

Looking Back: Evangelicals and Homosexuality

by Dr. Ralph Blair

Harvard philosopher George Santayana famously warned: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” That’s been shown to be tragically true, time after time. And forgetfulness condemns far more folks than merely the forgetful. Yet, without *data* of the past, there can be no remembering.

“Never Forget” signals a call to diligent remembering “lest we forget” the centuries of cruelty, even atrocities, committed in professedly “good conscience” for supposedly “sacred” causes, backed up by words from the Bible, the Koran and political ideologies that – sometimes – get reinterpreted or rejected later on. But it’s always *too late* for the victims of earlier interpretations, whose ordeals are now so easily forgotten, lest they suggest there are contemporary victims of contemporary “sacred” causes and ideologies.

Someone less academic than Santayana, but nonetheless, savvy, observed: “The only thing *new* in the world is the history you don’t know.” That’s some common sense that Merle Miller attributed to President Truman in his *New York Times* bestseller, *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman* (1974), written after years of his friendship and interviews with the former President. Without a significant intervening variable, e.g., awareness of such a *new* bit of really relevant history of which one had been unaware, the best predictor of one’s continuing thinking is his present ignorance.

Three years earlier, Miller had acknowledged his homosexuality in a *New York Times Magazine* article. Born in 1919 and reared in Marshalltown, Iowa – hometown of Billy Sunday (1862) and Young Life founder Jim Rayburn (1909), brother of Bob Rayburn (1915) – small town ignorance and the then *unmentionable* matter of homosexuality made growing up gay a formidable challenge.

Finally coming out at age 51, Miller joined the Advisory Board of the Homosexual Community Counseling Center in New York City, founded that same year, 1971, by Ralph Blair. The aim of the HCCC was to help same-sex attracted men and women and their families to *grow up* about growing up gay.

In 1975, Blair founded Evangelicals Concerned to help evangelical Christians deal with these *same* issues, and with *the added burden* of coping with what they thought the Bible said about homosexuality. Bob Rayburn was, by then, founding president of Covenant College and Theological Seminary and EC’s earliest evangelical encourager. Jim Rayburn’s son and Bob’s nephew, Jim III, keynoted the EC summer conference in 2014.

Also in 1975, Blair was leading and keynoting daylong seminars in 28 cities across the country, sponsored by the HCCC quarterly, the *Homosexual Counseling Journal*. This series was meant to better prepare those in the mental health fields, as well as clergy, to meet their professional responsibilities in regard to homosexuality. He encouraged them to move from having “shared in the silence that has kept homosexuality a taboo topic [to their taking] a fresh perspective [for] new meaning and hope to the everyday lives of homosexual men and women and our families.”

Truman’s observation on what’s not known about history rings true, but there’s an old counter quote that’s foolish: “What you don’t know can’t hurt you.” To the contrary, not only can what *you* don’t know hurt *you*, what *you* don’t know can hurt *someone else*, and even *many* others. So, it’s crucial that, in dealing with currently popular evangelical

interpretations of the Bible, faith and homosexuality, Christian pastors and counselors, parents and Christian gays and lesbians, themselves, be aware of the *historical diversity* of evangelical interpretations of these issues as well as about many other, now forgotten or ignored, controversies, so as not to proceed from positions of *ignorance* of whatever kind.

In all disputes, as in controversies over homosexuality, there can be some *innocent* ignorance and there can be some *intentional* ignorance. These differ in terms of where the ignorant *individual* or *group* is coming from. They differ in terms of *motives*.

The *innocently* ignorant simply don't know better. *Innocent* ignorance lacks a motive. But *intentional* ignorance is motivated by a *self-serving* or *self-preserving agenda*. The *intentionally* ignorant may suspect that they've come down on the wrong side of a controversy just as many a forebear has done throughout history. Still, the *consequences* of either kind of ignorance can be equally unjust and devastating to the lives of many people.

The *intentionally* ignorant refuse to really wrestle with data that they, not without some reasons, fear might upset their valued assumptions, beliefs, worldview, reputation and even their livelihood, should they have to conclude by honestly changing their minds and following through on that. So, in such a bind, to change one's mind requires a degree of duress – the stress of cognitive dissonance, psychosocial conflict in uncomfortable shame over one's self-centeredness and neglect of others' welfare and rights.

When the question is, for example, whether or not to affirm a same-sex couple's committed partnership and the conflicted person works for an evangelical church or some other conservative institution that decries all homosexuality, there's the temptation, on social and financial grounds, to resist a revision of viewpoint. This dilemma opens the door to *rationalizing*, to *willed* ignorance. Loss of job and career to which one believes he's called of God and for which he prepared for years and has been employed for years in ministry, is no small matter. Predictable consequences could, indeed, be devastating and unjust.

Blair, himself, lost his job on the Inter-Varsity staff at the University of Pennsylvania because he stood up for same-sex couples in 1964. And, as an *evangelical* with a mainly non-Christian gay clientele in Manhattan, there are secular gays who refuse to see him for psychotherapy even though his secular patients recommend him to them.

But *not* changing one's mind in the face of new information and eye-opening evidence has *devastating* and *unjust* consequences for *others*. Besides, how *faithfully soul preserving, intellectually honest* and *psychologically healthy* is it to continue to "go along" with an institution's antigay agenda while being, oneself, conflicted over its ever more obvious incoherence, unfairness and cruelty?

The first step toward honesty can be taken by the *intentionally* ignorant by admitting frankly, that they *do* have a *clue* that there's something they really *don't want* to know, something they don't think they can *afford* to know. Rationalizing *tries* to cover up what one doesn't want to look at because of fears that it *might* be true but *mustn't* be true because one can't *afford* for it to be true.

Yet, the intentionally ignorant are stuck with knowing that this rationalizing is a camouflage. How so? *They, themselves, put it there to cover up what's underneath the cover-up*. Everyone is aware of what's behind his or her own rationalization. So, such awareness is, in itself, *culpability* when, for example, the rationalization is used to bear

false witness against neighbors, even when that's not what's basically *intended*.

Fortunately, one's self-awareness of his or her rationalizing is also a *gift*. It's a gift that can *convict* conscience of the need to do a truly more *honest* job of looking into one's evasion and disregard. This is especially significant when so many are suffering as a result of others' failure to handle matters more candidly, without being distracted by other real, yet really extraneous, personal concerns.

One might ask, either sincerely or sarcastically, "Then, there's no room for *honest disagreement* on homosexuality?" The one who thus objects must go deeper than mere matters of opinion. Agreeing to disagree – intellectually, theoretically, academically – is one thing. But when one's privilege to disagree, goes beyond mere disagreement and gets involved in forcing others into lifelong celibacy that the one who disagrees would not want forced upon himself, when he is enjoying the marriage that he and his spouse have entered into to meet their deepest human needs for interpersonal, sexual intimacy, serious questions arise about *empathy* and the ancient worldwide awareness of the *ethic of reciprocity*.

It's expressed in Christian terms in Jesus' saying: "In whatever way you wish others to treat you, treat them that way, too. This summarizes all the Law and Prophets." (Matt 7:12) It's right there in the Torah: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." (Lev 19:18) Muslims understand that, "None truly believes until he wants for his brother what he wants for himself." It's evident to Hindus, too: "One should never do to another what one would not want done to oneself." It's also a Confucian principal: "Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself." Is there not, in all of this common ground, abundant evidence of what all humanity knows to be right?

Jesus spoke of the Last Judgment. He'll separate people. To some, he'll say: "Come, you're blessed by my Father, come into the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me." He'll tell them he had everyday needs with which all can identify, and that they helped him in these times of need. But they'll be confused and ask: "When did we see *you* in need? When did we help *you*?" He'll explain: "Inasmuch as you did something for the least among you, you did it for me." He'll then turn to the others: "Get away from me, you who are cursed. I had all these needs with which all can identify, and you did nothing to help me." They'll object: "When did we see *you* in need and not help?" He'll explain: "Insofar as you did not help one of the least among you, you did not help me." (Matt 25:31ff)

Says a Bible commentator: "This is one of the most vivid parables Jesus ever spoke, and the lesson is crystal clear – God will judge us in accordance with our reaction to human need." (William Barclay)

Now, it's never wise, psychologically or spiritually, for anyone to violate his or her own conscience. But conscience, *per se*, is no infallible guide to what's true or false, right or wrong. Conscience can be well informed or misinformed. Just as much of a sense of guilt can be felt when violating a *misinformed* conscience as when violating a *well-informed* conscience.

So, what one thinks and believes matters – not only to one's own welfare but also to the consequent welfare of others whose welfare must always be of concern to Christians who are called to love others as we love ourselves. Therefore, one's beliefs must be *clearly identified*, *honestly challenged* and, if necessary, *changed* according to what's learned at

a deeper, more reasonable, less self-righteous, less self-centered, loving level of inquiry.

There needs to be a willingness to learn what one might *not yet* know or may have *tried* not to know about, e.g., the Bible and homosexuality, committed same-sex couples, facts of four decades of failures and frauds of the now closed-down “ex-gay” movement as well as the checkered history of evangelicalism in controversies that are no longer controversial among evangelicals (e.g., the slave trade, the Old South’s system of slavery, segregation, opposition to mixed-race marriage, opposition to woman’s education and voting rights, even early endorsement of abortion and the Roe v Wade decision as well as all those silly old notions about women’s bobbed hair and men’s long hair, etc.). Such an education can bear fruit of a *truer* witness, not only *about homosexuality*, but, *to persons who happen to be homosexual*.

On September 8, 2008, after having given a lecture on Christian apologetics at Gateway Cathedral in New York City, Ravi Zacharias told his audience that he had time for three questions during Q & A.

