

AN INSIGHT INTO THE FALLACIES OF CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM (With an Emphasis Upon Sexuality and Body Perception)

by Gordon Gill (Revised March 2004)

Introduction

This document is the product of research I performed following my 1998 experience at what proved to be a fundamentalist church parish. (The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines fundamentalism as, "The strict maintenance of orthodox religious beliefs or doctrines, especially belief in the inerrancy of Scripture and literal acceptance of the creeds as fundamentals of Protestant Christianity.") The parish referred to here is located in northern Virginia--in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area--and is affiliated with the national Episcopal Church.

Adherents of Christian fundamentalism mechanically cling to early English-language renditions of Scripture, notwithstanding modern scholars' findings that sundry passages therein are inexact translations of original text. The fundamentalists' refusal to acknowledge enhanced interpretations arising from improved translation proficiency--coupled with their insistence upon a literal reading of Scripture--has led to their adopting an unwarranted negative tone toward aspects of sexuality, along with a strident downplaying of the aesthetics of the human body. After satisfying my one-year financial obligation to the parish in question, I felt compelled to transfer to a new one.

The analysis to follow includes these components:

PART I

Observations on Key Fundamentalist Issues

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PART I. Observations on Key Fundamentalist Issues

NOTE: Discussed in Sections A & B below are two matters of core concern to persons commonly depicted as "fundamentalists."

A. Sexuality

1. Sexual Expression

To explain their perception of sexual engagement suitable for the unmarried (viz., none at all), fundamentalists often point to the first century Biblical writings of St. Paul, especially 1 Corinthians. The working staff appointed by the British crown to prepare the historic (i.e., 1611) *King James* English-language rendering--translated from Paul's ancient Greek--employed the word "fornication" (a term defined in modern dictionaries as sex among singles) within a listing of presumed misdeeds that this apostle had been notified was occurring.¹

In the ensuing discussion, we shall seek to determine whether such seventeenth century interpretation faithfully mirrors what Paul actually had in mind when he drafted his manuscripts more than a millennium and a half earlier. (Bear in mind here that the language appearing in *King James* reflects an imposition of arbitrary wording in numerous instances of disagreement among the approximately 50 known translators, and that obsequiousness to the monarch was a major consideration underlying their thought processes.²) If it can be ascertained--based upon the latest

¹ Here are four samples of fundamentalist writing: (1) *The Other Side of Morality* (G/L Publications; Glendale, California; 1969; page 121): "Christians are to avoid *any kind* of sexual looseness, *any kind* of fornication, *any kind* of premarital ... sex." [Emphasis in original.] (2) *Our Corinthian Contemporaries* (Zondervan; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1971; page 59): Outside of marriage no one has the right to use his sexual powers...." (3) *Sexual Understanding Before Marriage* (Zondervan; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1971; pages 65 & 114): "[N]ecking and petting on social dates are a violation of the general teaching of the Scriptures.... For a person to give of himself sexually out of the bonds of wedlock can only lead him to despair...." (4) *Sex for Christians* (Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1976; page 128: "[I]ntercourse by unmarried people is sin."

The text in Section A--coupled with extensive support provided in Part II, *infra*--will show that the above-quoted exhortations are unpersuasive.

² Professor David Daniell observes in *The Bible in English* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2003) that members of various *King James* translation panels "engaged in arguments, which were sometimes violent...." (page 440) Additionally, he concludes from that Bible's fawning dedicatory pages that the translators recognized it was critical to placate the royal "sovereign upon whom their welfare, even their lives, might depend." (page 446) In this regard, Alister E. McGrath--professor of historical theology at Oxford University--expounds on pages 141 & 148 of his book *In the Beginning* (Doubleday, New York, 2001) that James I made it quite plain to the translators that they were expected to affirm in Scripture the theory of the "divine right of kings," omitted from the
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etymological advancements--that the *KJ* compilers did not fully incorporate the subtleties of ancient Greek parlance and idioms, that translation becomes subject to appropriate modification. And, indeed, it has been modified, as we shall see.

At the outset, it should be recognized that translators exercise a vital and ongoing role in maintaining Scriptural integrity. As stated in the preface to the *Life Application Bible/New International Version*, "Because thought patterns and syntax differ from language to language, faithful communication of the meaning of the writers of the Bible demands frequent modifications in sentence structure and constant regard for the contextual meaning of words.... There is a sense in which the work of translators is never wholly finished."³

Relative to "fornication," an examination of eight post-historic *King James* interpretations is instructive. That is to say, such word has apparently been totally excluded from five of them (i.e., *New International Version*, *New Century Version*, *Contemporary English Version*, *New Living*

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so-called Geneva Bible then commonly in use and championed by his political enemies, the Puritans.

The *King James* writers doubtless were well aware in 1611 of the vicious killing just three quarters of a century earlier (i.e., in 1536) of William Tyndale, perceived by some as a heretic for his drafting of a revisionist New Testament. One must wonder how different the 1611 writers' text would have been if their predecessor Tyndale had not been persecuted for his honest attempt to interpret ancient Scripture.

³ Tedious work continues to face those updating the Bible. Gustavus S. Paine reports on page 135 of *The Learned Men* (Crowell, New York, 1949), as to his discovery of "mistakes made by the [*King James*] printers, averaging about one in ten pages." We know that some of the more egregious ones have been corrected (e.g., the passage that initially read, "Thou shalt commit adultery," obviously missing an adverb that changed its meaning 180 degrees), but one must wonder how many have not been caught.

Professor McGrath explains in his aforementioned book that a "factor contributing to the large number of errors in English Bibles was the constant pressure to reduce their production costs." (page 214) He also confirms that today's scholars are in a position to improve *King James* for reason that "our understanding of the Hebrew language has developed considerably since 1600 [because a] wealth of knowledge has accumulated on other languages of the ancient Near East ... which cast light on the meaning of a Hebrew root." (page 231) Additionally, in the late nineteenth century "significant advances were made in understanding the everyday Greek of the eastern Mediterranean world [from] a series of vernacular papyri...." (page 236) Further, "serious misjudgments" arose from the *KJ* translators having wrongfully assumed that "the same vocabulary rules of grammar that applied to the classical period also applied to the New Testament." (page 238)

As Professor McGrath aptly notes, "Like any living language, English changes over the years. Linguistic development is simply a sign of life, in that a language is being used and adapted to a new situation.... The paradox is that those who insist that we retain *King James* as the only English translation of the Bible actually betray the intentions and goals of those who conceived and translated it--namely, to translate the Bible into living English." (page 309)

Translation, and Good News Bible), and partially omitted from three more (*New American Standard, New King James, and New Revised Standard Version*). [I shall be pleased to provide anyone who so requests with a chart identifying the specific verses in which "fornication" appears in (1) the historic *King James*, and (2) the three other named works.]

Professor William Graham Cole--well known authority on religion at Williams College and, later, president of Lake Forest College--provides us with valuable insight on the elimination of such word. On pages 247-248 of his book *Sex and Love in the Bible* (Association Press, New York, 1959), he asserts that, "Fornication means to us sex relations between unmarried persons, but its Latin root *fornicare* meant to patronize a brothel, or whoredom. The verb was derived from the noun *fornix*, meaning arch or vault, and as Roman brothels were located in underground vaults, the connection is clear."

Manifestly, whatever the nature of the sexual activity that may have transpired in Roman vaults ages ago, it has not been shown to bear meaningful resemblance to today's relationships conducted by responsible individuals who happen not to be wed. That is to say, no known cogent rationale links these two disparate concepts. Deletion of "fornication" from Bible passages shows that present-day scholars are coming to a realization that Paul's condemnation of various forms of behavior did not extend to tender couplings engaged in by affectionate and caring sweethearts. This shouldn't surprise us in light of Professor Cole's finding that such word is derived from commercial brothel culture, a milieu that has nothing to do with the joyous rewards obtained through loving sexual bonding achieved in a warm and giving atmosphere of mutual trust.

Further indication that the *King James* translators' use of "fornication" does not conform to the conventional definition of such word becomes evident from examining the proceedings of the 43rd session (August 1994) of Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense, a major conference of theologians. Although a lengthy presentation made to the delegates included an evaluation of 1 Corinthians 7:2 (a passage containing "fornication" in the historic *KJ*), it was confined to such arcane matters as Greek grammatical construction, analysis of prepositional phrases, and the like. But it is clear, both from the text of the presentation and from the reaction thereto, that the theologians deemed the questioned activity in Corinth to have been extramarital sex involving harlots. Significantly, these experts apparently made no claim--in either conference papers or post-conference critiques--that acts of sex between singles are covered in this Pauline passage.

In addition, still more evidence that key expert translators today lack confidence in the suitability of "fornication" in Bible text can be found on page 752 of *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Prentice Hall; Upper Saddle River, New Jersey; 1990). Thus, "fornication" in Acts 15:20--as it appears in the historic *King James*--is specifically seen as an improper translation of author Luke's original Greek, with the context of such passage most reasonably calling instead for "incestual union."

Plainly--in recognition of the unwillingness, as shown above, of (1) the respected theologians participating at the religious conference, and (2) the editors of the scholarly commentary, to characterize the acts depicted in the cited N.T. passages as "fornication" in the modern sense--the

meanings intended by Paul and Luke must be seen today as "harlotry" or "incest." So, unless the fundamentalists can manage to prevail in a debate with contemporary translators over the proper interpretation to be accorded the ancient Greek manuscripts--hardly a likely outcome--their antisexual hypothesis necessarily collapses.⁴

Another way of looking at this is to consider the virtual dearth of Biblical references to non-idolatrous and non-commercial sexual coupling of single males and females acting with mutual consent.⁵ Part of the explanation may be that Israelite girls were expected to wed--actually, to be sold by their fathers--soon after attaining puberty, resulting in a scarcity of unmarried adult women. (See page 32 of *Sex Sense and Nonsense: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Sex* by James C. Hefley [David C. Cook Publishing Company; Elgin, Illinois; 1971].) But in recognition of, for example, author Stephen Sapp's analysis--shown on page 33 of his book *Sexuality, the Bible, and Science*; Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1977--that with respect to the effect upon society of unattached women engaging in sex, "no harm was done," it seems likely that Paul and others simply saw no reason to comment.

