questions where such issues are at stake, and see if you receive a more satisfactory response than I seem able to obtain. There is too much at stake for the faith community to allow their leaders to leave such questions unasked and unanswered.

References

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APA Publicity Brings Attention to NARTH; Association Says It "Learned Lessons" From Fiasco

In March, our web site experienced its all-time highest usage--just over 50,000 monthly visitors--as a result of several articles mentioning NARTH in the APA-published *American Psychologist*.

The articles in the *American Psychologist* described NARTH's role in 1999 in uncovering a controversial pedophilia study. Publicity about that study turned into what the *American Psychologist* calls "the political storm of the century for the field of psychology, with gale-force winds raging from the media, congressional leaders, state legislatures, and conservative grassroots organizations." The resulting public-relations nightmare marked the first time, APA said, that it had been called into the public arena to defend the publication of a study.

Among the lessons APA said it learned from the pedophilia fiasco were (1) that it must build bridges "between the field of psychology and the conservative end of the political spectrum," and (2) the profession must prepare itself for the "looming challenge to psychology as a science."