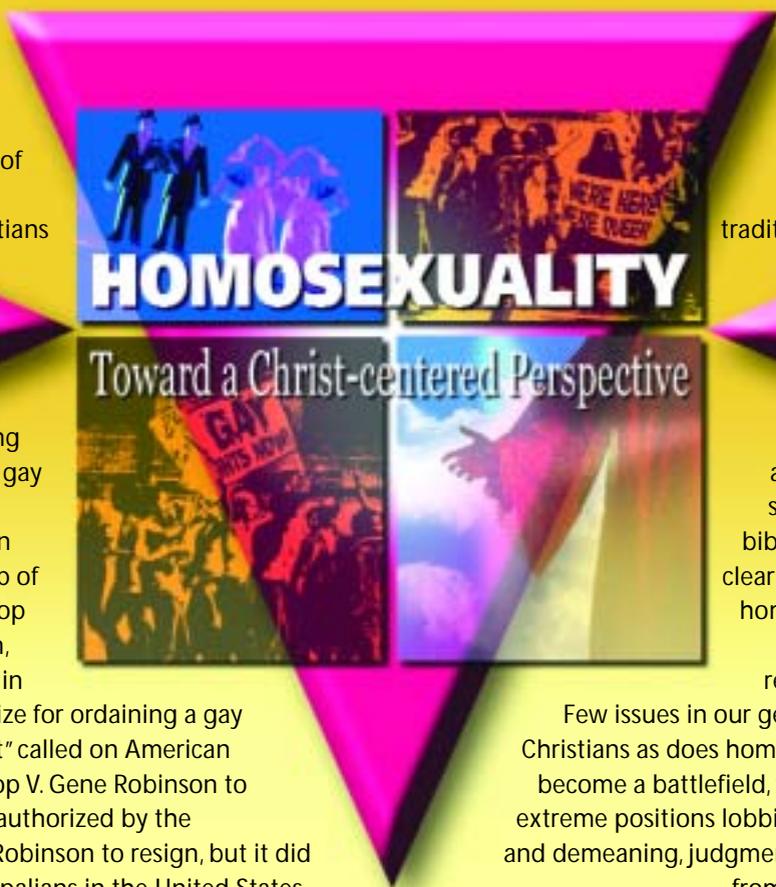


The worldwide Anglican Communion of churches is rocking and reeling as the prospect of division looms closer and closer. Over 70 million Christians in 164 countries are now affected as their Anglican and Episcopalian churches are facing the possibility of being ripped apart by the issue of gay sexuality.

This past fall a commission convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury, senior Archbishop of the Anglican Communion, asked the Episcopal Church in the United States to apologize for ordaining a gay bishop. The "Windsor Report" called on American bishops who ordained Bishop V. Gene Robinson to apologize. The commission authorized by the Archbishop did not call on Robinson to resign, but it did criticize conservative Episcopalians in the United States

who reacted to Robinson's ordination by breaking away from the church. The vast majority of Americans believe in traditional marriage. This past fall's general election featured eleven states approving constitutional amendments prohibiting same-sex marriage. While biblically-based Christianity clearly defines the practice of homosexuality as a sin, how should we as Christians respond to homosexuals?

Few issues in our generation have polarized Christians as does homosexuality. This topic has become a battlefield, with Christians from two extreme positions lobbing theological grenades and demeaning, judgmental insults at each other from opposing perspectives:



EXTREME LIBERAL VIEW

1 Homosexuals are born as homosexuals. God made them, and therefore any biblical references that seem to prohibit loving homosexual practice are archaic and culturally biased. Why would God create a homosexual and then accuse him/her of sinning if they express their love with another homosexual in a monogamous relationship? Homosexuals in loving and faithful relationships are simply demonstrating their love. Those who take any other position are homophobic, bigots and hatemongers. □

EXTREME CONSERVATIVE VIEW

2 The practice of homosexuality is condemned in the Bible. Homosexuals are not born—they are made. Nature does not produce homosexuals—they are produced by dysfunctional relationships and a corrupt world. Homosexuals are deviates and perverts—they are skilled at using politics and the media, attempting to move homosexuality into the mainstream of society. The truth is that homosexuality is absolutely the worst kind of sin. □

There is a third alternative increasingly favored by many evangelical Christians. These Christians reject both extremes and advocate a balanced and biblical, Christ-centered viewpoint that doesn't answer all the questions or solve every ambiguity, but comes closer to authentic Christianity than the two extremes.