Paul accepts the notion that young widows may desire to remarry (1 Timothy 5:14). He avoided delving into the minutiae of prewedding courtship, but notably, did not counsel these widows and their male lovers to refrain from sex during such period. Had nonmarital sex been as opprobrious to Paul as the fundamentalists like to claim, he hardly would have passed up such a golden opportunity to single out for reproach betrothed couples who might have been engaging in it, particularly since he exhibited no hesitation in reprimanding several church congregations for myriad transgressions. Fundamentalists who put words in Paul's mouth are merely expressing what they wish he had said.

⁴ Fundamentalists face an embarrassing contretemps with respect to the appearance in English-language Bibles of "fornication," vis-a-vis certain nonsex-related words. Consider, for example, Luke 14:26, the English translation of which indicates we all should "hate" our parents, etc. Despite this ghastly phrase still enduring in Scripture nearly four centuries after its bizarre insertion into *King James*, virtually nobody today regards such an outrageous notion as theologically appropriate.

More realistic than "hate," it would seem, is the idea couched in a parallel rendition in Matthew 10:37, viz., believers should elevate their devotion to Christ beyond the love bestowed upon family. This interpretation is confirmed on page 119 of Professor Raymond E. Brown's book *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Doubleday, New York, 1997) in connection with a discussion of the so-called "Q" documentation of original Greek sources.

The fundamentalists will likely never, however, acquiesce to an improved term for "hate" in the cited Luke passage. For if they were to do so, consistency would require that they also repudiate the discredited word "fornication," something they would be loathe to pursue in view of their unaltered stratagem of forcing suppression of unwed sex. As is amply demonstrated in this paper, their position lacks Biblical support and, hence, is untenable.

⁵ A notable exception is the beautiful and moving account of lovers' delight expressed in the O.T. book Song of Songs. For an overview of scholarly analysis of this warmhearted Biblical story, see footnote 25 and the last two pages of text in Part II, *infra*.

To preclude misunderstanding here, it should be noted that the fourth fundamentalist writer quoted in footnote 1 as decrying nonmarital sex, attempts to rationalize his position by construing Genesis 2:24 in a manner that would limit intercourse to married couples only. However, careful examination of this passage reveals that it simply empowers a man to leave his parents' abode and take a wife, characterized Scripturally as their becoming "one flesh."⁶ Until such time as a man and woman today may affirmatively choose to enter into wedlock, no language in that passage binds either of them to the sexual exclusiveness that may be envisioned in a marriage contract.

Notably, Professor L. William Countryman (Divinity School of the Pacific) asserted on page 262 of his book *Dirt, Greed, and Sex* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1988) that the apostle Paul "did not count every act of sexual intercourse as constituting an indissoluble bond of marriage. We should not do so either."⁷

⁶ Upon stumbling into the word "flesh" in the cited Genesis passage, fundamentalists typically leap to the conclusion that it must allude to sex. But a close reading indicates that its use here refers to something quite different, viz., the blending or uniting in marriage of two heretofore distinct individuals so as to create a new human entity. Confirmation of such interpretation may be obtained by inspecting other passages similarly employing flesh as a descriptive term indicating some kind of creation. For example, John 1:14 (*New Revised Standard Version*) expresses God's manifestation into human form as, "And the Word became flesh...." John was, most assuredly, not thinking about sex when he composed the foregoing.

Paul's assertion in 1 Corinthians 6:16 that some of his contemporaries were uniting in "one flesh" with "prostitutes" also appears to confuse fundamentalists. As documented in Subsection 3, *infra*, scholars have identified Biblical prostitutes as mercurial figures lurking ominously in pagan temples, poised to indulge in carnal profligacy as an integral element of idol deification. When applied in such context, the term "one flesh" reflects ritualistic machinations of feckless outcasts drawn toward mindless dabbling in the nether realm of apostatic exploration. Significantly, word-by-word scrutiny of the cited 1 Corinthians passage establishes that nothing therein pertains to ordinary sex engaged in by unmarried partners.

⁷ Further regarding the matter of translation, Rev. Raymond F. Collins--professor at The Catholic Universities of America and Leuven (Belgium)--states on page xi of his book *Sexual Ethics and the New Testament* (Crossroad Publishing Co., New York, 2000) that, "Even those who can read the Greek of a Mark or a Paul are hard pressed to capture the precise nuance of the author's words."

In addition, modern scholars find the absence of quotation marks in ancient Greek text troublesome. Professor Marcus J. Borg reveals on page 240 of his book *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time* (HarperSan Francisco, 2001) that "serious misunderstandings can result" from unsophisticated readers of *King James* inferring that Paul widely denigrated sexual expression when, in reality, his style for tendering advice included first restating questions posed to him, some of which were apparently couched in negative terms. The *New Revised Standard Version* tries to rectify this deficiency by placing quotation marks where appropriate, e.g., to clarify a sex-related question within 1 Corinthians 7:1.

Moreover, Professor Daniell notes on page 428 of his aforementioned book that, "Sometimes the [*King James*] translation is wrong, or clumsy, or baffling." [Underscoring supplied.] Also,
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2. Adultery

Since adultery is mentioned in the Bible as being a matter of concern, it would likely be helpful to note that in olden times such term conveyed a very different meaning from that which commonly prevails today. That is to say, whereas we usually think of adultery as disloyal sex (by either spouse) that threatens continuing conjugal affection, in the highly patriarchal society of the Biblical era the word consistently referred to infringement upon a male's property right in a woman, rather than simply to a sex act, per se.⁸

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internal structures employed in ancient Biblical texts can impede conversion into a form comprehensible to us. Thus, introductory pages to the *New Revised Standard Version* identify an inadequacy in the English language, viz., "lack of a common gender third person singular pronoun."

It is significant, though, that contemporary researchers applying modern analytical techniques have--as explained herein--refined traditional translations to make them better, if not yet perfect. The fundamentalists' obstinance in slavishly perpetuating obsolete versions is hardly defensible, especially since they typically fail to demonstrate any ancient-language proficiency of their own.

Incidentally, speakers of other modern languages besides English are discovering that early Biblical translations do not adequately reflect word usage now observed. According to page C11 of the March 2, 2003, issue of *The Washington Post*, French Catholics have petitioned the Vatican to change *gourmandise* (which at one time embraced the sin of "gluttony," but which has since evolved to mean simply enjoyment of nourishing food and wine in congenial company) to *gloutonnerie* (a term preserving the original intent).

⁸ There is abundant evidence that patriarchalism permeated the lifestyle of that era and that wives did not possess marital rights as we know them today:

Nathaniel S. Lehrman (psychiatrist practicing in Great Neck, New York, and clinical instructor at Albert Einstein College of Medicine) observed in the July 1962 issue of the *Journal of Religion and Health* at page 368, that "The Mosaic standard of sexual morality was distinctly a double one, in which the categorical insistence upon premarital virginity and extramarital fidelity for Hebrew women was not demanded of Hebrew men."

In *Human Sexuality*--edited by Edward A. Powers (United Church Press, New York and Philadelphia, 1977)--pages 35-36 reveal that, "Where woman does appear in the legal codes [of Israel], she has the role of a dependent and normally an inferior.... Her sexuality was the exclusive property of the male [and her infidelity] merited the death penalty.... The husband's sexual infidelity was not ranked as a crime [and divorce] was an exclusively male prerogative."

Moreover, author Stephen Sapp (identified hereinbefore) also notes that, "The Old Testament makes fully clear both in the laws and in descriptions of marriages that the woman was, in a fundamental sense, the property of her husband.... Coitus with another man, therefore, was fundamentally an affront to the husband's exclusive possession of his wife.... This 'chattel motif' naturally led to a double standard, by which the wife could sin only against her own marriage
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Notably, contemporary society generally rejects the Biblical admonitions relative to adultery set forth in Matthew 5:32 and Luke 16:18. Such passages warn that a man contemplating marriage with a divorced woman risks committing adultery against her ex-husband.

A variation of third-party sexual entanglement involves the law of levirate (Deuteronomy 25:5-6 in the O.T.; Matthew 22:24 and Luke 20:28 in the N.T.). Under its terms, the brother of a deceased husband is obligated to impregnate the widow. When Onan defied the edict by prematurely withdrawing from Tamar, he was put to death (Genesis 38:8-10)! [In light of their fixation upon Biblical literalism, one would expect today's fundamentalists to apply their brand of faith by routinely complying with the impregnation provision set forth in the above-cited passages. Since, however, we do not hear of such deeds occurring, these people are apparently managing to extricate themselves somehow.]

3. Prostitution

Prostitution is another endeavor noted in the Bible as constituting a matter of concern. This activity is usually seen today as sex in exchange for money. As we shall observe, however, the Biblical connotation of the term is considerably different.

That is to say, Bible annotators have shown that Paul's prostitution reference in 1 Corinthians alluded to priestesses who employed sex as a form of pagan worship ritual in the temple of the love goddess Aphrodite, in effect repudiating God's omnipotence.⁹ He likely saw a parallel between such horrific behavior and the egregious conduct recorded in Numbers 25:1-3 (where we are told that early Israelites engaged in intercourse with heathen Moabite women as a ceremonial sacrifice to the latter's deities) and in Ezekiel 23:7 (concerning a woman who turned merrymaking with dashing young men into lustful prostitution involving idol worship). Moreover, Paul must have been outraged by Hosea 4:10-12 (which the annotators explain refers to prostitution rituals in the temples

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whereas the husband could not sin against his marriage but only against that of another man."

That the Biblical adultery references pertain to the violation of men's rights only, is reinforced by language in the Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:21). Accordingly, any coveting by women of other women's husbands was *not* embodied therein, i.e., by its terms, the spouse-coveting sanction incorporated into the Tenth Commandment was structured so as to apply solely to men.