The first questioner asked: “How do we present the Gospel to people who disagree with us on homosexuality?” There had been no mention of homosexuality in the presentation and the man’s presumptive use of “us” was not warranted in terms of some in attendance.

Zacharias granted that he viewed homosexuality as “desacralizing” of sex, but he added a warning against *Christians wounding already-wounded people*. He illustrated his caution against attempting to do what one is not equipped to do, with a recent experience he’d had while recovering from back surgery.

His doctors had told him he’d need to be turned in his bed from time to time. But, they warned, it must be done by at least two big strong men so as not to cause needless pain. When a small nurse came into his room and announced that it was time for her to turn him, he tried to tell her what his doctors had told him, but she insisted she could turn him all by herself and she proceeded to try. Immediately, she caused him such *excruciating* pain that he let out a loud scream. She jumped back, exclaiming: “Oh, you had *back surgery*? I thought you’d had a hip replacement.” Zacharias wisecracked with his audience, that, at that moment of such pain, he thought he was going to *need* a hip replacement! He then, seriously and caringly, drew the analogy to one’s rushing in to undertake what one may not be at all prepared to understand about a gay person’s life experience, especially if that person has been hurt by Christians. He urged that a simple sharing of the Gospel, as one would do with anyone, would make more sense.

Recently, a few evangelicals who oppose same-sex marriage say that, while they’re not going to change their position, they want to take a friendlier *tone* than what’s been shown. Yet, after the Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage, there’s been an unleashing of angry backlash from many politically conservative Christians. And, in it, there’s still the all too obvious *underlying ignorance* of homosexuality and of “what the Bible says” – or *doesn’t* say – about it. And, in effect if not always by intent, there’s the same old failure to fully appreciate the fact that homosexual and heterosexual orientations are *equally central* to the subjective experience and the intimacy needs of all in each of these orientations. There’s resistance, if not outright refusal, to admit that a same-sex attracted person’s *everyday experience* of sexual orientation and a desire to be in an appropriately oriented marriage of commitment is the *same intrinsic, involuntary and immutable everyday experience and aim* that a heterosexually attracted person has.

So, there’s too little sense, on the part of heterosexual evangelicals, that, as it were,

“There, but for the grace of God, go I”. *Not* that the homosexuality *as such* is a problem, but, given the prejudice and opposition brought against homosexuals by evangelicals, a more reasonable identification with the *common experience of involuntariness* and *immutability* in both sexual orientations could produce some much needed empathy and understanding and even some additional motivation for applying the Golden Rule.

The year before Zacharias’ remarks in New York City, the evangelical polling firm of Barna Research found that, “disdain for gay individuals [had] become virtually synonymous with the Christian faith” in the minds of 16 to 29 year-old Americans. In 2015, disdain around issues of homosexuality is still far too common an attitude among many evangelicals. It’s that attitude that’s still *perceived* by almost all same-sex attracted persons – as well as by *almost all younger Christians* – to be *synonymous* with evangelical Christianity. No wonder Barna is finding evidence that younger Christians are leaving these churches in droves – though they’re *not* necessarily leaving Jesus.

Back in 2007, in his book, *unChristian* (Baker), Barna Research president David Kinnaman wrote that both Christians and non-Christians “believe that Christians show excessive contempt and unloving attitudes towards gays and lesbians.” He’d said then: “One of the most frequent criticisms of young Christians was that they believe the church has made homosexuality a ‘bigger sin’ than anything else.”

And this, of course, has been done quite blatantly for decades. Forty years ago, in 1975, the year of the founding of Evangelicals Concerned, an article in the Christian and Missionary Alliances’ *Alliance Witness* stated emphatically, yet unbiblically: “The New Testament blasts homosexual activity as the lowest most degrading kind of immorality.”

Yet, in a 1974 *Eternity* magazine article, the popular evangelical writer, Joe Bayly, made some distinction between “homosexuality” in the Bible and “total judgment of the homosexual person”. “For years I have been troubled”, he said, “about a precise identification of every person of this type with the biblical model.” But his antigay sons, PCA ministers, are stridently sarcastic. They mocked fellow PCA minister Tim Keller’s careful attempt to show something of their father’s spirit *vis a vis* homosexuality in a Q & A at Covenant Seminary. When they did it again, on Keller’s understandably careful handling of issues of Hell, Blair commented on their blog: “I remember their dad and their blogging is no chip off the old block of his good sense.” Tim Bayly noted for their readers: “This Ralph Blair who comments here supporting Tim Keller is a longtime sodomite advocate who claims Inter-Varsity and Evangelical credentials.” (June 3, 2010)

The angry backlash against the 2015 decision in *Obergefell*, legalizing marriage for same-sex couples, evidences evangelicals’ continuing *contempt* for the sexual intimacy needs of same-sex couples and continuing *ignorance* of the historical continuum of evangelical views on homosexuality.

This all underscores Kinnaman’s observations in 2007 when he’d been “surprised” at how much, *both the Christians’ and the non-Christians’ perceptions of the hostility*, “were rooted in specific stories and personal interactions with Christians and in churches. When they labeled Christians as judgmental this was not merely spiritual defensiveness. It was frequently the result of truly ‘unChristian’ experiences. We discovered that the descriptions that young people offered of Christianity were more thoughtful, nuanced, and experiential than expected.”

He pointedly reminded his *Christian* readers: “When the Apostle Paul advises believers to ‘live wisely among those who are not Christians’ and to ‘let your conversation be

gracious and effective' (Col 4:5-6), he could be writing no better advice to committed Christians in America." Said Kinnaman: "Christians need to downgrade the importance of being anti-homosexual as a 'credential' [and Christians need] to avoid rhetoric that dehumanizes people, especially in interpersonal interactions."

He quoted Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "Nothing that we despise in the other man is entirely absent from ourselves. We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or don't do, and more in light of what they suffer." More recent biographical research on Bonhoeffer's possible *same-sex* attraction lends poignancy to his statements.

Realizing that, unfortunately, "many Christians may be offended by his conclusion," Kinnaman reminded his readers to "consider the ultimate goal of our lives: pointing people to Jesus."

Writing in September 2015 on, "Why Are Millennials Leaving the Church in Drove?", biblical scholar Preston Sprinkle of Eternity Bible College, confirms Kinnaman's reports and concerns. Says Sprinkle: "Many dechurched people said they weren't allowed to question, dialogue with, discuss, or pushback against some of Christianity's pet doctrines. I'm not talking about the deity of Christ or salvation by grace. I'm talking about the duration of hell, the genre of Jonah, and whether the Bible's same-sex prohibitions apply to monogamous, consensual, same-sex marriages. These aren't rebels. These are inquisitive and honest believers who didn't find much honesty in the church."

Ironically, also in September 2015, Mark Galli, editorializing in *Christianity Today*, expressed the opinion that, today, "no false teaching is more confusing or divisive than that the church should bless same-sex relationships". So, he's calling for "a new battle for the Bible". He harks back to Harold Lindsell's 1978 *Battle for the Bible*, even though he admits it "was divisive and unhelpful". And it was! Galli claims we need to "return to the Bible as the final authority in matters of faith and practice—and especially Christian doctrine." But the dispute over same-sex relationship is *not* a dispute over biblical authority – at least for evangelical scholars. Evangelical scholars on both sides of this debate necessarily rely on their *interpretations* of the Bible for their work in this or any other doctrinal matter. The dispute is in the arena of biblical *hermeneutics*, *not authority*. Ironically, Galli repeats typical errors of earlier "traditionalists" when they dealt, for example, with "what the Bible says" in support of slavery and segregation and against interracial marriage. Indeed, as evangelical historian Mark Noll has explained, "traditionalists" came to these older disputes armed with their explicit Bible proof-texts while evangelical abolitionists and integrationists had to rely on more general biblical principles, e.g. the Golden Rule.

As Truman was right, that what's *new*, is the history we don't know, and as Santayana was right, that, in remembering the past we can help us avoid mistakes of the past, the *fuller* and, in many ways, quite *unknown*, history of evangelical faith and homosexuality is vitally important to record and report. Some of that history is what is presented in what follows. It's done with the concerns expressed by Zacharias, Kinnaman and Sprinkle regarding the simple, straightforward presentation of the Good News of Christ, uncluttered by "culture war" distractions that obscure the everlasting Gospel.

The Fall 2015 issue of *Record*, the quarterly newsletter of Evangelicals Concerned, included a special retrospective on some of the 20th and 21st century history of evangelicalism and homosexuality. This was placed in the historical context of earlier

disputes that now have been better resolved in light of the Gospel and in terms of a greater sense of social justice and in ways that past generations of evangelicals, for reasons they called “biblical”, did not see their way clear to question or revise.

Two news items led into that special parenthetical section of the *Record*. They were reports on the recent announcements by two evangelical leaders who indicate that they are now fully supportive of same-sex couples: Tony Campolo and David Neff.

Campolo is a sociologist, professor emeritus at Eastern University and founder of the new Campolo Center for Ministry at Eastern University. He’s also a popular evangelical speaker in demand internationally. Neff was editor-in-chief of *Christianity Today* from 1985 until retiring in 2013 and writes a regular *CT* column. He’s a former editor-in-chief of *Christian History* magazine and has served in the National Association of Evangelicals. Campolo’s and Neff’s announcements were met with immediate *negative* reaction from *Christianity Today*’s current editor, Mark Galli, and from many other conservatives.

On June 8, 2015, Campolo announced: “I have come to know so many gay Christian couples whose relationships work in much the same way as [my marriage]. Our friendships with these couples have helped me understand how important it is for the exclusion and disapproval of their unions by the Christian community to end. We in the Church should actively support such families.” He notes: “Rest assured that I have already heard – and in some cases made – every kind of biblical argument against gay marriage. ... Obviously, people of good will can and do read the scriptures very differently when it comes to controversial issues, and I am painfully aware that there are ways I could be wrong about this one.” But, he says, he’s “old enough to remember when we in the Church made strong biblical cases” against other things we’ve since changed our minds about. “I am afraid we are making the same kind of mistake again.”