This third, balanced perspective acknowledges that no one definitively knows whether homosexuals are born or whether they become that way. The jury is still out, with conflicting studies and research, much of which unfortunately seems to be self-serving and subjectively skewed.

TOWARD A BALANCED, CHRIST-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE

3 The Bible condemns homosexual practice, along with many other sins, including hatred, pride and self-righteousness. On the one hand, no human has the capability of declaring some of the Bible to be true and accurate, with other portions being myth and opinion. Such "scholarship" attempting to justify homosexual practice is self-serving abuse of the Bible. On the other hand, the Bible does not indicate that homosexuality is the worst of all sins, nor does it give such a ranking to any sin. The gospel

of Jesus Christ makes it clear that we are all sinners, and that we all need Jesus Christ.

Above all, the Bible clearly defines Christians as those who have love. Christians are identified by this love—God's love. This love is not a word or concept that humans can subjectively use to justify their behavior. Love is not expressed through lying, stealing, hating, pride, envy, drunkenness, gluttony or homosexuality. Love is not expressed by condemning others, shouting insults at them from picket lines or ostracizing them. God's love is not our love, it is his love, and it is by that love Christians are known.

Unfortunately, many have taken unbiblical views that are either self-serving and self-justifying on one hand, or judgmental and hateful on the other. Sadly, many Christians have become known as bigots who have no time for homosexuals. All Christians are sinners; Christians have proclivities and weaknesses of all kinds, including homosexuality. However, Christians who are homosexuals, who have homosexual desires, including those who have once been practicing homosexuals will not,

by definition, practice homosexuality. They will not parade their pride in the practice of homosexuality and insist that the church or society at large accept them in same sex marriage. Marriage is one man and one woman according to the Bible. Therefore, a Christian homosexual will be a celibate homosexual, much as a recovering alcoholic will not drink any alcohol, and they will avoid situations where they may be tempted.

Other Christians who happen to have differing weaknesses and sins will reach out to celibate homosexual Christians rather than condemn them. Christians are known by God's love that lives in us through Jesus Christ.

Christ lives his life within us and reforms us in God's image, transforming us from all human culture, including the culture of religion that often opposes Christ. *Plain Truth* asked Barbara Curtis and Madison Trammel to share their thoughts about homosexuals, and homosexuality. Each expresses a move to a Christ-centered perspective on this potentially divisive issue. □

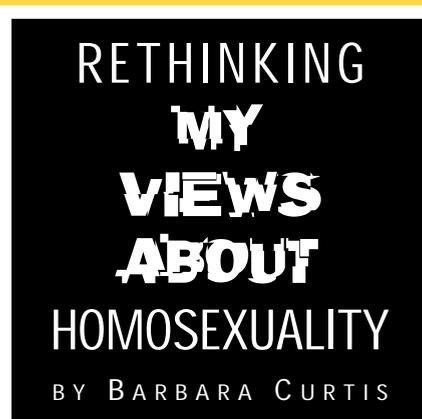
—The Editors

Oscar was the first gay man I knew well. It was 1973 and I'd just migrated to San Francisco from Virginia—a hippie chick wandering in for a haircut, immediately charmed by all the things that made him different from any man I'd met before.

It stands to reason I'd be attracted. The gay scene was another cutting edge of the counterculture, and I loved hanging out on cutting edges. Over the next few years, Oscar and I became good friends, at first just trading gossip and giggles, but eventually allowing our lives to become deeply entwined.

In 1976, when I left my husband, Oscar was there for me—from decorating my new flat to staging my daughter Jasmine's two-year-old birthday party. When my decadent lifestyle landed me in the hospital, Oscar moved in and took over, then stayed when I came home to a long recovery—cooking, cleaning and taking care of Jasmine.

Eventually I came to spend most of my time hanging out with gay men. I even had a couple of gay roommates as my life spiraled downhill through a series of drug dependencies. Romance was never an issue, as the gays I knew were not experimenting, not bi, but only into men. Many had come to San



Francisco from the Midwest or points east to get away from their families and to live someplace where they felt they could be who they were. As I listened to their bragging and boasting, I could hardly believe the way they lived their lives, with numbers of partners that staggered the imagination. Some claimed to have had 500 or more a year.