Note also that the incident leading to Jesus's declining to condemn (see John 8:11) a married woman who had engaged in sex with an outsider--thus making herself a party to an act deemed, *ipso facto*, as interfering with her husband's absolute power to maintain blanket control over his property--arose out of Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22 (such passages treating wives as men's sexual possessions). Similarly, Jesus's admonition in Matthew 5:28 against lustful glances was limited to the actions of men only.

⁹ As expressed in *The Interpreter's Bible* (Volume 10, at page 74), "To have intercourse with the priestesses of Aphrodite meant consecration to the goddess...."

of the Canaanite fertility gods Baal and Asherah) and Micah 1:7 (denouncing conniving Samaritan women for soliciting money to dally in prostitution with idols).

The above incidents should suffice to show that the portrayal of prostitution in the Bible does not conform with our contemporary use of the word.

4. Miscellaneous Words

We should also note an additional area of the Bible in which sexual language has been modified. Accordingly, compare published translations of a portion of another of Paul's epistles, viz., Galatians 5:19. In the historic *King James* account, he addressed four delineated subcategories: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lasciviousness. However, a more recent text (viz., *Life Application Bible/New International Version*) not only reduces the number of subcategories to three, but also alters the descriptive terminology through adoption of the terms sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery. We have already expended considerable effort in discussing "fornication" and "adultery," but let us now analyze the other above-listed words.

"Debauchery" and "lasciviousness" are expressions characterizing sundry uncouth or vulgar acts typically associated with persons of general disrepute. (In clarification, no woman who willingly and enthusiastically engages in sexual relations would complain, concerning her experience, that she has been debauched by a lascivious man.)

The word "impurity" is the opposite of purity (and its adjectival form, pure), one celebrated Biblical reference to which appearing in the famous Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:8 records Jesus as saying, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (*New Revised Standard Version*), which signifies that a holy lifestyle requires believers to coexist in mutual harmony (see 1 Peter 1:22); in the context of the discussion here, the maintenance of purity dictates that each participant in a sexual act proceed with fitting regard for the other's well-being.¹⁰

The term "sexual immorality" is broad enough to embrace acts seen by virtually everybody as sordid, in ancient times and/or today. Incest, bestiality, pedophilia, and coercive exploitation come to mind. Surprisingly or not, polygamy seems to have been excluded from this category in the O.T.; accordingly, the criticism of Solomon in 1 Kings 11:3-6 for his having 700 wives was directed not to their number but to their non-Israelite origins. In the N.T., Paul advised church bishops and deacons to limit themselves to one wife; see 1 Timothy 3:2 & 12 and Titus 1:6.

That leaves sexual "uncleanness" still to be explored. A reading of Leviticus 15 makes the meaning of this word obvious, i.e., it refers to the spillage of male and female bodily fluids.

¹⁰ There is good authority for the above-stated interpretation of "impurity." Professor Countryman writes on page 141 of his aforementioned book that "[The N.T.] authors shift ... between two quite different areas of purity language: the literal and the metaphysical, in which it points to various applications of the Christian 'purity of the heart.' When the N.T. writers insist on purity as a standard of Christian conduct, they intend the latter, metaphysical sense."

Uncleanness (or derivations thereof) in such context appears thirty-four times in this 33-verse O.T. chapter. However, whereas the *King James* account of Paul's epistle to the people of Galatia brings the uncleanness concept into the N.T., more recent texts do not.

Apparently then, modern translators have determined that Paul did not really use the Greek equivalent of uncleanness in his epistle. This, in turn, may mean that followers of the Lord who suffer such spillage are no longer required to tender two doves or pigeons to a priest for sacrifice, as is directed in Leviticus 15:14-15 & 29-30. It would not be unrealistic, however, for us to presume that passionate fundamentalist clergy currently demand adherence to this Biblical command (or, if they don't, to ask them why not).

5. Marriage

As expressed allegorically in Ezekiel 16:7-8, relative to the covenant between the Lord God--or Yahweh--and the people of Jerusalem, the girl child portrayed in this passage matured and was ready for a husband: "And when you reached the age of maidenhood, your breasts were full-formed and your pubic hair had grown ... you were old enough for marriage." (*Living Bible*)

Paul addresses the subject of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7. Actually, he discouraged it (verse 8) because he believed that our Lord's return (the Parousia)--with the concomitant onset of our salvation--was imminent (verse 29 and also Romans 13:11); thus, entering into long-term earthly relationships seemed pointless. Moreover, he recommended that the people dedicate their available time and energy to Church affairs, an easier task for single men and women than for married persons distracted by the special demands of such a relationship (verses 32-35).

Nevertheless, Paul acquiesced to marriage (verse 9) if such step proved necessary to deter either incest or disporting with temple prostitutes and harlots (remember that because of the early-marriage custom, few other unattached women--aside from widows--were then freely available to men for intimate relationships). While not providing any specific ideas for our guidance, Paul did acknowledge that husbands and wives should adequately fulfill each other's sexual needs and desires (verses 3-6).¹¹

¹¹ Curiously, language in Deuteronomy 25:11-12 is negative toward a woman touching a man intimately. Professor Cole states in this regard--see page 383 of his aforementioned book--that the admonition in these passages "served as a warning to any and all women that the private parts of a man are taboo." If the fundamentalists' idea of Biblical inerrancy were to be accepted as controlling (i.e., if the words are construed as binding Christians forever), countless female sinners would be among us today.

Happily, women should be relieved to know that the Episcopal Church leadership (to name one example) typically rejects fundamentalist interpretation. In a commentary on pages 12-14 of *The Anglican Digest* for Advent 1999, the Rt. Rev. Frank K. Allan (Bishop in Atlanta) notes that "Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments ... point to and witness to Jesus as the Word made flesh.... At the same time, Scripture ... was written by human beings who had their own prejudices,

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Interestingly, Deuteronomy 22:13-17 describes a test to determine--for whatever reason--whether a new wife is chaste. Accordingly, a seepage of blood from her genitals at the time of the husband's first penetration would strongly indicate a state of virginity. Although such a test applied to a menstruating woman could be inconclusive because of doubt as to the blood source, laws set forth in Leviticus 18:19 & 20:18 and Ezekiel 22:10 (flatly forbidding intercourse during menstruation) constrain the man to postpone it until her flow has dissipated.

As information, Proverbs 2:16-17; 5:3 & 20; 6:24-35; and 7:4-27 warn married and marriageable men to be wary of unscrupulous women on the loose who seek to seduce them for nefarious reasons. Also, Revelation 2:20 tells of Jezebel--wife of King Ahab of Israel--who mercilessly enticed the household servants into the royal conjugal bed.

6. Conclusion

There are scattered references to sexuality elsewhere in Paul's various epistles, etc., but they are repetitious of passages we have already examined. Among the important things to remember from Subsections 1 through 5 are the reasoned judgment of numerous academics and the significant analysis performed by theological researchers, regarding the evident misuse of "fornication" in early English-language Scripture. Considerations such as these negate the fundamentalists' antisex platitudes shown in footnote 1, *supra*.

It is instructive to note that, whereas Paul directed his attention to the whole panoply of shameful deeds in which he had found the people of Corinth (and some other places) engaging, public utterances by today's most notorious fundamentalists¹² indicate that they harbor an irrational preoccupation with sex.¹³ Not only that, this group and their less-known followers go beyond the

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biases, cultural limitations, and pre-scientific world views.... No ethical person [nowadays] would countenance executing a disobedient child or stoning an adulterous wife...."

So it appears then that today's women, positioned to benefit from the fruits of modern psychological research, are blameless when they follow their urges to fondle the men in their lives.

¹² It is not essential to name them here. Anyhow, informed people generally already know who they are.

¹³ I am not alone in observing the fundamentalists' curious attitude toward sex. In his book *Stealing Jesus: How Fundamentalists Betray Christianity* (Three Rivers Press, New York, 1997), Episcopalian layman Bruce Bawer states on page 212 that when fundamentalist preachers address male-female interaction, "they almost invariably focus on sexual acts."

Even intellectuals tending to sympathize with the overall fundamentalist cause remark that such preachers are on shaky ground. For example, James Barr--at various times a lecturer at the University of Chicago, Princeton University, Union Theological Seminary, and Vanderbilt University--reproaches them on page 328 of his book *Fundamentalism* (Westminster Press; (continued...)

specific aforementioned categories of behavior that disturbed Paul by stretching their sex fixation to criticize sundry acts of intimacy widely practiced by men and women, both married and unmarried.¹⁴ Most ominously in this regard, fundamentalists have sought to impose restrictions on the rest of us, sometimes by lobbying legislators to enact or retain criminal statutes designed to thwart certain everyday sexual practices.¹⁵

An example of a church ministry accomplishing genuine good was touched upon in a recent sermon called to this writer's attention. It seems that a man--having lost his spouse and children as a result of his alcoholism--pitifully cried out, "My whole life is broken." What a heart-rending tale! Fortunately for this man, a loving church congregation took him under its wing. Channeling efforts toward helping people deal with this kind of dilemma would appear to advance the interests of humankind more positively than harboring, as fundamentalists typically do, an accusing obsession with amorous undertakings conducted by mature people within caring relationships.

Additionally, it should be noted with regard to sexuality that (1) a standard confirmation-preparation workbook [i.e., the Episcopal Church manual authored by Lambert and Fender and published by Morehouse-Gorham Company] says nothing whatsoever about it, and (2) "An Outline of the Faith" [*The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 845-862] discloses but a single oblique mention secreted amidst an abundance of other material.¹⁶

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from an examination of these key official sources is that--contrary to the fundamentalists' agenda and notwithstanding certain national resolutions

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Philadelphia; 1977). He states, "[It is often said] that fundamentalists maintain pathologically censorious and puritanical attitudes towards such matters as sex and marriage, women's dress, and so on.... [Such a position] does not seem to be essential to fundamentalism, and I do not think it should be stressed very heavily."