Neff immediately saluted Campolo’s support for same-sex couples. Neff wrote: “God bless Tony Campolo. He is acting in good faith and is, I think, on the right track.” Neff told Galli: “I think the ethically responsible thing for gay and lesbian Christians to do is to form lasting, covenanted partnerships. I also believe that the church should help them in those partnerships in the same way the church should fortify traditional marriages.”

Campolo’s announcement wasn’t entirely surprising, but recent shifts on the issue by Neff and other evangelical leaders have caught the conservative religious establishment off guard. Those who are in charge at *Christianity Today*, *World* magazine, conservative churches and similar institutions and agencies seem to be even *frantically* pushing back.

Instead, they should be receptive to warnings against “making the same kind of mistake” that’s been made repeatedly and repeatedly regretted, throughout church history. Indeed, what are now seen as *atrocities* committed by church leaders of the past and cruel and embarrassing interpretations of Scripture, even in fairly *recent* times by Southern Christians, *CT*, *World* magazine, et al., should sound enough of an alarm to motivate serious reconsideration of what’s so habitually assumed to be “Christian”.

Yet, the Religious Right’s Mark Tooley, while easily granting that the church was wrong on issues of women as teachers, slavery, etc., mocks Campolo’s caution: “So ...we all know better now and so too on same sex marriage. Let the nuptials begin!” But Tooley’s sarcasm misses the point. The words of caution come with sad memories that,

in each case, it was *always only after* the mistakes were made and the damage done that we all came to admit, “we all know better now.”

Looking Back

Much of what’s been written on same-sex issues and evangelical response today suffers from self-serving polemics on all sides and, even more so, by a serious ignorance of history. The following overview is meant to give some corrective perspective.

Bob Jones, Sr. was right: “You can’t move without producing friction.” The moves by Campolo, Neff and other evangelicals are producing *lots of friction*. Sparks fly as Mark Galli, on behalf of the flagship of evangelicalism, resists these moves. He quickly distanced himself and his employer, *Christianity Today*, from the empathy shown by Campolo, Neff and other evangelicals who’ve lately joined the evangelicals who, over many decades, have given their support to same-sex couples.

Among these more recent supporters are Baptist ethicist David Gushee, Nashville megachurch pastor Stan Mitchell, former NAE executive Richard Cizik, and pastor Fred Harrell of the (formerly PCA) City Church in San Francisco.

In 1975, Ralph Blair founded Evangelicals Concerned for just such support. He’d written, *The Bible is an Empty Closet*, and began by saying: “There are no homosexuals in the Bible. Ruth and Naomi were no lesbians. David and Jonathan weren’t gay. Neither were Jesus and John, the men of Sodom, cult prostitutes, slave boys and their masters, nor call boys and their customers. The Bible is an empty closet.” He meant that both antigay and pro-gay propagandists look in vain to find a homosexual in the Bible.

Blair cited Bernard Ramm who taught at Biola, Bethel, Baylor and other evangelical schools. Ramm knew that, contrary to popular and simplistic notions, “The issues about homosexuality are very complex and are not understood by most members of the Christian Church.” He noted: “To them, it is a vile form of sexual perversion condemned in both the Old and New Testaments.”

Blair pointed out that, according to Calvin Seminary’s very conservative Old Testament scholar, Marten H. Woudstra, chair of the NIV Old Testament translation committee and a past president of the Evangelical Theological Society: “There is nothing in the Old Testament that corresponds to homosexuality as we understand it today.” Blair cited the evangelical theologian Helmut Thielicke’s explaining that, homosexuality “can be discussed at all only in the framework of that freedom which is given to us by the insight that even the New Testament does not provide us with an evident, normative dictum with regard to this question. Even the kind of question which we have arrived at”, said Thielicke, “must for purely historical reasons be alien to the New Testament.” And Blair quoted New Testament scholar Victor Paul Furnish dismissing all anachronistic readings by stating explicitly: “There is no text on homosexual orientation in the Bible.”

An experience comes to mind from the life of Anna Bartlett Warner, author of “Jesus Loves Me”. As 2015 is the centennial of her Home-going, Evangelicals Concerned is honoring her at EC’s autumn retreat at Ocean Grove. Among her many works is, *Tired Church People*, her little book on “Christian amusements”, written in 1881. She writes: “I suppose one never goes heartily into any bit of Bible study, without finding more than one counted upon. And so, for me, searching out this subject of Christian amusements some curious things have come to light. As for instance, how very little the Bible says

about them at all. It was hard to find catchwords under which to look. ‘Amusement’? there is no such word among all the many spoken by God to men. ‘Recreation’?-nor that either; and ‘game’ is not in all the book, and ‘rest’ is something so wide of the mark (in the Bible sense, I mean) that you must leave it out altogether. And, ‘pastime’? ah, the very thought is an alien.”

Yet, over and over again, as homosexuality has become a focus of debate within evangelicalism, people on all sides of the issues rummage through the Bible to come up with proof-texts to support their arguments. Gay activists mistakenly call David and Jonathan, a “gay” couple; Fundamentalists mistakenly call the men of Sodom, “gay”.

In 1972, three years before EC’s founding and a year before the American Psychiatric Association initiated the removal of homosexuality from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* on the basis of its updated, across-the-board, 3-pronged criterion for the classifying of *all* psychopathology, A. M. Nicholi, a psychiatrist and an evangelical, said in *Christianity Today*: “As homosexuality continues to become more acceptable for discussion, churches will undoubtedly become more aware of this problem among their members. As a matter of fact, they may find a surprisingly large number of churchgoers struggling with homosexual impulses.” He noted that, “This ought not be surprising. ... The loneliness, the intense need for human contact, the image the homosexual has of himself as a misfit, may cause him to see the Christian community as a refuge and a possible source of comfort.”

Sadly, at that time, such a wished-for compassion was not very much in evidence. The furiously antigay Religious Right soon made sure that Nicholi’s hope for empathic hospitality and any hope gays may have had for “human contact [within] the Christian community” was dashed. In fact, a *CT* editorial in the issue right after Nicholi’s appeal, struck the opposite note from the one he’d made so wisely and so kindly.

Ironically, that onrushing move to the Right in the mid-1970s ran counter to what characterized the beginning of *Christianity Today* in 1956. Back then, *CT*’s founder, Billy Graham, had stated clearly that he wanted the publication to “plant the evangelical flag in the middle of the road, taking the conservative theological position but a definite liberal approach to social problems.” Graham promised: “It would combine the best in liberalism and the best in fundamentalism, without compromising theologically.”

Two decades later, what Graham had envisioned for *CT* was Blair’s vision for EC – a “conservative theological position but a definite liberal approach to social problems” faced, in this case, by same-sex couples. Yet Graham’s *CT* effort toward his goal in the mid-1950s met with the same sort of liberal Protestant disinterest and Fundamentalist disapproval as Blair’s EC effort met with in the mid-1970s.

No wonder then, that, as a 1956 Bob Jones University freshman, Blair was called on the carpet for sticking up for Graham. He’d been overheard “griping” about the morning’s chapel speaker, New York attorney James E. Bennett, an associate of the militantly Fundamentalist preacher, Carl McIntire. Bennett had attacked Graham’s having non-Fundamentalists on his upcoming Madison Square Garden Crusade committee. Blair’s forbidden “gripe” was immediately reported to BJU administrators and, within an hour, he was summoned to the Administration Building about his “heart problem”, as it was put. There, surrounded by several deans in the office of the Dean of Men, Blair was seated in a chair opposite a very angry Dr. Bob Jones Sr., the school’s founder, who

harangued him for having the audacity to think that he knew more than “Dr. Bob” about how mass evangelism should be run.

After that, Blair wised up to the eavesdroppers who were as alert to sniffing out and exposing campus “heresy” at BJU as are today’s PC spies at sniffing out and exposing politically incorrect campus comments that “offend” opponents of free speech. He enjoyed the good things BJU had to offer before he transferred, in 1958, to Bowling Green State University in his home state of Ohio.

On Good Friday, April 15, 1960, Billy Graham, having breached Apartheid in South Africa, called on all Southern clergy to move to racial reconciliation. In quick response, and with evidently nothing more relevant to preach on an Easter Sunday morning, Bob Jones Sr. preached his *Easter sermon* on, “Is Segregation Scriptural?” He said it was! He used the Bible to back him up. He quoted Acts 17:26, saying: “God Almighty fixed the bounds of their habitation. That is as clear as anything that was ever said.” Fifty-five years later, evangelicals say that God Almighty fixed the bounds of their *cohabitation* and it’s as clear as anything that was ever said.

From its founding in 1927 in Bay County, Florida, the school was open to various ethnic groups, but in its segregationist setting in the South, it did not admit African Americans. The school maintained its racist policies throughout its relocations to Cleveland, Tennessee and, in 1947, to Greenville, South Carolina. Eventually, due to IRS pressure, blacks were enrolled between 1971 and 1975. But even then, the school did not accept *unmarried* blacks so as to preclude mixed-race dating and mixed-race marriage.

Well, Bob Jones Sr. had died in 1968. After the death of Bob Jones Jr. in 1997, Bob Jones III, who’d been a freshman with Blair, became the third president of the school. In 2000, he removed the mixed-race dating restrictions.