My theory was that their sexuality represented the complete domination of masculine sexuality. Just as in their natural state men tend to be more interested in sex than relationship, and women put a greater value on relationship than sex, in San Francisco in the 70s the homosexuals I knew had virtually stripped sex of human attachment. They wanted sex without limits. And since women represented limits, they didn't want women.

In 1980, I left the gay scene in San Francisco, moved to Marin, California, then—realizing the change I really needed to make was in me—joined Alcoholics Anonymous to learn how to live without drugs and alcohol. Seven years of spiritual seeking followed before I, along with my husband Tripp, became Christian in 1987.

The next twelve years, consumed with learning and teaching my children what it meant to be a believer, I paid little attention to what was going on in the world outside Christianity. When I came up for air, it was a different cultural landscape. The cutting edge of the counterculture had become mainstream. Movies and TV shows with sympathetic portrayals of gay characters had made a choice once considered taboo just another lifestyle.

And often, they were the nicest characters in the show. Take the recent "Queer Eye For the Straight Guy"—you couldn't meet five nicer, more helpful, witty and fun-to-be-with guys. It was as though they'd taken Oscar and highlighted each wonderful part about him.

But the political landscape was bad news, with aggression and hostility coming from both sides: homosexuals aggressively seeking change and acceptance, and Chris-

tian groups organized to defend foundational truths.

Like other Christians, at first I was angered and confused by the new labels we had to bear: Anti-gay, homophobe, bigot. Yes, homosexuality was undoubtedly a sin, but only a few fringe fanatics were running around with signs saying, "God Hates Fags."

Most of us knew God doesn't hate fags, that he loves them, that if Jesus were here today he'd probably eat dinner with them, challenging all of our prejudices. We knew we were supposed to hate the sin and love the sinner, but with regards to homosexuals, what exactly would that look like?

Around the time these questions were nagging at my soul, I had an epiphany about my attitude towards homosexuality and homosexuals. Here's what I wrote:

NIMBY: Now In My Back Yard

I wasn't ready for this so close to home. After all, I live in a rural, relatively unsophisticated town, boasting not a single shopping mall or pet psychiatrist, where people shop at Kmart and are thankful to have one. I thought we might remain backward yet a while longer—at least until my children were all grown.

Still, we're only an hour north of the Golden Gate Bridge, and on weekends the freeway that slices through our town hosts an ever-growing stream of upscale cars carrying two men apiece to the funky river resort towns another hour north. Noticeably distinct from local types sporting Ford pickups and hunting rifles, these passers-through are more inclined to drive BMWs and fancy bikes. With no women or children to provide for, they can afford it.

Sometimes on the freeway perched high in my own BMW—Big Mama Wagon—I see them holding hands, looking a lot like two left shoes. At 65 miles per hour it's not so hard to shrug off.

But, I wasn't flying down the freeway last week, I was just making a bank deposit. My teller was new, and breaking new ground at our bank—four earrings, no less. As he typed in my transaction, my eyes grazed his

name tag, then the walls of his cubby—browsing for pictures of wife, girlfriend, kids or pets.

Sure enough, there was a wedding picture, a couple under an arbor abloom with pink. "Doug," smaller, younger, and clearly quite smitten, held hands with his new partner. Two tuxedos, no bouquet.

So now ...I paid little attention to what was going on in the world outside Christianity. When I came up it's in my own backyard, for air, it was a different cultural landscape. The cutting edge of the counterculture had once so far from San Francisco's Castro District, my former stomping ground as a "fag hag" (affectionately, a straight woman who hangs out with gay men—or in my case even lived with them). But how did it happen? I can only say that when I walked in darkness, I walked farther than most. I thought it was "hip."

It wasn't, really. These PC "wedding" pictures now gracing magazines (and who knows, maybe lots of cubbies like Doug's) are different than the debauchery I saw in the late 70s. My guess is that among young gay men they are still the exception, rather than the rule.

The dominating force in the homosexual community I knew was unbridled, unfettered male lust. Bathhouses and places even more unspeakable offered access to hundreds of anonymous partners a year. Gays boasted of their records, outdoing each other and themselves in sheer numbers and types of perversion.



become mainstream. Movies and TV shows with sympathetic portrayals of gay characters had made a choice once considered taboo just another lifestyle.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NBC, INC © 2004

And often, they were the nicest characters in the show. Take the recent "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy"—you couldn't meet five nicer, more helpful, witty and fun-to-be-with guys.