¹⁴ Analyzing the motivations of male fundamentalists in their quest for wives, Dr. Roger W. Wescott (associate professor of social sciences at Michigan State University, fellow of the American Anthropological Association, and contributing scholar at the Realist Association) has noted that "the determined virgin-hunter [praises] the magical virtue of the unruptured hymen."

¹⁵ For example, Virginia's so-called Sodomy Law (Title 18.2, §361A) prescribes up to five years of imprisonment or a fine of \$2,500 for persons engaging in specified bedroom activities of a nature *regularly suggested in marriage manuals*. Indeed, this felony statute applies to married couples as well as to singles.

¹⁶ The virtual omission of sexual references in these sources is not surprising. Rachel Moss--author of *God's Yes to Sexuality* (Collins/Fount, London, 1981)--states on page 62 that, "Neither the Old nor the New Testament can be treated as a code book of timeless truths which can be isolated from the situations in which they were uttered.... The Bible does not present a united front with reference to sexual ethics, because it was written from and to different communities, whose circumstances and needs were far from identical. It therefore represents not one tradition but a number of traditions, whose very diversity is evidence that they were living and changing."

suggesting otherwise--issues of sexuality (at least heterosexuality, the focus of this section) are not on the Episcopal Church's front burner. And they should not be, except perhaps for the limited purpose of emphasizing that the fundamentalists have not justified their position (most probably because they can't).¹⁷

The discussions hereinbefore of adultery and prostitution are not intended to suggest that the modern versions thereof should be regarded as desirable pursuits, but merely that they are not the kinds of conduct referred to by these names in the Bible.

I hasten to add before closing this section that persons of both genders involved in relationships (whether sex is present or not) need to guard against an imbalance in shared affection, where the tenderness expressed by one gets way ahead of the sensitivity felt by the other. That--not sex--is the real potential source for deep emotional hurt and its devastating and tragic consequences.

To restate an assertion appearing above in the subsection on sexual expression, aside from the loving tête-à-tête in Song of Songs there is an apparent "dearth of Biblical references to non-idolatrous and non-commercial sexual coupling of single males and females acting with mutual consent." Unless somebody can find such references, it must be presumed that they are nonexistent.^{18, 19}

¹⁷ The fundamentalists' campaign to steer unmarrieds from sex is generally being disregarded. According to the *New England Journal of Medicine* for March 20, 1990, a faculty study of female students at Brown University revealed on pages 822-823 that 87 percent were sexually active, with the wise and prudent adoption of appropriate precautionary measures for safeguarding health having quadrupled since a comparable study made fifteen years earlier.

And the journal *Family Planning Perspectives* (published by the New York City-based Alan Guttmacher Institute) disclosed on page 208 of its September/October 1990 issue the results of a scientific study in which "Never Married" women acknowledged they had engaged in intercourse. Thus, 74.8 percent of such women 20-24 years old (i.e., an age bracket roughly embracing the threshold of their adulthood) reported having so engaged, with 59.9 percent doing so within the three-month period immediately preceding the study.

¹⁸ Southern Baptists--often associated in the public mind with fundamentalism--spearheaded beginning in the 1990s so-called virginity pledges, wherein adolescents are urged to be "sexually abstinent" (a phrase usually interpreted by sociology professionals as refraining from intercourse) until they marry.* Responsible people are likely pleased to learn of innovative means to dissuade our very young from activity for which they may not be emotionally or otherwise prepared. However, a study of adolescents attending 80 representative U.S. high schools--published in the January 2001 issue of *American Journal of Sociology* at pages 859-912--suggests that measured against the Baptist's stated goal of no intercourse prior to marriage, the virginity pledge experience has largely been a failure.

That is to say, adding together (1) the generally accepted age of sexual maturity of 12-14 years, and (2) the average number of years between such occurrence and marriage as disclosed by the researchers [males-12.5; females-11.8] reveals that persons of both sexes are typically marrying
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in their mid-20s. Based upon a finding by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that 65 percent of all adolescents transition from virginity to first intercourse by 12th grade, i.e., while still in their teens (see the *Journal of Sex Research* for May 1973, page 145; *The Washington Post* of July 13, 2001, page C8; and *Journal of the American Medical Association* for December 11, 2002, page 2851), the 30 to 38 extra months of virginity which the researchers report that male and female pledgers, respectively, accrue over nonpledgers is insufficient to carry most of the former to a mid-20s wedding day.

These researchers also note that a substantial number of pledgers either break their pledges by relinquishing their virginity before marriage, or marry hastily--and unwisely--in an effort to keep their pledges. Neither alternative is what the Baptists had in mind. And because those breaking their pledges commonly do so on impulse, they rarely have available to them the birth control protection that nonpledgers can be expected to arrange for in advance.

* For a group that purports to be asserting a level of expertise in the subject area, it seems odd that the Baptists do not acknowledge awareness of non-intercourse manifestations of sexual behavior. According to the online site of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation of Menlo Park, California, one-third of 15- to 17 year-old women and two-thirds of 18- to 24-year-old women have engaged in oral sex. Moreover, 53 percent of males aged 15-19 have "been masturbated by a female...."

Further, professional literature is replete with scholarly studies of such nature. The *Journal of Sex Research* reported as far back as November 1983--on pages 331 & 334--that two-thirds of a group of 250 female college students responding to an academic survey disclosed that they participate in oral-genital stimulation, active or passive or both. (Tellingly, those women in the survey reporting low self-esteem were concentrated overwhelmingly in the one-third not having oral sex.) Also, Lillian B. Rubin, a psychologist at City University of New York, recounted in her book *Erotic Wars* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York; 1990) that 75 percent of about 600 college students returning questionnaires from eight campuses and fully 100 percent of 300 non- and post-college adults interviewed, practiced oral sex. Moreover, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* noted on page 277 of its January 20, 1999, issue that 82 percent of female students surveyed at a large Midwestern university engage in oral sex.

¹⁹ Although the purpose of Section A is to address issues of heterosexuality, I would be remiss not to call attention to a major conundrum fundamentalists face with respect to their view of homosexuality. While fervently pointing to Leviticus 18:22, which characterizes homosexual activity as an "abomination" (*King James*), they utter not a peep about a companion clause in Leviticus 20:13 demanding that homosexuals be put to "death." The fundamentalists know that society would never acquiesce to carrying out such judgment, of course. So--in an apparent gambit to avert being written off as irresponsible--they proceed as if the death passage doesn't exist. Manifestly, for them to ballyhoo "abomination," while ignoring "death," appears disingenuous.

The above abomination quote (mixed incongruously with a raft of no-no's pertaining to incest) covers behavior deemed sinful by fundamentalists, albeit some other equally prohibitory passages--e.g., Leviticus 19:19, which forbids the cross-breeding of cattle and the planting of hybrid seeds--doesn't seem to trouble them at all. The reason for their not condemning farmers engaging in such practices may be that this translation of ancient text into English is considered too imprecise for general application today. Significantly, if the above-cited verse dealing with agricultural

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B. Body perception

Let us now address another phenomenon frequently associated with fundamentalists, viz., their obsession with coercing others to keep their bodies mostly covered, most of the time. These people tend to become unhinged at, e.g., the thought of persons discreetly pursuing recreational activities that do not by nature require a body covering, and they recoil in revulsion upon encountering undraped human images in the world of art. Notably, they harangue legislators to enact sweeping prohibitory statutes and harass innocent souls over whom they have some measure of control.²⁰ Although fundamentalists typically point to various O.T. and N.T. passages in attempting to justify their extreme position, the discussion to follow demonstrates that arguments of the kind they advance consistently fail to stand up under analysis.²¹

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techniques has, indeed, been inadequately translated (and we know from footnote 4, *supra*, that defective translation is present), it is not difficult to conceive that actively scrutinizing the Hebrew etymologies giving rise to "abomination" and "death" in *King James* will turn up translation flaws for these words as well.

Most distressing (as evidenced by a continuing series of foreboding news bulletins) is the prospect that fundamentalist Episcopalians pushing misguided and confused views on homosexuality may foment schism, and thereby ruin the noble character of our beloved Church.

²⁰ Many examples could be cited, but only three are shown here in the interest of keeping this paper at a reasonable length: (1) *The Washington Post* of October 12, 1982, observed at page B5 that the preacher at New Covenant Christian Community Church in College Park, Maryland, urged that town's council to reject a business's proposal to open a spa site. He complained that a photograph taken in another spa operated by the same owners showed "four people who seemed to be without clothes," and that features customarily found in spas (padded deck, dimmed lights, piped-in music) "promote lust and sexual immorality." [He failed, and the spa opened as planned, according to a February 28, 1983, *Post* article.] (2) After *The Kansas City Times* published a December 12, 1986, front-page account of that city's prestigious Nelson-Atkins museum having acquired for \$2.5 million a prized painting of Persephone (famous maiden in Greek mythology), the pastor at First Baptist Church of Missouri sanctimoniously whined in a letter to the newspaper's editor that he "was shocked" by her nudity, visible in the accompanying photograph. (3) The *Houston Chronicle* for March 20, 1993, reported on page 1 of its religion section that, "Bowling to Baptist pressure, Baylor University's governing board voted Friday not to add a nude figure drawing class to the art curriculum."

²¹ Other writers also have observed the fundamentalists' scholarship deficiency in this area. For example, Paul M. Bowman wrote extensively and authoritatively on religious interpretation in his book *Nakedness and the Bible*, available at Box 1978; Ferndale, Washington 98248. See in addition his meaningful articles (Spring 1987, pages 19-21; and Autumn 1987, pages 38-39) in the quarterly journal *Clothed With the Sun*, long published at Box 132; Oshkosh, Wisconsin 54903, and now known as *N* magazine.