In 2008, forty years after the death of Bob Jones Sr., and in what *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* called “an eloquent statement”, Stephen Jones, great-grandson of the founder and the school’s fourth president, publicly apologized for the institution’s racist past. The statement said that, “for far too long, we allowed institutional policies regarding race to be shaped more directly by that ethos [of Southern racial segregation] than by the principles and precepts of the Scriptures. We conformed to the culture rather than provide a clear Christian counterpoint to it. In so doing, we failed to accurately represent the Lord and to fulfill the commandment to love others as ourselves. For these failures we are profoundly sorry.” According to the apology, the institution was now “committed to maintaining on the campus the racial and cultural diversity and harmony characteristic of the true Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world.” For the BJU founder and his son, *this move* would have produced *much friction*.

Sadly, apologies from later generations don’t undo the damage done to the generations who suffered through the oppression of the past. Nor do they overcome the oppression’s aftermath. Nonetheless, Blair sent his appreciation to the BJU administration and urged that this same awareness of the Lord’s “commandment to love others as we love ourselves” prompt the school to revise its *antigay* views and policies. He indicated that the new Davis Field House at BJU was named for his late uncle, a major benefactor of the school. In 1955, Blair had introduced his uncle to BJU and he’d always had his uncle’s encouragement and support. But, contrary to traditional BJU policy that, out of Christian courtesy, no communication goes unanswered, he received no reply.

In 2015, though, under pressure from thousands of signatures of supporters of BJUnity, the unofficial LGBT-affirming group of BJU alums, Chancellor Bob Jones III finally issued an apology *of sorts* for what he'd said at a press conference in Washington, DC in 1980. He'd declared back then: "I guarantee it would solve the problem post-haste if homosexuals were stoned." Now he says: "I take personal ownership for this inflammatory rhetoric", but he back-peddles a bit: "This reckless statement was made in the heat of a political controversy 35 years ago." Yet, he'd known at the time that it was out of line, for before he said it, he'd remarked: "I'm sure this will be greatly misquoted". Of course, it wasn't *misquoted* at all. It's what he said. Besides, for many decades, gay alums, closeted while they were students, recall his repeatedly going into antigay tirades during his chapel talks. Now, he notes an evolving hermeneutic: "The Bible I love, preach, and try to practice, does not present today the stoning of sinners as God's way."

BJUnity issued this gracious response: "We are grateful that Bob Jones III has taken responsibility for these words – words that have caused deep harm for many more people than any of us knows. ... It represents the beginning of a change in the rhetoric and conversation."

Homosexuality and Evangelicals in the Mid-20th Century

Before the early 1960s it wasn't easy to find evangelicals supporting same-sex couples. Most evangelicals knew really nothing about the subject and avoided it. Christians who wished to understand had to rely on naive, even harmful, sources such as the inadequate counsel of Clyde Narramore in his 1960 book, *The Psychology of Counseling* (Zondervan). He accepted the old secular notion of a "distant father" and a "smothering mother" as causal for homosexuality and, as a Christian, he wrote, unhelpfully: "After the question of salvation has been settled, then the counselor can help the counselee develop an effective program for spiritual development which, in turn, will have an important effect on his problem."

Still, in 1955, a year before *CT*'s founding and twenty years before *EC*'s founding, C. S. Lewis said that he saw "much hypocrisy" in discussions about homosexuality. He sensed "a certain nausea" but noted, "I think that of very little relevance to moral judgment." He asked, rhetorically, "Is [hostility to homosexuality] then on Christian grounds?" and replied: "But how many of those who fulminate on the matter are in fact Christians?" He nailed it when he concluded: "The real reason for all the pother is, in my opinion, neither Christian nor ethical. We attack this vice not because it is the worst but because it is, by adult standards, the most disreputable and unmentionable, and happens also to be a crime."

This insight from Lewis may account for why a major Reformed theologian, J. I. Packer, drifts from rightly affirming that, "Christ's vicarious righteousness is the *only* ground of justification", to blasting all who are "living in homosexual relationship". To Packer: "They don't qualify for Christ's salvation in terms of the Gospel that God has revealed!" But in biblical terms, evangelically speaking, who in the world *qualifies* for Christ's free *gift* of salvation? While Packer has long opposed fellow Anglican clergy who are avowed atheists and who have repudiated the very most basic of Christian doctrines, he never separated from them ecclesiastically. But when Anglicans decided to endorse committed and monogamous same-sex couples, he said that *this* violated prime

doctrine of the very “first order” and he walked out on them.

Lewis’ longest lasting friendship was with Arthur Greeves. They grew up in Belfast, across the street from each other. Until Lewis died, he and Greeves exchanged more letters than Lewis exchanged with anyone else. Greeves disclosed his homosexuality to Lewis in 1918. Lewis, at 19, replied with warm understanding and a maturity far beyond his years: “Congratulations old man, I am delighted that you have had the moral courage to form your own opinions independently, in defiance of the old taboos. I am not sure that I agree with you; but, as you hint in your letter, this penchant is a sort of mystery only to be fully understood by those who are made that way – and my views on it can be at best but emotion.”

In the era when “the love that dare not speak its name” was a crime for which one went to prison, Lewis sensed that homosexual orientation was a *given, innate, not a choice*, and that it could be fully *understood* only by one who’s “made that way”. So, he granted that heterosexuals’ views of it were, “at best but emotion” and this insight is reflected in what he wrote in 1955 about anti-homosexuals’ “nausea”. In his entire lifetime of letters with his good friend, Greeves, there’s no hint that Lewis ever revised, with Greeves, what he’d expressed to him so very early on. In 1933, Lewis dedicated his very first Christian book, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, to Greeves.

Long before the debacle of the “ex-gay” movement and the cruel demand for enforced celibacy for the “good” of gay people, Lewis had written – with Greeves, perhaps, in mind: “Of all tyrannies a tyranny exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. ... To be ‘cured’ against one’s will and cured of states which we may not regard as disease is to be put on the level with those who have not yet reached the age of reason. ... You start being ‘kind’ to people before you have considered their rights, and then force upon them supposed kindnesses which they in fact had a right to refuse, and finally kindnesses which no one but you will recognize as kindnesses and which the recipient will feel as abominable cruelties.”

In 1960, three years before Lewis died, he wrote a letter to fine artist (and homosexual) Delmar Banner. Banner was in a mixed-orientation marriage to sculptor Josefina de Vasconcellos, a devout Christian. She’d learned early on that it was to be a sexless marriage. It lasted for 53 years. She died at 100, 22 years after his death. Lewis told Banner that he supported the decriminalization of homosexuality. He added, in his habit of abbreviation, that he stood firmly with “the persecuted homo against snoopers and busybodies.”

In 1962, in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at the USC Graduate School of Religion, Blair was supporting same-sex partnership. He was not faced with pushback within the IVCF chapter, including the faculty advisor who later was on staff at Fuller Seminary. Rather, there was both serious inquisitiveness as well as indifference. Homosexuality had not yet been hit by the hysteria of the following decade’s Religious Right. This was 6 years after *CT*’s founding.

In 1965, in his bestseller, *The Comfortable Pew*, Canada’s leading journalist, Pierre Berton, wrote that, “the homosexual is the modern equivalent of the leper. His very job, economic and social status, community position, and public acceptance depend on the successful concealment of an awful secret. And when his disease is discovered, he is relegated to the modern leper colony – the half-world of his fellows which, with great

irony and great sadness, is called 'gay'." Berton went on to state: "That homosexuals themselves feel ignored and rejected by the Church is beyond doubt."

After graduating from USC in 1964, Blair served a year on IVCF staff at the University of Pennsylvania. But his pro-gay position aroused criticism when he spoke at a Christian student event at Yale, and IVCF decided not to *reappoint* him for the next school year at Penn. He then moved to Penn State to serve as the interim American Baptist chaplain (though not a Baptist himself). He immediately created and hosted a yearlong series of "Open Panels on Problems" or "OP-OP" (a la the Op-art craze of the day). This series of controversial topics included: "The Playboy Philosophy", drugs ("Is there really a rainbow at the end of pot?"), anti-Semitism, life and death control, censorship and "The Homosexual Revolution" (the biggest campus hit of all).

As soon as OP-OP posters went up around campus and along College Avenue in the late summer of '65, VP for Student Affairs Robert G. Bernreuter, the psychologist who developed the Bernreuter Personality Inventory, rushed into his office shouting: "What the hell is Oop-Oop and who the hell is Ralph Blair?"

After his interim year on the Religious Affairs staff, Blair stayed on at Penn State to write his doctoral dissertation on homosexuality. His study of the etiology and treatment of homosexuality was part of his doctoral dissertation on homosexuality. A member of his dissertation committee, noted psychologist and sociologist, Carlfred Broderick, the editor of the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, wrote that Blair "is scrupulously thorough and shows a remarkable analytic ability in his evaluation of the research of others. Indeed, his survey on the etiology of homosexuality is to my mind the best in existence." And the Mayo Clinic's Walter C. Alvarez agreed, writing this endorsement: "Blair has written a splendid survey of the etiology of homosexuality."

On etiology, Blair concluded: "The theories on etiology are contradictory, incomplete, and based on inadequate samples of patients examined and interpreted by clinicians from different schools of thought without the control of standard definitions and procedures. ... One sees homosexuals who 'should' have been heterosexuals and heterosexuals who 'should' have been homosexuals – if the theories are to be believed. ... In any particular case, however, it is important to remember that the individual's perceptions of these factors are certainly as important as the factors themselves and that even after the identification of such factors it would be impractical, if not impossible, to monitor so complex an array of etiological factors."

On treatment, Blair concluded: Whatever the mode, e.g., individual psychoanalytic or psychodynamic, client-centered, rational-emotive or cognitive, group therapy, chemotherapy, hormone therapy, behavioral or hypnotherapy, etc., "after all variables are considered, no treatment in even these most promising cases [heterosexual-performing "bisexuals"] is seen to be usually successful in reorienting a homosexual to heterosexuality." The term, "usually", simply indicates that, in almost every case, one has only the psychotherapist's own reporting of his or her "success" to go by.