That was pre-AIDS, of course. And though AIDS may have put a temporary damper on the party, it seems once again to be in full swing. For years gays have been demanding a cure which will allow them to continue their reckless behavior. Now in San Francisco they clamor for the reopening of the bathhouses, which were closed in the 80s to prevent the spread of disease. The Annual Gay Pride Parade continues to look like a descent into the torments of hell. Not

at all the image conveyed in Doug's wedding picture.

Monogamy—that was for dumb heterosexuals, or “breeders.”

Now Breeder Supreme, I wonder what Doug is thinking as he sifts through my bundle of checks—article payments from places like *Focus on the Family*, Southern Baptists, the Salvation Army. Will he pigeonhole me as his enemy? I'm not. I want to ask him how he got here, where he's going. I'd really like him to know how much I care.

“You're new here, aren't you?” I begin. “Are you from Petaluma?” I smile a lot, maybe too much. I hope not.

As a Conservative-Christian-Come-Lately I've had to reconcile what I know firsthand to be wrong with the “other” side with what I observe to be wrong with my own. Here is what I see:

We claim to love the sinner and hate the sin, but the problem of homosexuality and its destructive effects within our society has surely made it a challenge. Still, it can't be right for Christianity to be pitted against homosexuality as though it were the worst sin on parade. I recently heard of a pastor who resigned his position and filed for divorce to marry the also-inconveniently-already-married church secretary. His main complaint: his wife was too fat. Is his sin less

than Doug's? Such hypocrisy makes our very specific outrage over homosexuality difficult for those in darkness to understand.

As though it were planned, I seem to wind up with Doug as my teller more often than not these days. He sorts through my collection of “enemy” checks while we talk of the weather, the weekend, whatever.

It's not that hard. I know more than most that a life can be turned 180 degrees. In the meantime I choose to be friends with Doug. Someday that may make a difference.

Rethinking my position on homosexuality—focusing on how God might like to see me behave—made

Gay and Lesbian Appreciation Day. His face flushed, his voice rising, the pastor slowly and deliberately read Clinton's words of appreciation for homosexuals' contributions to the United States.

“Let me make this clear,” the pastor concluded, jabbing his finger angrily. “No homosexual has ever contributed anything to our country.”

Homosexual Contributions?

I'm sure the pastor intended to speak out strongly against sin, nothing more. Yet his words were simply untrue. I have a gay uncle who has brought his long-term partner to nearly every Thanksgiving I can remember. His partner cooks the turkey each year, spending most of the day in the kitchen so that we can all enjoy his culinary specialty. Has he contributed nothing to our family's holidays? My wife's favorite cousin, who spent hours teaching her to set a volleyball and frequently brought her along on ski trips, recently came out of the closet. Did that decision undo all of the kindness she'd shown my wife growing up? Besides my own personal experience, we see people like Billie Jean King, Elton John and numerous other notable names who have made significant contributions to society beyond their limelight.

More importantly, the pastor's words were also damaging, especially to those in the congregation who were secretly struggling with homosexuality. Were they encouraged to believe that victory was possible for them? Did they learn that Jesus could forgive their sins too? Or did they simply hear once again from a Christian that their temptation was more heinous than anyone else's?

The truth is, we are all vulnerable to sexual sin, and no sin is more despicable to God than another. A couple of years after hearing this sermon, Regina and I learned that the pastor had been battling his own secret sin for many years, an addiction to pornography. The church finally had to let him go because of his unwillingness to follow a prescribed restoration program.



While listening to the debate swirling around the failed Federal Marriage Amendment Act, it occurred to me that Americans already know that most Christians oppose gay marriage. What they don't know, and may find impossible to believe, is that we have anything but our own narrow interests at heart.

We must confess, the fault lies partly with us. Too often the gay community has heard only condemnation from our lips. We have broadcast our beliefs, denounced sin, petitioned legislators—and frequently forgotten to love homosexuals.

I attended a Sunday service several years ago that illustrated this point. My wife, Regina, and I had just moved to Florida and decided to visit one of the most well-respected churches in the area. Dynamic and growing, the church owed much of its success to its senior pastor. On that morning, however, the pastor chose to dedicate a large chunk of his sermon to berating then-president Clinton for supporting a national

a difference for me and my family. It helped us see that no matter how passionately we oppose homosexual political gains—particularly now with same-sex marriage—we need to treat every person we meet with respect and kindness. With children involved in music and theater, we’ve met and have ongoing relationships with many individuals who happen to be homosexual.