Turning our attention first to the Garden of Eden, it can readily be seen in Genesis 2:25 that nakedness had traditionally been the norm for Adam and Eve.²² But we learn from Genesis 3:1-10 that this pair's serene life would change for the worse following their disobedience of God through their eating of forbidden fruit. Realizing soon afterward that they were about to be rebuked, they felt vulnerable and tried to hide from God's wrath by fashioning fig-leaf attire allowing them to blend in with the natural greenery of the garden.²³

The fundamentalists allege there is a message for us in this story, viz., that we should share the couple's shame and accordingly restrict what others see of our bodies. But there is a flaw in their thinking. If strict clothing criteria are to be imposed in perpetuity as a result of the Fall, consistency requires that analgesics be forever prohibited during childbirth because God decreed in Genesis 3:16 that women will endure pain at such time. (See also Isaiah 13:8 and Jeremiah 4:31.)

The existence of any church-run maternity hospital that actually denies mothers-to-be access to pain-relieving medication has yet to come to this writer's attention. Fundamentalists' negative views of body exposure arising from the forbidden fruit episode deserve no credibility as long as these people continue to accept the relief from suffering now made available through modern medical science.

A related Garden of Eden justification proffered by the fundamentalists in their condemnation of body exposure involves God's furnishing Adam and Eve with coats made of skin, reported in Genesis 3:21. To the contrary, such garments would simply shield the pair from the thorns and thistles encountered--see Genesis 3:18--upon their banishment from the garden.

Other Biblical passages also mention covering one's self to protect against a harsh environment, while not giving any hint that prudery should dictate the concealment of body parts. Thus, see Exodus 22:27 (concerning a nighttime sleep comforter), Job 24:7 (referring to a need for cold-weather garb), Job 31:19-20 (describing the warming properties of sheep fleece), and James 2:15-16 (pertaining to apparel specially designed for warmth).

Also, according to the fundamentalists' theory, Noah's sons Shem and Japheth walked backward when approaching their inebriated father (Genesis 9:23) because they were embarrassed by his nakedness. But a more plausible reason the sons avoided looking at him is that they were sickened by the sadistic defilement of their father's body by Canaan, his malevolent grandson (Genesis 9:24). There is no credible evidence for the fundamentalists' strained interpretation that this incident constitutes a general command for body covering.

²² Indeed, in his book *The Good Life* (Harper, San Francisco, 2002), Peter J. Gomes--professor of christian morals at Harvard College--asserted on page 135 that "God is not put off by the nudity of his creatures...."

²³ We can speculate that the fig leaf attire covered their whole selves, not just the genitalia as popular artistry depicts.

Still another Biblical story the fundamentalists apparently misconstrue involves the renowned character David. After recovering the stolen ark of the covenant, he returned it to Israel and bid the community to celebrate (2 Samuel 6). However, his wife Michal--who inexplicably had come to loathe him--berated him (verse 20) after watching him arrive and cast aside his traveling clothes within view of slave girls, an act she deemed unbecoming for an exalted leader. According to conventional fundamentalist thinking, Michal's reproach conveys an unqualified antinuity message.

However, the fundamentalists need to have brought to their attention that Michal was not concerned with David's lack of attire, per se; we know this because she said nothing about the many unenslaved women present who similarly saw him without covering. Anyhow, David rejected Michal's criticism and humbly accepted God's directive that he tend to all the people (verse 21); he felt proud to be held in honor by the slave girls (verse 22).

The fundamentalists also misguidedly focus upon the first part of 1 Timothy 2:9 wherein St. Paul urges women to adorn themselves modestly. They then seize upon these words to promote a notion that women--and perhaps, by extension, men too--must guard against exposing more than a modicum of bare skin in public places.

However, the fundamentalists are wrong again. Examination of the last part of the cited passage clearly indicates that Paul's musing over modesty had nothing to do with the extent of covering, but rather, with ostentatiousness associated with such things as braiding one's hair and choosing gold or pearl accessories. (As information, a nearly identical Biblical theme appears in 1 Peter 3:3). This is another example of the fundamentalists seeing only what they want to see, while blatantly disregarding everything that doesn't conform to their preconceived pet notions.

In summation, the foregoing discussion addressed sundry Biblical passages that fundamentalists have used to rationalize their hostile stance toward, e.g., beach aficionados who disrobe in sparsely populated locations to enjoy surf and sand, and devotees of the arts who seek to replicate the splendor of the human figure. Significantly, the accompanying analyses of such passages show that the fundamentalists' interpretations lack merit.²⁴

²⁴ Prominent scholars have written positively on the subject of easygoing nudity in the home:

Seward Hiltner--professor of pastoral theology of the University of Chicago's Federated Theological Faculty, and visiting professor at the Menninger School of Psychiatry--observed on page 23 of his book *Sex and the Christian Life* (Association Press, New York, 1957) that, "[R]elatively well-educated people seem usually indifferent about having their children glimpse them in the nude...."

Similarly, Professor William Graham Cole--whose credentials were set forth in Section A--noted on page 295 of his book *Sex in Christianity and Psychology* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1955) that, "Pre-school boys and girls accompany one another to the toilet and continue conversation with complete nonchalance while they evacuate bowel and bladder. Children raised
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C. The historical record

It should be noted here that fundamentalist clergy have a bad track record vis-a-vis earthly professionals (i.e., scientists, etc.) in analyzing/interpreting God's revealed truth. Specifically, it was fundamentalist clergy in Rome who persecuted Galileo--a 17th century earthly professional--for popularizing Copernicus's famous hypothesis that, contrary to previous thought, the sun does not revolve around the earth.

But now scholars know for sure who was right and who was wrong on that subject in those days. It is doubtful that even the most conservative fundamentalist clergy persist in upholding the pre-Copernicus interpretation, which belief would necessarily turn astronomy on its head.

Recognizing, then, that the earthly professional Galileo conclusively validated scientific truth in the 17th century--notwithstanding fervent opposition from the fundamentalist clergy--people today would be wise to remain skeptical when 20th/21st century fundamentalists challenge the scholarship of modern earthly professionals trained in psychiatry and sociology.

Indeed, responsible scholars in these professions have studied sexuality extensively. There are reliable findings that stability of marriage--indisputably a desirable goal for Christians and others--rests largely upon early preparation involving principles of intimate interaction between the genders. (See Part II, *infra*, for details.) Demanding chastity outside of marriage--a pet aim of the fundamentalists--is in direct conflict with such principles.

While believers do accept that God rules supreme over psychiatrists and sociologists, failure to accord the counsel of such professionals due regard would most certainly result in more divorces and/or unfulfilling marriages arising out of basic incompatibility, perceived only after it is too late to recognize the peril. Society should consider this inevitable result in advance, rather than leap headlong, lemming-like, into the direction the fundamentalists would take us.

D. What to expect in the future

We can speculate over what the fundamentalists will choose to push in the new century. Considering the condemnation in Isaiah 3:16 of "ornaments jingling on [women's] ankles" and the prospect (in verses 18 & 20) that "the Lord will snatch away their ... ankle chains" (*Life Application Bible/New International Version*), it would not be surprising to see the fundamentalists pursue an anti-ankle chain agenda.

(...continued)

in such an atmosphere seldom reveal any morbid curiosity about the anatomy of the opposite sex, or any shame about their own bodies."

But rather than agonize over the acceptability of ankle chains (along with other accouterment named in verses 18-23, viz., headbands, necklaces, perfume, nose rings, purses, shawls, etc.), the Church may be better served by concentrating its energy upon matters of acknowledged relevance to contemporary communicants. An example of the latter might be organizing resources to expedite repeal of the federal marriage tax, a penalty now operating to discourage men and women from expressing their love for each other through life-long unions.

E. To summarize

How the fundamentalist mind works is difficult to fathom. Whereas ordinary people can oftentimes discern the most plausible message underlying Biblical passages, fundamentalists contrive meanings that make little or no sense, as is demonstrated above.

In this connection, Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong pointedly noted on pages 3 & 134 of his book *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism* (HarperCollins, New York, 1991) that, "Those whose religious security is rooted in a literal Bible do not want that security disturbed. They are not happy when facts challenge their biblical understanding or when nuances in the text are introduced or when they are forced to deal with either contradictions or changing insights.... Fundamentalism is both an expression of and an assisting cause in the terminal sickness that hangs over religious life today."

The dangerous aspect of all this is that the fundamentalists seek to foist their notions upon the rest of us through manipulation of the political process. Indeed, Tamara Kreinin--president and CEO of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States--stated on pages 6-7 of her organization's 2002 Annual Report that, "The momentum [the religious right] have gained has presented advocates of comprehensive sexuality education and reproductive rights with significant political, social, and economic obstacles. Today's conservative political configuration encourages ideology to trample over sound public health policy and scientific research."

That disturbing message is not new, however. Ironically, the dean of all conservatives--the late Senator Barry Goldwater--was noted in *The Arizona Republic* (June 17, 1993, at page A23) for criticizing "his own party as he's seen it surrender to a fundamentalist Christian Gestapo." Moreover, *The Washington Post* reported (August 16, 1999, at page C2) that H.L. Mencken, one of the most respected twentieth-century journalists and widely known as the "Sage of Baltimore" (although his influence extended throughout the nation), wrote biting--in connection with the famous Scopes trial on the teaching of evolution--of "the menace that fundamentalism offers to civilization."

Fundamentalists are doubtless devout believers, but I challenge any reading these words to effectively rebut what I have said in Part I.

PART II

Scholarly Writings Exposing the Fallacies of Fundamentalism

NOTE: If any readers question the validity of the content of Part I, their doubts should be put to rest by the excerpts below of pertinent writings by 29 learned persons. The points they make, separately and collectively, bolster my various assertions. As can be seen, these individuals are engaged in a variety of disciplines:

*6 College faculty
5 Bishops or other high church leaders
5 Seminary faculty
4 Lay researchers
3 Unidentified church authors
2 Parish priests
1 Marriage counselor
1 Psychiatrist
1 College chaplain
1 Professional journalist*

A. Clergy, Religious Educators, Church Officials, Church Literature

A1. Professor Karen LeBacqz; Pacific School of Religion; Berkeley, California:

The two redeeming purposes of sexuality have always been understood as procreation and union.... Both traditions [i.e., Catholic and Protestant] have moved toward affirming union as primary.... [The essence of such a relationship is defined scripturally in the O.T. book] Song of Songs which displays in glowing detail the immense passion and vulnerability of lovers. This is not married or "preceremonial" sexuality, nor are children the justification for the sexual encounter. It is passion pure and simple. And it is graphic sex.... Celibacy in singleness is not the answer [to the quest for a sexual ethic appropriate for unmarried adults].²⁵

²⁵ Fundamentalists--who typically claim that sexual intercourse is unacceptable for persons not in a state of wedlock--tend to deny Professor LeBacqz's above-noted assertion that the sex play engaged in by these lovers (see especially Song of Songs 4:16-5:1*) reflects their mutual desire for sexual union, rather than a broader commitment extending to marriage. This writer's research indicates that sundry religious scholars support the professor vis-a-vis the fundamentalists; for confirmation, see the last two pages of text in Part II.