In 1969, Blair became the Director of Counseling at the City University of New York's NYC Community College (now CUNY's CityTech). In 1970, he founded and edited *The Otherwise Monographs* on homosexuality and, in 1971 he founded the Homosexual Community Counseling Center, Inc. (the first time the term, "homosexual" was incorporated in New York State). He also began his private practice of psychotherapy, and, in 1974, started and edited the first mental health quarterly on homosexuality, the

Homosexual Counseling Journal. Among mental health professionals associated with either HCCC or the *HCCJ* were George Weinberg, Evelyn Hooker, Virginia E. Johnson, Richard Pillard, Wardell B. Pomeroy, Charles Ihlenfeld, Hendrik Ruitenbeek, Ernst van den Haag, et al. Among lesbian and gay rights leaders on the HCCC Advisor Board were Barbara Gittings, Phyllis Lyon, Craig Rodwell, Troy Perry, Kate Millett, Jeanne Manford, et al.

In 1975 and 1976, under the auspices of the *Journal*, Blair led a two-year series of all-day seminars on homosexuality for local mental health professionals in 28 cities across America.

Blair began his keynote for the national tours with these words: “In the 200 years of America, there has never been a time when our citizens have been better prepared than today for their own homosexuality or for that of others. Even so, most people still live in a ‘let’s pretend’ world, and therefore homosexuality is still striking many people as a complete surprise, as a terrible disappointment. This is both hard and easy to explain, for homosexuality is common but ignored.” He concluded his keynote with these words: “Now, as new information challenges what we thought we knew for sure, it behooves us to act on what we know. We must stop behaving as though our old knowledge has been sustained and we must act as responsible and rational people in the mental health and helping professions, behaving in accordance with what we know to be true and allowing the experiencing of ourselves interacting with this reality to reinforce our sense that we are well relating to our responsibilities in the real world, where everyone does not grow up the same way.” (*The Homosexual Counseling Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1975)

It was in 1974, ten years after Thielicke’s helpful insight on homosexuality and the Bible and ten years after Blair had been refused reappointment to InterVarsity staff for taking a pro-gay view, that, InterVarsity Press surprisingly published *Who Walk Alone* by Margaret Evening, an evangelical English campus chaplain and former missionary to Africa. Writing on “love – with the same sex”, she stated: “Surely we are all meant to enjoy our sexuality, whether we are heterosexual or homosexual. All too often homosexuality is thought of as a blight, a disease, something that needs to be hidden from all but those few who can share at a deep level.” She said a same-sex couple should ask themselves: “To what extent is this a relationship of mature love (as opposed to immature infatuation)”, does it promote “emotional growth”, is it merely “self-indulgence”, does it deepen relationship with God and does it “help both of us to become more fully human?” Evening concluded: “If homosexual friends can, with real honesty, answer these questions to their entire satisfaction and peace of mind, then they have nothing to fear.”

In the following year, 1975, 19 years after *CT*’s founding, Blair founded Evangelicals Concerned, Inc. It was the first ministry for the support of evangelical Christians who happen to be same-sex attracted. EC also aims to educate and support their families and evangelical clergy and churches on same-sex issues. In starting EC, Blair was using what one of his former classmates at Westminster Seminary, historian George Marsden notes is evangelicalism’s trans-denominational model, a “parachurch” agency.

The very first evangelical leader to support Blair’s vision for Evangelicals Concerned was Robert G. Rayburn, the founding president of Covenant College and Seminary and, previously, pastor of College Church in Wheaton, Illinois. The new Covenant Seminary Chapel is named for Rayburn.

Blair had known Rayburn since the early 1960s when Blair helped to start and, during

his vacations from college, lead a new congregation (a PCA predecessor) in Youngstown, Ohio.

Rayburn and another Covenant faculty member had attended Blair's Kansas City mental health seminar on homosexuality on March 3, 1975. Later that year, Rayburn met with Blair and, as they discussed the need for the EC ministry, Rayburn suggested that it be *publicly* launched during the upcoming National Association of Evangelicals convention in D.C. This was done and interested people attended from across the country. Some had ordered Blair's monograph, *An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality*, through an ad in *The Advocate*, the national gay paper. Others showed interest after learning of EC from leaflets distributed in the lobby of the convention's Shoreham Hotel.

In 2015, the centenary of Bob Rayburn's birth, EC honored his memory at EC's 73rd summer conference. These seasonal retreats have been held around the country since 1980 and have been keynoted by over a hundred evangelical leaders.

The 2015 Supreme Court Ruling on Marriage For Same-Sex Couples

Immediately after the Supreme Court ruling in support of marriage for same-sex couples, Galli sent these words to his *CT* readers: "Rejoice. Not in the decision, of course, but 'Rejoice in the Lord' ... that the gates of the Supreme Court or Congress cannot prevail against Christ's church. ... That the kingdom will come."

Galli's bitter disappointment with the ruling, together with his triumphal tone, was a rendition of the rhetoric of R. L. Dabney, the Old South's leading Presbyterian theologian in 1867. Four years *after* Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and two years *after* the Civil War ended, Dabney huffed: "Although our people are now oppressed with present sufferings ... they well know, that in due time, they, although powerless themselves, will be avenged. ... Meantime, let the arrogant and successful wrongdoers flout our defence [sic] with disdain: we will meet them with it again, when it will be heard; in the day of their calamity, in the pages of impartial history, and in the Day of Judgment."

An historian reminds readers of *The Weekly Standard* of what a "Herculean effort ridding America of slavery required." (Richard Striner) "The most virulent defenders of slavery", he says, "could not even be paid to do the right thing". He deplores the "ideology based upon the notion that the outward physical features of our fellow human beings are indications of inward character traits." Just as deplorable is an ideology based upon the notion that outward physical features of the genitalia of a fellow human being's lovingly committed companion are indications of inward character traits.

Exactly 100 years after Dabney wrote his self-righteous conclusion to his 356-page *Defense of Virginia and the South*, the Supreme Court issued *Loving v. Virginia*, its 1967 ruling against laws prohibiting marriage for *interracial* couples. Now, just short of half a century later, we have *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court's ruling against laws prohibiting marriage for *same-sex* couples. Couples freed by both Court decisions share what *all* couples committed to marriage share: intimate affection and stability valued for their marriage and, as per the Golden Rule, for everyone else who values marriage.

But, just as *CT* now objects to marriage for *same-sex* couples, *CT* objected to marriage for *mixed-race* couples. Gary Dorrien's historical account, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Westminster John Knox), reports that, "The magazine's editors made it clear that they regarded interracial marriage as repugnant." He adds that, "when James

Meredith sought to enter the University of Mississippi as a student, *Christianity Today* applauded the State of Mississippi for refusing to admit him.” He notes *CT*’s saying that Martin Luther King Jr.’s civil disobedience was “implicitly Communist”. *CT* called the 1963 March on Washington, a “mob spectacle”. J. Edgar Hoover’s fingerprints may be all over these last two comments as he had influence at *CT* and wrote for the magazine.

As evangelicals are still evolving on issues of homosexuality, we must recall that evangelicals have come through revisions on other issues such as race relations and abortion. It’s important to realize that in these earlier moves there were hidden and historical complexities that should alert us today, in our contemporary debate. We’re no doubt dealing with yet another round of hidden historical complexities.

Randall Balmer, noted historian of American religion and a former *CT* editor, gives background on evangelicals’ evolving on social issues that were not always what they seemed or pretended to be. He documents, contrary to what’s assumed or postured by the Religious Right, that the issue of abortion was *not* the issue over which the Religious Right was put together. In fact, as Balmer explains, “it wasn’t until 1979 – a full six years after *Roe* – that evangelical leaders, at the behest of conservative activist Paul Weyrich, seized on abortion not for moral reasons, but as a rallying-cry to deny President Jimmy Carter a second term. Why? Because the anti-abortion crusade was more palatable than the religious right’s real motive: protecting [racially] segregated schools.”

According to Balmer, a 1968 symposium sponsored by *CT* and the Christian Medical Society refused to call abortion sinful. Indeed, “individual health, family welfare, and social responsibility” were all cited as *justifications* for abortion. Balmer reports: “Both before and for several years after *Roe*, evangelicals were overwhelmingly indifferent to the subject, which they considered a ‘Catholic issue’.”

He points out: “When the *Roe* decision was handed down, W. A. Criswell, the Southern Baptist Convention’s former president and pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas—also one of the most famous fundamentalists of the 20th century—was pleased: ‘I have always felt that it was only after a child was born and had a life separate from its mother that it became an individual person. ... It has always, therefore, seemed to me that what is best for the mother and for the future should be allowed’.”

Criswell’s opinion in 1973 was in marked contrast to the opinion expressed by another Baptist, the Civil Rights activist Jesse Jackson. In the March 22, 1973 issue of *Jet*, the African-American weekly, Jackson said: “Abortion is genocide.” He warned: “If people use preventive measures to stop the life process from originating, I can buy that. If they use pills, contraceptives, rhythm to stop it from being, I can buy that, too. But if they get carried enough away to set the baby in process, they must get carried enough away to accept the responsibility of the baby. And I don’t want to hear this bit about babies not really living until the baby has a face and the doctor smacks it and it cries.”

Jackson paid attention to the long-established biological facts and Criswell and other Fundamentalists and evangelicals didn’t. Valparaiso Law professor Richard Stith observes: “Since the 1820s, when evidence of ovular fertilization first became known, it has been clear that the life of a human being runs from conception to death.” Jackson’s view was no doubt shaped, at least in part, by his having been born to a 16-year-old unmarried girl who’d been impregnated by a 33-year-old married neighbor. As such, he was a typical candidate for abortion.