Two years ago, I saw Doug for the last time. Our family moved to Virginia,

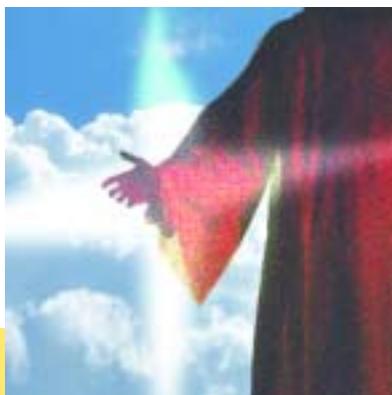
back to the old-fashioned values and traditions that I’d scorned in my younger, unbelieving years.

On our tree-lined dirt road, graced with brick houses on three acre lots, the house two lots down was recently bought by a couple in their 80s who went to town fixing it up, with contractors swarming the property like locusts. When the dust settled, I brought over a welcome basket to the two men

who’d seen the same beauty in our neighborhood I had. It turns out they’ve been involved in theater all their lives and love to come to see my kids perform.

Where will our friendship go? I don’t know. But I thank God for it, thank God for teaching me to love them, and—acknowledging my complete helplessness—I place all the unresolved issues in his care. □

Barbara Curtis and her family live in Virginia. In addition to appearing regularly in the Plain Truth, Barbara’s work is published in a wide variety of Christian magazines.



Divorce, spousal abuse and extramarital affairs all dishonor marriage, as does homosexuality. All fall short of God’s best. Yet as restrictive and unpopular as this message is for many people, it can only be heard if it is accompanied by love.

I cannot feel superior to the pastor, because pornography poses a powerful temptation for me as well. I must admit that I have not always resisted it, as I should. Yet neither can I feel superior to those who wrestle with homosexual longings. So I can’t help but wonder: What would have happened if the pastor had shared his own failings with the congregation that morning? What if he had spoken of the forgiveness and hope that Jesus offers to everyone who feels trapped in sexual sin? His ministry might have been saved by open confession and greater accountability, and the congregation would have heard a sermon that did more than condemn sin—it also would have pointed the way to life.

A Paradox of the Gospel

When a group of religious leaders brought an adulterous woman to Jesus, intending to stone her, he said that whoever was perfect should cast the first stone. Soon everyone left. “Has no one condemned you?” Jesus said. “Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:10-11). Jesus never failed to accept people, affirm their worth and call them to something better. That was the paradox of his gospel. It remains counter-cultural today.

A gay uncle raised one of Regina’s former boyfriends, Marcos. After his parents had dropped out of his life, this uncle stepped in and provided him with love and a secure home. The environment was not perfect; the uncle smoked pot and had at least one live-in boyfriend during the years that Marcos was growing

up. Yet the uncle also encouraged Marcos in sports and schoolwork and even allowed him to attend church. In the end, Marcos, a young Hispanic whom many in society would have written off, earned a scholarship to Yale. He now teaches at a minority high school in Los Angeles.

For Christians, the real issue surrounding homosexuality isn’t genetics or religious freedom or even a constitutional amendment. We’ve focused on these enough. The real issue is the call of Jesus.

Rebuilding Bridges

I firmly believe that Christians have a timely and essential message for homosexuals in our country—men and women like Marcos’ uncle. The question is: Have we earned the right to be heard? Before we say another word, we must first apologize to the gay community for our unkind spirit. We must seek to rebuild bridges of communication and understanding. According to the Bible, God intended marriage to be a lifelong, committed relationship between a man and a woman. Divorce, spousal abuse and extramarital affairs all dishonor marriage, as does homosexuality. Yet as restrictive and unpopular as this message is for many people, it can only be heard if it is accompanied by love.

When Christians shun homosexuals, we communicate that Jesus doesn’t care about them. Nothing could be farther from the truth. While watching *The Passion of the Christ*, I was reminded of Jesus’ words in the Gospel of John: “Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-13.). For Christians, the real issue surrounding homosexuality isn’t genetics or religious freedom or even a constitutional amendment. We’ve focused on these enough. The real issue is the call of Jesus.

Let us be the first to heed it. We may be surprised to see who follows. □

With this issue we welcome Madison Trammel to the Plain Truth. Madison writes from Wheaton, Illinois.