* Citing studies that Bible scholar Samuel Noah Kramer has made of Song of Songs, Marvin H. Pope informs us on page 499 of *The Anchor Bible* (Doubleday, New York, 1977) that reference--by
(continued...)

A2. David R. Mace, religious leader in the Society of Friends:

[T]he time has come--and more than come--for the church to reverse its negative and punitive attitudes toward sex, and to take a more positive approach. This decision must be taken, firmly and clearly, and the sooner the better. There is no alternative open to us if we have any true sense of our mission to our day and generation.... If Christianity persists in presenting itself as an antisexual religion, it will not get a hearing in this generation.

A3. From *Keeping Body and Soul Together*, a document prepared for the 203rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA):

A Christian ethic of sexuality is needed that honors but does not restrict sexual activity to marriage alone.... Similarly, it is wrong to condemn nonmarital sexual activity simply because it falls outside a particular formal institutional arrangement.

A4. Professor L. William Countryman; Church and Divinity School of the Pacific; Berkeley, California:

At one extreme, one cannot defend the promiscuous person who desires only personal gratification at whatever expense to others. At the other [extreme are] those widowed persons who wish to contract a faithful and giving relationship without benefit of legal marriage.... Between these extremes, there lies a large area of difficult individual desires. People will have to wend their way through such decisions, however, for the gift of celibacy is not given to all....

Some nonmarital liaisons may in fact prove to be preparatory to marriage in the stricter sense. Others may serve to meet legitimate needs in the absence of genuine alternatives. Still others may be abusive and exploitative. Only the last is to be condemned.

A5. Rt. Rev. John Shelby Spong, former Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark:

(...continued)

both the man and the woman--to the woman's garden seems "a euphemism for the vulva."

[I]n our generation the rules [of sexual conduct] have become so out of touch with reality that they are simply disregarded.... Does [the] status [of mature single people] require sexual abstinence? I think not.

[C]ompanionship can be on many levels--from a working relationship or a brief social connection to a deep friendship in which time is invested, life is shared, and intimate moments are spent together. Is sex to be ruled out by the guardians of public morality from all of these relationships, because they each fall short of the solitary standard of marriage? ... There are voices that would say yes.... I would like to propose that no is the proper and only moral answer....

The prohibitions of the past have been abandoned, not because people are evil "secular modernists" but because life has changed and those prohibitions are simply no longer appropriate. To expend ecclesiastical energy clinging to those prohibitions, to pass resolutions recalling people to those prohibitions, to seek to revivify those prohibitions, will prove an exercise in futility. Finally, such activities will so discredit the church that whatever moral authority it has in other areas of life will be dissipated as well.

A6. Karen A. McClintock, United Methodist clergy member, faculty affiliation at Southern Oregon University:

The goal of [our Victorian ancestors] was procreation. All other aspects of sexuality were considered sinful. The ghosts of this perspective still haunt us.

A7. A.E. Harvey; lecturer at the University of Oxford and later, Sub-Dean of Westminster:

What we do not find are any specific [Biblical] laws or injunctions against casual sexual relationships.

A8. Roger Shinn, professor at Union Theological Seminary, New York:

Arising out of Biblical scholarship of the last twenty years is the recognition that the Bible's attitude toward sex is affirmative and that sexual repression is a heresy.

A9. William Graham Cole, professor of religion, Williams College:

There can be no quarrel with the secular world [with respect to the latter's acceptance of nonmarital sex]. It is right and the church has been wrong.... The method of moralism has been weighed in the balance and found wanting, partly because it moves in the wrong direction and partly because it has based its case on fear.... The church has been guilty of preserving and preaching a point of view not generic to Christian faith, an attitude which originated in Hellenistic dualism and which is not only un-Biblical but also anti-Biblical.

A10. Rev. William Coats; Interim Rector, Church of the Redeemer; Morristown, New Jersey:

I argue that it is possible for some people to live in situations of [unwed] intimacy so long as these relationships image patterns of self-denial and mutual giving.

A11. Rev. Frederic C. Wood, Jr.; Episcopal Chaplain at Vassar and Goucher colleges:

[T]he church ... often promulgates attitudes which inhibit health and morality in the sexual sphere.... To make intercourse outside the covenant of marriage easier certainly does not mean to remove the moral challenge [but] might even lead to a more wholesome attitude toward sexuality itself.... And the popular belief that greater social acceptance of sex outside the covenant would lead to sexual license and to disregard of all moral considerations is not demonstrable. From counseling and listening to college students involved in premarital affairs, I see no more evidence of sexual irresponsibility and license than I do among my married peers. Indeed, if anything, I see less.

A12. Walter Wink, Professor of Biblical Interpretation, Auburn Theological Seminary; New York City:

No sex act is "ethical" in and of itself, without reference to the rest of a person's life, the patterns of the culture, the special circumstances faced, and the will of God. What we have are simply sexual morals, which change--sometimes with startling rapidity--creating bewildering dilemmas. Just within one lifetime we have witnessed the shift from the ideal of preserving one's virginity until marriage, to couples living together for several years before getting married. The response of many Christians [editor's note: this means fundamentalists] is merely to long for the hypocrisies of an earlier era.

A13. Joseph Fletcher, one-time dean of St. Paul's Cathedral (Cincinnati) and, later, professor of social ethics, Episcopal Theological School; Cambridge, Massachusetts:

The Christian churches must shoulder much of the blame for the confusion, ignorance, and unhealthy guilt associations which surround sex in Western culture.... [Jesus] said nothing about birth control, large or small families, childlessness, homosexuality, masturbation, fornication or premarital intercourse, sterilization, artificial insemination, abortion, sex play, petting, or courtship.

A14. *About Being an Episcopalian*, a booklet distributed by Channing L. Bete Co., Inc., Greenfield, Massachusetts (commenting upon a principal role of clergy, i.e., to offer a framework that laity might utilize in governing their adherence to God's plan):

The Episcopal Church does not control interpretation and practice. Instead, members are encouraged to use reason to explore and comprehend God's works....

A15. *The Episcopal Church History*, a pamphlet distributed by Forward Movement Publications, Cincinnati (commenting on the need for maintaining a balance among various theological subjects, a principle the antisex fundamentalists do not observe):

[T]he Christian life should neither neglect nor over-emphasize any one aspect of Christian teaching....

A16. Canon D.A. Rhymes, Southwark Cathedral (Church of England), London:

Yet there is no trace of [the tainting of sex] in the attitude of Christ.... Nor does Christ ever suggest that ... marriage is the only possible occasion of any expression of physical relationship.

A17. Rev. Richard E. Gary; graduate of Yale Divinity School; minister at St. Mary's Church, Manhattanville, New York; member of Department of Christian Social Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of New York (participating in a round-table discussion broadcast by radio station WINS in New York City):

And the very essence of the Protestant experience is the individual.... I was going to mention that in my own ministry there are a great many exceptions to the general rule of what would be regarded as normal sexuality, and these I counsel privately. But I don't have any set standard to apply in such cases, except Christian charity.

A18. Richard Holloway, Anglican Bishop of Edinburgh:

God knew when he made us that he has given us a built-in sex drive.... I think it would be wrong for the church to condemn people who have followed their instincts.

B. Academic and Professional Scholars

B1. Professor Richard Hettlinger, Kenyon College (Ohio); Consulting Editor, *Human Sexuality*:

[T]hose who avoid all sexual commitments out of ... an unexamined bondage to rigid parental or religious prohibitions are likely to remain stunted in their growth as persons. There is a danger that ... engaged couple[s who] concentrate their energies on avoiding intercourse [may] never have the opportunity to see each other as nonsexual objects. Concentration of hope and expectation on the blissful pleasure to be enjoyed in the distant future may distract their attention from more mundane factors which affect the desirability of the partner as a lifelong mate.... As a result, a couple may find themselves virtual strangers on the honeymoon.

B2. Dr. Roger W. Wescott, Associate Professor of Social Science (Michigan State University), Fellow of the American Anthropological Association, and contributing scholar at the Realist Association:

Even in the days of erotologist Iwan Bloch, prospects for betrothed virgins were bleak; and they seem to have declined since then. Virginity, in other words, seems to be a very poor passport to happiness.

In fact, about the only prediction one can fairly make about the girl who is a physiological virgin before marriage is that she is more likely than her unchaste sister to remain an emotional virgin after marriage.

Kinsey notes that after being thus repressed for 10 or 15 years, getting married does not transform [men] overnight into Don Juans. And the sexual adjustment with their new mates is, at best, quite often a difficult matter.

B3. Dr. Robert A. Harper, past president of the American Academy of Psychotherapists and the American Association for Marital and Family Therapy, and fellow of the American Psychological Association:

As a veteran family life educator, marriage counselor, and writer and lecturer on premarital and marital topics, I should like to state flatly that the conventional moral

code regarding premarital chastity does a great deal more harm than good in contemporary American society. This code not only leads some young people into firmly fixed pornographic attitudes and prudishly repressive sexual behavior (from which matrimonial ceremonies cannot free them), but it instills guilt feelings in countless other youth who proceed to violate the marital taboos.