But when Jackson ran for the Democrats’ Presidential nomination a decade later, he

turned his back on his earlier pro-life position while, by then, Criswell and company had become pro-life. Even today, many who think of themselves as sophisticated, still won't admit that, scientifically, the fusing of chromosomes of sperm and ovum creates a living *human being* who, if uninterrupted, will be born to grow up. The science is settled; "pro-choice" people pretend otherwise. Can they refocus attention from their little "selfies" to some ultrasound visuals of a little beating heart?

What's the explanation for Fundamentalists' earlier support of abortion? Racism! Much as they don't want to be reminded and much as folks can have had their fill of all the overdone talk of racism today, conditioned racism in Criswell and other Southern whites buttressed their early support for abortion. Disproportionate numbers of unborn black babies were being aborted in Margaret Sanger's Negro Project, begun in the South in 1939. A founder of Planned Parenthood, Sanger herself, cautioned in 1932: "Although abortion may be resorted to in order to save the life of the mother, the practice of it merely for limitation of offspring is dangerous and vicious." She called it, "the most uncivilized weapon that [women] have to use if they will not submit to having children every year or every year and a half". Planned Parenthood tries to forget what she said.

Balmer explains that the 1976 IRS rescinding of BJU's tax-exempt status over the school's doing so little to reform its racial policies, was, "for many evangelical leaders, ... the final straw. As Elmer L. Rumminger, longtime administrator at Bob Jones University, told me in an interview, the IRS actions against his school 'alerted the Christian school community about what could happen with government interference' in the affairs of evangelical institutions. 'That was really the major issue that got us all involved'."

Christians' complaints that they'd no longer be allowed to discriminate, as Christians, on the basis of *race* are similar to Christians' complaints that they'll no longer be allowed to discriminate, as Christians, on the basis of *sexual orientation*. Christians today try to argue that the two controversies are not similar. Yet they argue just as their elders did, citing Bible verses, either in ignorance or as excuses. Meanwhile, as in the past, *other* Christians interpret the cited Bible verses very differently. Moreover, nobody now reads the previously cited Bible verses as supporters of slavery and segregation did back then.

Today, racist reasons for the Religious Right's start are embarrassing to conservative Christians. Yet obviously, they were embarrassing right from the start, else why all the rationalizing and cover-ups. Will underlying reasons for evangelicals' antigay agendas be an embarrassment in the future? There's already some embarrassment, else why all the rationalized readings *into* a few poorly deciphered and long overlooked verses, taken out of historical context, and turned into *the central, deal-breaking* biblical, theological and pastoral issue in evangelicalism today? It's all the more suspicious in view of the neglect of *clear biblical commands* on many other matters, not to mention the overarching Good News of God's amazing grace in the law-free Gospel and Jesus' summary of all the Law and Prophets in *love!*

Unlike 18th and 19th century evangelical agencies that were out in front, leading the anti-slave trade and abolitionist movements, *Christianity Today*, *World* magazine and much of the rest of today's evangelical establishment, repeat the "traditionalist" habits on social issues when it comes to extending to the *latest* of "the least", to these still objectionably "different", what's been reserved for only *one's self* or *one's own*.

Again, discrimination is spun out of Bible verses, pious appeals to "tradition" and even

to some version of so-called “natural law”. In the old days of racism, according to historian Clarence E. Walker, “free black people were ‘matter out of place’ [and] subversive of a *natural order* in which black people were to remain forever subordinate or unfree.” Nowadays, same-sex couples are called “unnatural”, “against Nature”, because they, (like many heterosexual couples?) do not, cannot and will not reproduce.

Nonetheless, we’ll probably not have to wait as long as we did in the case of resistance to abolition and *racial* integration. After all, unlike those days, folks today are finding that the “different” are their kin who grow up in their own families. And *that* can make a *difference*, though, for Christians, love and empathy, shouldn’t have to depend on that.

“Traditional” and “Biblical” Marriage?

Amy Plantinga Pauw points out that, “Both theologically and practically, marriage has always been a work in progress for Christians.” This Jonathan Edwards scholar and theological historian from the venerable Christian Reformed family of scholars explains: “There is no single, unchanging biblical view of marriage. This is clear as soon as we start reading the Bible.” So, how do “Bible-believing”, Bible-reading evangelicals so easily miss this? “Our theological problems”, as the Reformed theologian John Frame notes in general, “usually arise from our failure to note what is obvious.” But, it’s difficult to note what’s obvious when we come to the text expecting something else.

Ignoring biblical and historical scholars’ research on “traditional” marriage, not to mention rushing over what even a layperson can see in the text, two weeks before the Supreme Court decision on marriage, Galli editorialized under the headline: “Breaking News: 2 Billion Christians Believe in Traditional Marriage. And So Do We”.

But what “traditional marriage” does he have in mind? No doubt it’s a selective swath of 20th-century American marriage. It’s not “traditional marriage” in the ancient world, biblical or otherwise. It’s not the “traditional marriage” in the Third World today. He tells the “alarmed” that billions of Christians agree with him. But what’s “traditional” for millions of these “Christians”? Millions live in Third World cultures of syncretism that he, no doubt, doesn’t have in mind. Many others are divorced and remarried, many are having adulterous affairs (as the Ashley Madison hacking revealed), others – even married evangelical preachers – say they’re addicted to Internet porn, others are physically abusing a spouse or sexually abusing their kids, others are in lonely, sexless marriages as are those who’ve been forced into mixed-orientation marriages by their Fundamentalist preachers. Yet many of these people voice their “Christian” opposition to *same-sex* marriage.

Throughout most of world history, there was not even a *concept* of *same-sex* marriage, certainly no *same-sex marriages* in those *male*-dominated, *female*-subjugated cultures and no *peer* marriage of any kind. There was no sense of homosexual *orientation* either.

But today’s appeals to “traditional biblical marriage” in order to denounce marriage for same-sex couples could also be used to denounce today’s *heterosexual* marriages of *spousal equality*. That’s not traditional. There was no *spousal equality* in biblical era marriage. All ancient sexuality involved assertions and demonstrations of superiority and power on the part of one over the other, whether *male* over female, *husband* over wife or wives, *free* over slave, *victor* over vanquished, *invader* over invaded, *native* over

sojourner, etc. The *powerful* one was *always* the *superior male* and “the other” was *always* a *female* or an *inferior male*. That’s the *traditional*!

In ancient society or, indeed, even in today’s Islamic culture’s continuing assumptions from the desert culture of the 7th-century, *gender inequality* is taken for granted. Mutuality between the genders is missing, and husbands are privileged to force their will on their wife or wives, even with violence.

What’s also missing in “traditional marriage” among the ancients and in much of Third World culture today is what’s experienced these days as *romantic love* in the post-medieval and modern West.

Biblical era marriages were not *romantic*, a phenomenon then still a millennium away. There was no dating. Biblical era marriages were *arranged* by parents for *economic* and *political* advantage and for the sexual pleasure of the *husband*. Wives were available beginning between 11 and 13 years of age. In *Christianity Today*’s era in America, the lowest age-of-consent ranges from 16 to 18. Below that, it’s a crime. In the biblical world, wives were chattel. Husbands owned them as *theirs*, as they owned *their* offspring, *their* slaves, *their* cattle and all *their* other material goods. This is evident even in the *male* perspective of the 9th Commandment: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife nor your neighbor’s house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything else that is your neighbor’s property.” (Deut 5:21)

Wealthier husbands had multiple wives and/or concubines as Israel’s patriarchs and kings did. Since bloodlines were so important, if a husband died before having offspring, his brother was obliged to have sex with the widow in order to produce offspring for the sake of the dead brother.

Christians are enmeshed in today’s taken-for-granted Western social and cultural environment and, consequently, they’re caught up in its almost inescapable expectations and experience. Naively, they read back into ancient texts such as the Song of Solomon and other parts of the Bible, a *romantic love* that, as C. S. Lewis pointed out in 1936 in his, *The Allegory of Love*, was clearly *unknown* and *never experienced* prior to its coming into existence through circumstances and the social construction of “courtly love” during the Middle Ages. Medieval historian Norman Cantor, in his important work, *Inventing the Middle Ages*, says Lewis’, *Allegory of Love*, along with Lewis’, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, his *magnum opus*, “rocked the transatlantic Anglophone world of medieval studies”. He said Lewis had “an incalculable effect” on shaping understanding on this.

So, it’s dishonest, it’s self-deluding, to smuggle our own familiar “falling in love” phenomenon into ancient days. The Song of Solomon focuses on that era’s notions of *physical beauty*, *not on romance* as we now think of it and experience it with a peer partner. And this is just one of several ways that both antigay and pro-gay apologists misread the history of sexuality through personal experience and today’s ideological agendas.

Middle Eastern Islamists are incomprehensible to Western secular “progressives” who think they’d be up for democracy, for example. So, too, are the Middle Ages incomprehensible to Moderns. Even the Middle West is incomprehensible to self-styled elitists on East and West Coasts. It’s difficult, if not impossible, to identify with the everyday assumptions and experiences of folks in even our own early or mid-20th-century. How then are we to identify with or experience what was taken for granted in

the 10th - or 5th - or 1st -centuries or in the eras BC and on the other side of the globe? What globe?

We look at the moon and stars and don't see what the ancients assumed they saw. We anticipate a trip of 1,000 miles with very different thoughts of time, effort and calculated dangers. We have expectations for civil liberties that never crossed their minds. We'd be appalled by the everyday stench with which they were totally accustomed. We'd dread the dietary monotony and the scarcity of food and water.

A parody of Galli's specious scenario against same-sex marriage could run like this: Scanning recent church history, you'll have a hard time turning up any Christian who'd support marriages arranged by parents for strictly financial advantage, marriages for which there was no prior dating and no experience of "falling in love" with each other and in which the husband owned his 11 to 13-year-old wife or wives along with his real estate and other material possessions and where, if he died without children, his brother would be obliged to impregnate the widow for the sake of that dead brother.

But *such* was *traditional* marriage long before the "traditions" that Christians have in mind nowadays. Actually, much of our day's sense of "traditional" marriage dates from the 20th or not much earlier than the 19th century. Our assumptions and expectations were not those of our great-grandparents, as ours weren't theirs – never mind going all the way back to the folks in the ancient world of the Bible.

Evangelical: What It Is, What It Isn't and How it Matters

Some twenty years after Christ appeared to Paul, persecutor of Jewish believers in Christ as he headed to Damascus to persecute more of them, the *now-apostle* of Christ was writing to fellow Jews at Rome, citing the prophet Ezekiel and chastising them for their obsession with a *traditional* torturing of Hebrew Scriptures. He told them: "God's name is blasphemed among the *goyim* because of you." (Rom 2:23f; cf. Ezek 36:20ff) Today, God's name is blasphemed among the *gayim* because of *tradition-obsessed*, judgmental and self-righteous "evangelicals".

Today, Jesus' followers are failing to remember that Jesus summed up the whole Law and Prophets in *one word*, as it were: the loving of God with all one's heart, all one's soul, and – Jesus added – with all one's *mind*, and the loving of one's neighbor as one loves oneself. (Matt 22:37ff; cf. Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18) Today, it's not "the offense of the *cross*" (Gal 5:11) that's turning people away from Christ. Before they ever even get to hear anything about the truly Good News of Christ's cross, they've been turned off by evangelicals' judgmental self-righteousness and what they see as a lack of love and empathy for people with same-sex attraction.

Christianity Today is the flagship of *evangelical* periodicals. Since the intrusion of the Religious Right into the latter 20th-century, the term "evangelical" has meant *bad news* to many people within and outside evangelical circles. But, "evangelical", as the National Association of Evangelicals correctly notes, "comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning 'good news'." According to the NAE, *evangelical* faith properly focuses on "the 'good news' of salvation brought to sinners by Jesus Christ."

Moreover, the NAE observes: "Evangelicals are a vibrant and diverse group, including believers found in many churches, denominations and nations. Our community brings together Reformed, Holiness, Anabaptist, Pentecostal, Charismatic and other traditions.

Our core theological convictions provide unity in the midst of our diversity.” It’s also true that, *within* these divisions of the NAE, *insiders* in *other* NAE divisions are *excluded*. Nonetheless, *some* inside *each* of the member divisions of the NAE do agree with EC, Campolo, Neff, et al. while others in each division don’t.

There are Evangelicals for Social Action, Evangelicals for Life, Evangelicals for Peace, Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding, Evangelicals for Biblical Immigration. There’s the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus, the National Association of Evangelicals, The Evangelical Theological Society. And there are those in each of these and other evangelical organizations who agree with Evangelicals Concerned and there are those who don’t. So it’s at least silly, if not unchristian, for *some* evangelicals to set themselves up as *the* spokespersons for *all* evangelicals or to say that evangelicals such as those in Evangelicals Concerned aren’t *really* evangelicals.

Not a mention of the *evangel*, the Gospel, appears in the late 20th-century’s two-sentence “Doctrinal Basis” of the Evangelical Theological Society. Does that mean ETS isn’t evangelical? No. But, it does reflect the fact that, at *that* time, ETS got distracted with debates over “inerrancy” just as evangelicals today get distracted over debates on gay issues. So the Gospel gets neglected for the sake of a passing fixation.

According to evangelical historian Mark Noll: “Once past a shared commitment to a supernatural gospel, evangelicals are all over the place theologically.” In Noll’s positive review of Phyllis Airhart’s history of the Canadian church scene in *CT’s Books & Culture*, he acknowledges: “Americans are not in the best position to address the merits of ‘liberal evangelicalism’ since we inhabit a religious landscape that has been dominated by strong binaries.” Noll points out that, “In other parts of the English-speaking world, it has been more obvious that the institutionalized evangelical Protestantism that became so important in so many places for so many purposes during the 19th century always defined a spectrum of practices and beliefs. Broadly considered, all evangelicals embrace the four characteristics specified in David Bebbington’s well-known definition: conversion, the Bible, the cross, and activism. But those who can be grouped together as sharing these characteristics have promoted an almost limitless array of specific variations.” He mentions what he says can be called, “social gospel evangelicalism” or an “evangelical social gospel”. Noll concludes: “Might ‘liberal evangelicalism’, in fact, be the most genuinely biblical form of evangelical Christianity?”

F. F. Bruce: “An evangelical is someone who believes in the God who justifies the ungodly. To believe in Him, and nothing more nor less, is to be an evangelical.” Fundamentalist president of Southern Baptist Seminary, Albert Mohler, with church historian D. G. Hart, state: “No single evangelical tradition exists.” Yet, on same-sex marriage and evangelicals, Mohler asserts: “This issue will eventually break relationships: personally, congregationally and institutionally”. And, he certainly seems to believe that it should be such a deal breaker!

Beeson Divinity School’s Gerald Bray, an Anglican, writes: “Evangelical identity has come to embrace such a wide range of theological options.” He notes, “it has been so ever since the 18th century split between John Wesley and George Whitefield, during the very beginnings of what is known as evangelicalism.” Bray says that, “from that day to this, there has never been an evangelical church or even a confession of faith, which all evangelicals can accept as definitive of this movement.” Regent College’s John G. Stackhouse, Jr., an advisory editor for *Christianity Today*, asserts: “Evangelicalism is a

network and tradition of Christians united on a few select convictions. As such, evangelicalism is not essentially committed to this or that ... so long as Christ is glorified, the Bible obeyed, the gospel preached and the kingdom extended.”

It’s clear in these evangelical scholars’ attempts to identify evangelicalism’s *essence* that there’s a *diversity* of emphases as well as *varying* scopes for inclusion. However, the overall sense is that it can be fairly defined by the Gospel’s centrality and not by one side or another in a current culture wars dispute where evangelicals take opposite sides.

Regent’s historian Bruce Hindmarsh writes: “The most widely accepted essentialist definition of evangelicalism [is] a movement of orthodox Protestants who stress conversion, the Bible, the cross, and activism.” He argues that this call to focus on *evangelicalism’s central message of the gospel* is, “worth heeding mid the balkanization of evangelicalism in America and Britain today over issues of gender, sexuality and politics.”

In a *Focus on the Family* interview in 2011, Tim Keller of the PCA warned that “pro-family” conservatives were turning families into *idols*. Lately, however, even he has not been able to duck the distracting “balkanization” over “gender, sexuality and politics.” Under persistent queries from media, Keller is voicing his antigay views more frequently. And this currently distracting “balkanization” looms large at *Christianity Today*, *World* magazine and in other evangelical institutions and agencies.

Progression, Accord, Unity, Diversity, Liberty and Evangelicalism

Progression in revealed religion is a matter of historical record and it’s an affirmed doctrine and expounded expectation – until, of course, it comes up against whatever is a *current* dispute, before that old phenomenon of continuing change has had a chance to work out a *newly settled* viewpoint – at least for now.

Christians certainly don’t use Hebrew texts the same way they were originally read and interpreted and this is reflected in even the term, “*Old Testament*” or, in more politically correct terminology, “*First Testament*”. Fundamentalist Christians, even with dogmatic pride, take biblical *progression* for granted. It’s foundational for Dispensational theology and it frames the system of the *Scofield* Reference Bible. For all practical purposes, whether legitimate or not, many conservative Christians and most liberal Christians neglect the Old Testament. Adventists employ views that were not familiar throughout church history while Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians say they’re receiving newer “revelation” all the time.

Old historical Christian mottos provide a heads-up for theological *progression*. One of these, attributed to Augustine, is: “*In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*,” “in essentials, unity; in uncertain things, liberty; in everything, love”. Another gets to the *root* of things from a time when Reformers were being accused of innovating their way out of ecclesiastically established “traditions”: “*Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*”, “the church reformed, ever being reformed”.

The Puritan John Robinson’s pastoral farewell to Mayflower Pilgrims inspired them as they faced the hard voyage to America: “If God reveal anything to you by any other instrument of His, be as ready to receive it as you were to receive any truth from my ministry, for I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth from His holy word.” Reformed biblical scholar Herman Ridderbos knew that, “The

contents of the Christian message will always appear to have new answers to new questions.” F. F. Bruce understood that, to adhere to the Bible, “is not tantamount to shutting the Holy Spirit up in a book or collection of books. Repeatedly, new movements of the Spirit have been launched by a rediscovery of the living power which resides in the canon of Scripture.” Helmut Thielicke observed: “In the course of history, every age has not had the same problems. Thus the same biblical words are not significant in the same way in every age. Rather, at any given time only a part of the canon bears fruit ‘unto its time’.” A major biographer of Calvin noted: “As his understanding of the Bible broadened and deepened, so the subject matter of the Bible demanded ever new understanding in its interrelations with itself, in its relations with secular philosophy, in its interpretations by previous commentators.” (T. H. L. Parker) Christians need to learn these lessons in every generation, for, in the words of Leon Morris: “There are always risks in living in a new age but there is disaster in trying to live in a past age.”

Didn’t Jesus himself say that he had more to teach his disciples but that they weren’t ready for it? (John 16:12) Evangelical scholars discern that his disciples’ prejudices didn’t allow them to yet delve more deeply into all the wonderful implications of the Good News. (John 15:15) So, Jesus promised that, “When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into full truth.” (John 16:13)

According to J. I. Packer: “The Spirit’s work of illumination and instruction is also progressive, in the sense that those whom the Spirit teaches learn one thing after another. This principle applies not only to the individual but also to the church, within which a ‘progressive orthodoxy’ appears as one doctrinal issue after another is raised and resolved.” But are these, in turn, resolved for all time? Historical theology says they’re not. Westminster Seminary’s Moises Silva avers: “God’s truth remains sure, while our perception of that truth may need to change.” Donald Bloesch reminds us: “The Word of God is not fettered. It leaps and runs and is not even bound to the means of grace – the Bible, the sermon, the sacraments – though we are so bound.”