Fortunately, however, a growing number of young people have been able to perceive the false, superstitious basis of the outmoded sanctions against premarital coitus and are proceeding maturely, stably, wisely, and happily with wholesome and desirable premarital sexual relations which greatly aid them in their marital sexual adjustments....

B4. Eleanor Hamilton, psychiatrist (born and raised in Oregon; later operator of a medical practice in Sheffield, Massachusetts):

Virginity is about as useful as your appendix. It used to be that a man wanted his wife to be a virgin when they married. These days, I don't know of any young man who would marry one.... Sexuality is a primary function--put it on the shelf ... and you have an 80 percent chance of dysfunction.

B5. Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey, renowned behavioral researcher at Indiana University:

The girl who--as a result of premarital petting--has learned something about the significance of tactile stimulation and response, has less of a problem in resolving inhibitions after marriage.... The failure of a female to reach orgasm in her marital coitus may be a considerable source of marital discord [and our studies show such problem can last] for fifteen years after marriage.

B6. Lawrence Lipton, novelist, essayist, poet; lecturer at the Western Writer's Conference, California State College, University of Southern California, University of California at Riverside; instructor of West Coast Avant Garde Writing, University of California at Los Angeles extension:

Meanwhile the outstanding fact of sex in our time is the increase in unmarried sex, not as a preparation for marriage but as an end in itself. In effect, it does, of course, prepare [men and women] for a more successful sex life in marriage, but only if they succeed before marriage in wriggling out of the [Judeo-Christian] straitjacket of guilt, fear and psycho-physical armoring....

B7. Rustom and Della Roy, holders of doctorates from Pennsylvania State University and appointees to multiple committees of the National Council of Churches:

Christians should immediately desist from putting so much emphasis on the occurrence or nonoccurrence of premarital coitus as such.... Rightness or wrongness has nothing, absolutely nothing, to do with whether or not physical juxtaposition of sex organs has occurred.

B8. Professor Leo Koch, Department of Biology, University of Illinois, writing in the *Daily Illini* (campus newspaper):

With modern contraceptives and medical advice readily available at the nearest drugstore, or at least a family physician, there is no valid reason why sexual intercourse should not be condoned among those sufficiently mature to engage in it without social consequences and without violating their own codes of morality and ethics.

B9. G. Rattray Taylor, author of *Sex in History*:

[The adultery Commandment, essentially a property offense against another's mate, does not require] that a man should restrict his attentions to his wife; indeed, when a wife proved barren, she would often give one of her handmaidens to her husband that she might bear children for him.

Nor was there any ban on premarital sex; it is seldom appreciated that nowhere in the Old Testament is there any prohibition of noncommercial, unpremeditated fornication--apart from rape, and subject to a father's right to claim a cash interest in a virgin. Once a girl had reached the age of 12 1/2 years, she was free to engage in sexual activity, unless her father specifically forbade it.

B10. Christopher Jencks, contributing editor and book reviewer:

The boy or girl who cannot find [sexual] intimacy strikes me as far more likely to end up in serious trouble than the boy or girl who finds it and fails to foresee all the consequences. If college presidents were to devote more thought to the miseries of the deprived, and less to those who may or may not suffer from sexual surfeit, they might seem less offensive to the young and less absurd to some of the rest of us.

CORROBORATION THAT SONG OF SONGS REFLECTS A DESIRE FOR
SEXUAL UNION, NOT FOR A MARITAL COMMITMENT

(Footnote 25 Explains the Significance of this Distinction)

1. In *The Erotic Word* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2003), Professor David M. Carr of Union Theological Seminary noted on page 119 that, "These lovers belong to each other, but they do not appear to be married."

2. In a compilation of essays published by Sheffield Academic Press (Sheffield, England; 2000), J. Cheryl Exum noted on page 24 that, "[T]here is no indication that the couple ... we meet in the Song are married, yet they are clearly lovers...."

3. In *New International Biblical Commentary: ... Song of Songs* (Henderson Publishers; Peabody, Massachusetts; 1999), Roland E. Murphy and Elizabeth Huwiler noted on page 243 that "According to many [interpreters], the central couple is not married. This view is supported by the fact that the lovers must part in the morning.... Also, most of the couple's lovemaking apparently takes place out of doors, in the wilds, and in gardens.... [Overall, the text] does not seem to insist that the appropriate expression of sexuality is necessarily limited to marriage."

4. In *People of Passion: What the Church Teaches About Sex* (Mobery Press, London, 1997), Elizabeth Stuart and Adrian Thatcher noted on page 204 that "fertility [an essential for marriage among early Jews] is not a concern of the Song; instead it revolves around desire and the quest for its fulfillment.... The Song shudders with passionate imagery, glows in the beauty of the body, and the glory is mutual."

5. In *The Intercourse of Knowledge* (Koninklijke Brill; Leiden, Netherlands; 1997), Athalya Brenner remarked on page 88 that, "Quite a number of the plants repeatedly mentioned in Song of Songs have been used as female contraceptives throughout the Mediterranean world for, quite literally, ages." This indicates that physical desire--rather than procreation aspirations associated with the married--prompted the couple's amorous activity.

6. In their volume *Song of Songs* (Random House, New York, 1995), Ariel and Chana Bloch noted on page 14 that the "theme is the wonder of a woman with a man--an unmarried woman, with no concern about perpetuating the family line and no motive but pleasure."

7. A document commissioned by the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church (*Continuing the Dialogue*, published by Forward Movement, Cincinnati, 1995) stated on page 45 that the passages in this Biblical story are "in praise of sexual love, celebrating youthful passion, with no reference to God or to marriage.... It affirms that sexual love is in itself good and beneficial."

8. In *Sexual Paradox: Creative Tensions in Our Lives and in Our Congregations* (Pilgrim Press, New York, 1991), Celia Allison Hahn noted on page 192 that "The story is clearly not about marriage or procreation ... but about the delights of erotic love."

9. In *God and the Rhetorical Sexuality* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1978), Phyllis Trible stated on page 162 that "[T]o the issues of marriage and procreation the Song does not speak."

10. In an article titled "The Interpretation of the Song of Songs," published in the October 1937 issue of *The Journal of Theological Studies*, H.H. Rowley stated on page 358 that "I am not persuaded that ... the Songs had anything to do with a wedding occasion. They appear rather to be a series of poems in which a lover enshrined the love he gave and the love he received."

SELECTED SOURCES USED IN PART II

- Christian Century*; 5/6/87 (LeBacqz) - pp. 436, 438
Christian Response to the Sexual Revolution, The (Mace) - p. 126
Dirt, Greed, and Sex (Countryman) - p. 264
Honest Sex (Roy) - p. 87
Human Sexuality: A Psychosocial Perspective (Hettlinger) - p. 68
Living in Sin? (Spong) - pp. 210, 212, 217
New Republic, The; 4/4/64 (Jencks) - p. 18
Promise or Pretence: A Christian's Guide (Harvey) - p. 63
San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle; 2/24/80 (Hamilton) - p. A15
Sex and the New Morality (Wood) - pp. 34, 120-121
Sex in History (Taylor) - p. 241
Sexual Behavior in the Human Female (Kinsey) - p. 265
Sexual Shame (McClintock) - p. 41
Sexuality and the Bible (Wink) - p. 10
Situation Ethics (Fletcher) - p. 139

PART III - Letter to My Former Parish Explaining My Discontent

NOTE: This letter facilitates a greater understanding of my past difficulty. (It is edited here to streamline content and to omit certain extraneous matter included in the original.) So as to emphasize the message, rather than the people involved, I have x'ed out portions naming the parish and its clergy. Nevertheless, because nothing herein exposes secrets, I am willing to disclose their identities to anyone asking.

November 6, 1998

The Reverend xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
Associate Rector, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxx, Virginia 2xxxx

Dear Mr. xxxxxxx:

Feeling a need to communicate with someone in authority, I selected you for the reason that we meet from time to time when you preside at the Wednesday Noon Eucharist. I don't recall whether I previously informed you that my wife is heavily involved in parish work at another Episcopal church, thus creating a scheduling difficulty which led in 1997 to my attending this parish (selected largely because the midday timing of the service best suited my needs). While my year 1998 financial pledge was not extraordinary, it was not insignificant either.

Over the past year, I have gradually become aware of a facet of this parish which disturbs me greatly. This would be the rector's seeming fixation upon matters sexual. On the attached Appendix A, I have identified seven leading instances in which the subject has arisen, directly or indirectly. These occurrences have impacted negatively upon my fidelity to the parish.

During my lifetime, I have been affiliated with Episcopal congregations elsewhere in Virginia and also Maryland, District of Columbia, Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, and California. In none of these, however, have I ever been exposed to such repeated allusions to parishioners' sex lives. Indeed, neither my wife nor I can recall ever hearing a sermon in any Episcopal parish--other than this one--that discussed approved (versus disapproved) sex practices. Additionally, the confirmation-preparation workbook I once used never touched upon sex at all. Moreover, a search of An Outline of the Faith (*The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 845-862) for possible references to sex reveals but a single oblique mention secreted amidst an abundance of other material.

Most educated people, including mainstream clergy, would likely not shy away from pondering Scriptural nuances that may be advanced by antisex crusaders. However, the rector has not set forth a case amenable to debate. Basically, all he offers are shallow platitudes

unaccompanied by scholarly reasoning sufficient to constitute even prima facie underpinning for his views.¹

Conversely, my memorandum prepared in conjunction with this year's study classes (excerpts attached hereto) reflected reasoned research into relevant issues of this nature. I tendered explanatory interpretations of Biblical passages of the kind typically seized upon by our fundamentalist brethren in their attempts to foist their notions upon the rest of us through manipulation of the political process. Indeed, that granddaddy of all conservatives Barry Goldwater lamented shortly before his death that fundamentalists had infiltrated the Republican Party and were displacing its traditional values.

If the rector truly desires to effect widespread acceptance of the massive and far-reaching behavior modification program implicit in his pronouncements, one would expect to see him support his hypothesis by offering a point-by-point rebuttal of those theologians whose position he apparently finds so distasteful. Strangely, he does not seem to do so. Had I had engaged in shoddy documentation of my conclusions while assisting in writing legal analyses for the Interstate Commerce Commission, I would have been fired early on.

Indeed, responsible scholars in the psychological and sociological professions have studied sexuality extensively. There are reliable findings that stability of marriage (indisputably a desirable goal for Christians and others) rests largely upon early preparation involving principles of intimate interaction between the genders. One of the rector's fond examples, absolute chastity outside of marriage, is in direct conflict with such principles.

You can say, of course, that God rules supreme over the views of these earthly professionals. But if the rector's version were to prevail, the result would most certainly be more divorces and/or unfulfilling marriages arising out of basic incompatibility, perceived only after it is too late to recognize the peril. Perhaps that is a price church-going people should be willing to pay, but if so, we should consider this inevitable result in advance, rather than leap headlong into the direction the rector would take us. As far as I know, he ignores the adverse collateral ramifications that would ensue. (He probably has never even thought about this.)

Undoubtedly, the relations between the sexes have a moral element and, as such, may be appropriate for theological counsel. But at this parish, other precepts necessarily get short shrift when so much emphasis--virtually all negative--is placed upon sex. The various messages emanating from the pulpit appear fundamentally out of balance.

Curiously, of the three church presentations by the rector to which my wife accompanied me, sex warnings came up in two of them. (I guess fitting sex into a Christmas Eve message would be

¹ A good example of this is the rector's article in *The Episcopalian* for May 1987. To say--as it does--that sex before marriage is like communion before baptism, is ludicrous in light of my extensive and fully documented research, as explained in the body of this letter and in the attachments.

a bit difficult.) Neither my wife nor I have clandestine sex partners. The rector's incessant harping on sex seems to imply that he suspects we might, something I find a bit insulting. Moreover, he likely sympathizes with the fundamentalists' opposition to repeal of an anachronistic Virginia criminal statute (Title 18.2, §361A) limiting what even married couples may lawfully do in the bedroom.

Incidentally, the rector says that he laments the recent "feminization of society," whatever that means. Maybe he favors repeal of the women's suffrage amendment.

In closing, let me say I acknowledge that God's message can reach us through Scripture (recognizing, of course, that the various Biblical writers expressed outlooks reflecting their particular life experiences). A problem for modern Christians is understanding the meanings of Biblical text originally written in ancient languages. I expended some effort on this subject in the aforementioned study class memorandum, specifically concluding that I doubt God would have us literally hate our parents (a sickening thought) as the English translation directs us to do in Luke 14:26.

I further believe that God encourages us to grow and benefit from the cumulative wisdom gleaned from our study of this world, thereby empowering each generation to improve its understanding of the Gospel by applying newly found knowledge to the circumstances then prevailing. Notwithstanding that the grace of God is eternal, we can strive to enrich our insights into the greater scheme.

The collective result of the foregoing is that I have decided my future spiritual enrichment must lie in another parish of the Diocese. (Will you kindly see that my name is removed from current records.) I guess I've wasted a year and a half of my life while figuring all this out.

Respectfully,
/signature/

APPENDIX A - EXAMPLES OF ANTISEX EXPRESSION

1. In the leaflet entitled *Distinctives of xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx*, a passage reads, "... single persons [are to govern themselves] by abstinence from sexual activity." Why does the rector not similarly admonish us against such acts as murder, which I am under the impression Episcopalians are expected to refrain from?
2. During the January meeting of the Men's Ministry, the rector articulated that we should eschew pornography, a word excluded from my personal lexicon because I have learned it means different things to different people. (I have to guess what the rector meant by his use of the term; he never disclosed his definition.)
3. At the same men's meeting, it was apparent that a goodly number of attendees had visited with considerable enthusiasm the then-recent mass gathering of Promisekeepers. My understanding of this organization is that while its publicly stated goals appear laudable, the underlying motivations of its sponsors--slanted toward the fundamentalists' agenda--are inimical to my beliefs.
4. Enrolled with me in this year's study group was a couple, the husband of which is on the professional staff of an extreme right-wing political organization characterized in part by antisex dogma. While the chances of leader Gary Bauer's achieving his objective of winning the presidency of the United States are deemed slim, I believe the agenda which the group pursues--involving suppression of political freedom for others--is dangerous for the country. That this couple resides in the District of Columbia (where there is a plethora of Episcopal churches) but comes all the way out to this rector's parish is eye-opening. They apparently are finding something considerably different from that which I am seeking.
5. The rector's Easter sermon claimed that the young stars of the movie *Titanic* foolishly lost themselves in a moment of sex, rather than delay their carnal gratification until after achieving a wedded state. People I know who saw this movie regard the sex as constituting only a fractional aspect of the woman's realization that the world offered more than the sheltered life with which she was familiar. The sex scene likely overwhelmed the rector to the point of precluding his ability to grasp the main message.
6. At the spring banquet, the rector in his remarks brought up sex in some negative context, the specifics of which I don't remember. I do, however, recall feeling it coming. Sure enough, it came.
7. The September newsletter report on the Lambeth conference is especially insightful. The rector voiced his approval of the third world bishops' criticism of homosexuality (most U.S. bishops tend to rank sex issues low on their list of priorities). He then uses this as an opening for yet another condemnation of nonmarital heterosexual acts. Sadly--but not surprisingly--the column is totally silent on everything else that occurred at Lambeth, as if nothing matters but sex!

PART IV. Recommendations For a Proposed Course of Action

This writer respectfully suggests that, based upon the collective facts and analysis herein, the national Episcopal Church should disassociate itself from the fundamentalist positions discussed in Part I. This could take the form of a communication from the office of Presiding Bishop, or alternatively, a resolution introduced at a future General Convention.

We should be mindful of the sage advice offered by Bishop John Shelby Spong--as it appears in Part II, item A5--that "clinging to [the sexual] prohibitions [of the past] will prove an exercise in futility [and] *so discredit the church that whatever moral authority it has in other areas of life will be dissipated as well.*" [Emphasis added.]

Moreover, I urge our Church to strongly support the emerging effort to eliminate the income tax marriage penalty, which now deters some committed couples from proceeding into holy wedlock. (It seems likely that even the fundamentalists among us would approve.) Of course, we should seek guidance from legal counsel to avoid First Amendment conflicts.

PART V - Miscellaneous Notes

Relevant To Societal Problems Caused By Fundamentalism

"I am amazed that someone thinks a glimpse of my nipples could corrupt the youth of America."

---Sarah Miles, actress appearing in the film *Lady Caroline Lover*, upon learning that the Motion Picture Association of America planned to place age restrictions upon attendance

Example Of Late 19th Century Fundamentalism

Specimens of the titan arum flowering plant, noted for its eight foot-long fleshy spike, were brought from their native Sumatra to the West for display in botanical gardens. However, because their Latin name--*Amorphophallus titanum*--translates into English as "big, shapeless male organ," young women of the day caught gazing upon them were subjected to reprimand.

---*Washington Post* (June 9, 2003; page A8)

In Her Own Words

"I'm not saying girls should run out and get it over with, but when you're ready, there's nothing wrong with sex. I was ready. I really cared about the guy I was with, and I'm glad I did it, because it's just one more thing I can enjoy about life and my relationships, and there's nothing bad or wrong or regrettable about that."

---Marisa, 19 (*Seventeen* magazine, July 2003, page 62)

Luxuriating In Freedom

As joyfully related by a woman vacationing in the waterfront resort of Pentwater, Michigan, "The secret to happiness is ... visiting the beach with a gaggle of friends on a starry July night when the moon is almost full to bursting [and] throwing off your sweatshirt and then everything else and sprinting across the beach into Lake Michigan--a giggling blur of tan lines." And a 23-year-old woman, attending an anniversary celebration of the famous 1969 music festival in upstate New York, strode the grounds wearing nothing but flip-flops and glittery eye shadow. "Why not? The body is beautiful," she said. "I've always wanted to walk around in public nude. At Woodstock it's a tradition, so I feel like it's okay." (Fundamentalists would generally reject that assessment, of course, but I suspect she doesn't give a whit--and with good reason.)

---*Washington Post* (November 25, 2001-page E1; July 24, 1999-page C5)

In An Insightful Article On Women's Social Confidence

"I think sex is cool and people should have a lot of it."

---Anna, 22-year-old single graduate student (*New York Times*; January 11, 2004-section 9, page 1)

Young Adults Who Are Not Cowed by the Fundamentalists

"This week is V-week on campuses across the country, the V standing for valentine and vagina.... 'Love Your Body' days are common; during one such celebration last fall at Washington University in St. Louis, a talk called 'Good Vibrations: Women and Orgasms,' given by a lecturer in women's studies, drew so many students that the speaker had to repeat it immediately afterward. Heffalumps, a sex-toy store that sponsored a sales booth, ran out of merchandise."

----*Washington Post* (February 14, 2004-page C2)

Sharing Her Sexual Awakening To Help Other Women Overcome Anxiety

"I like to have my vulva kissed on. It does not have to be carried through to orgasm, although it is one of the easiest ways for me to have one. Licking and kissing and things are sexy foreplay, and I like all the wet feelings.... As far as I know, the whole clitoris is erectile, and swells up when aroused.... I mostly enjoy having my vagina touched...." (These excerpts are taken from the personal website [www.myvag.net/touch.shtml] of a self-assured young woman adept at analyzing her inner needs.)

----Sarah, 21-year-old single female currently in a tender relationship with her boyfriend

Any Similarity In This Pairing?

New York Society for the Suppression of Vice (early 20thC., USA)

vis-a-vis

Taliban Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (late 20thC., Afghanistan)

APPENDICES A & B

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1 Corinthians 6:16
1 Corinthians 7:1-6, 8-9, 29, 32-35
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1 Peter 1:22
1 Peter 3:3
1 Timothy 2:9
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Hosea 4:10-12
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Song of Songs 4:16-5:1
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NOTE: Specific pages--where appropriate--are identified in main text.

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New Century Version
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2. Newspapers

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