And Bernard Ramm explains: “Scripture is not the totality of all God has said and done in this world.” Over the centuries, what is understood as Common Grace and General Revelation can add, and often has added, to Christian insight in interpreting the truth of biblical or Special Revelation.

So there’s nothing heretical as such about being on a biblical journey, a theological pilgrimage toward greater maturity. Evangelical theologian and biblical scholar Clark Pinnock knew what that was like as he himself often changed his point of view as he grew in grace. He said it well: “Feeling our way toward the truth is the nature of theological work even with the help of Scripture, tradition and community A pilgrimage, therefore, far from being unusual or slightly dishonorable, is what we would expect theologians who are properly aware of their limitations, to experience.” When Pinnock died, *Christianity Today* said of him: “He was reputed to study carefully, think precisely, argue forcefully, and shift his positions willingly if he discovered a more fruitful pathway of understanding”.

There are Bible verses that, for centuries, were said to support slavery. These verses are still in the Bible but they’re no longer applied as they were. The same is true of interpretations of proof-texts against racial integration and mixed-race marriage. They were once such central obsessions, asserted so dogmatically and in the name of biblical fidelity, that they were used to rationalize schism and even war. Multitudes of Christians

lived their entire Christian lives believing that the Bible supported slavery and segregation of the races and opposed abolition and racial integration. Today, nobody uses the Bible to defend those once common views of even the relatively recent past.

Noll points out that proslavery arguments had *explicit* Bible verses on slavery to which appeal was made but that the antislavery arguments had to depend on separating “the Bible’s antislavery ‘spirit’ from its proslavery ‘letter’”. He says, the argument for the abolition of slavery “was not only a minority position; it was also widely perceived as a theologically dangerous position.”

Today’s debate over homosexuality is a rerun of the same sort of dispute. And the same sort of suspicions and accusations of infidelity are raised against those who would call for change on the basis of the “spirit”, if you will, as over against the “letter”, at least as read by some. Antigay preachers recite their selected “clobber” verses and claim that these ancient words address our homosexual phenomena today. They think that that’s all that needs to be done to support their antigay agenda. But those who affirm today’s same-sex couples understand these “clobber”, or rather, *clobbered* texts, in their historical and cultural contexts and make serious appeal to the overarching “spirit” of scripture – just as those abolitionists had to do. And, as before, antigay Christians pose as “traditionalists” calling those who affirm gays, “liberals”, heretical disregards of scripture. They do this with apparently no awareness that they’re duplicating destructive movements that played out in previous eras in other disputes that are no longer disputed.

From earliest times, Christians have not seen eye-to-eye on many matters. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, went to great length to discuss the difference between what’s crucial and what’s not crucial, though easily and often turned into something “crucial”. Such errors have done damage to Christians as well as to the witness of the Gospel. (Rom 14)

Nonetheless, Paul told Galatians that he confronted Peter, who was clearly wrong in backing off from his eating with Gentiles as soon as some traditionalist critics came snooping around. Peter feared their criticism. (Gal 2:11f) Then, as now, there’s the law-free Gospel that’s always at stake and never to be compromised. There were and are other matters that are not crucial, matters of indifference that yet, can be, and have been, made stumbling blocks of divisiveness. Over the centuries, minor matters have been made to matter too much. And in such cases, the Gospel is then violated.

In *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity & Diversity* (IVP), Baylor’s Roger E. Olson observes: “Too many Christians identify ‘authentic Christian belief’ with one narrow slice of Christian thought. Part of the process of Christian maturation is recognizing legitimate diversity and even disagreement within larger unity and agreement.” He affirms: “*Beliefs matter but not all beliefs matter equally.*” He notes, “the Christological touchstone. Jesus Christ is the heart of the whole matter: ‘What think ye of Christ?’ ” (Cf. Matt 22:42) This touchstone of “The Great Tradition [is] Christ and the gospel of free salvation through his death and resurrection.” This historical perspective challenges all who make the “big deal” be all about “gay” issues, however understood, and whether from the Left or from the Right.

“Big deal” sins in mid-20th-century Fundamentalism were playing cards, smoking, drinking and going to movies and dances, beards on Bible College boys and pants on Bible College girls. These were “shippable” offences. Such trifles had lasting, though unintended, consequences when the victims of such nonsense left the Faith they’d never even heard the truth about.

In 2000, Blair lectured on homosexuality at Gordon College. On his way into the auditorium where he was to speak, he saw a big poster advertising an upcoming Gordon College “Dance ‘Till You Drop” social event. During his talk, he said that, in Gordon College’s earlier days, there’d have been no dance for even a few minutes let alone “‘till you drop”. Times change. And, evidently, so does what passes for “evangelical”.

In his *Reforming Fundamentalism*, evangelical historian George Marsden recalls that, in 1960, multimillionaire evangelical philanthropist C. Davis Weyerhaeuser resigned as a trustee at Moody Bible Institute because, as Weyerhaeuser put it to the president of MBI (as well as to V. Raymond Edman, president of Wheaton), “I became increasingly aware that the average man in the street possesses an extremely distorted notion of what Christianity is because of fundamentalism’s emphasis on certain specific don’ts, its divisiveness and the tragic lack of manifest Christian love.” The Religious Right and its aftermath – especially in reference to issues of homosexuality – has had the same sort of misleading and negative effect on the public these days.

Evangelicals are Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, Baptists, Lutherans, Adventists, Disciples, Mennonites, Anglicans, Independent Bible Believers, et al. But they’re divided not only denominationally, but within denominational groups – with split after split resulting in some rather oxymoronic identities. The *United Free Will* Baptists? The *Cooperative* Baptist Fellowship that *split* from the Southern Baptist Convention?

They all read the same Bible. But their different *interpretations* of the one Bible prevent them from *ordaining* each other and prevent them from even “transferring letters” from one assembly to another. What with all the insistence on everyone’s dotting every *i* in order to be allowed to be a member and remain in good standing in “our” congregation, while over in that other congregation down the street it’s a matter of crossing every *t* in order to be allowed to be a member and remain in good standing, what’s going to be the shock when, not only the dotters of every *i* but the crossers of every *t* will be standing together, as in John’s vision? He looked and, “Look! A great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands!” (Rev 7:9)

Still, *Christianity Today*, even under the guise of “beautiful orthodoxy”, keeps beating the drums against Christians who happen to be same-sex attracted and therefore are in lovingly committed same-sex unions. Well, at least, Galli’s not as crass in *his* antigay efforts as was his predecessor at *CT* – the militant Fundamentalist inerrancy enthusiast Harold Lindsell!

Here’s the story on that. The cover feature of *CT*’s November 22, 1985 issue was, “Why same-sex partnerships are not a Christian option”. The editors chose to reprint a chapter on homosexuality from a recent book that John Stott wrote on a range of social issues (e.g., race, unemployment, divorce, etc.). At that time, 30 years ago now, a *CT*-Gallup Poll found that, already, 19 percent of evangelicals did *not* think that, “homosexuality is wrong”. *CT* founder, Billy Graham, said it was no more sinful than jealousy and Stott himself said, “pride and hypocrisy are surely worse”. But to *hypocrisy*, only *Gay Pride* was worse.

Stott admitted that Bible verses used against homosexuals may only “appear to refer” to homosexuality. He wrote: “It can be (and has been) argued that the Pauline condemnations are not relevant to homosexual adults who are both consenting and

committed to one another.” So, Stott goes to the *creation* narratives. But, these texts aren’t even mentioned by, for example, Hebrew Christian Paul Feinberg in his, “Homosexuality and the Bible”, published at that same time in Jerry Falwell’s *Fundamentalist Journal*. And *FJ* editor and Moral Majority leader, Ed Dobson, said we can’t “go back to the Garden of Eden” for instructions while we’re “still living in a sinful world.” (One of Dobson’s own sons would come out as a gay Christian in 2013.)

The *CT* selection seemed fixated on *genitalia*, so Blair wrote in his *EC Review* (Winter 1986) that, just as with committed heterosexual couples, committed same-sex couples’ most common connection is *non-genital*, “(e.g., a warm smile at breakfast, sharing household chores, nursing each other through illness).”

Blair’s review prompted Lindsell, himself, to fixate on *genitalia*. As *CT*’s editor emeritus, as his stationery identified him, Lindsell wrote to Blair on February 22, 1986. He said: “My question to you, wholly apart from such things a [sic] ‘warm smile over the breakfast table’, [sic] ‘sharing household chores’, and ‘nursing one another [sic] through illness’, is this: With how many men have you had oral and/or anal sex across the years.” [sic]

Well, wholly apart from the fact that research indicates that a third of gay men do *not* engage in anal sex though nearly *half* of straight men do, Lindsell’s query seemed just a bit off base. He informed Blair that he himself had *never* had sex with anyone but his wife. But he didn’t say what, if any, “oral and/or anal sex [they’d] had across the years.”

Though Lindsell’s effort to discredit his opponent was vulgar, a less unrefined but no less irrational way to try to gain the same sort of “advantage” is to discount a same-sex affirming argument by pointing out that a same-sex attracted person makes it. But how, then, would the antigay *heterosexuals* protect themselves from the same charge of bias?

Given Lindsell’s impertinent inquiry of one whom he’d never met, it’s not surprising that his approach to another with whom he disagreed, but had daily contact, the brilliant, but reserved and sadly depressed, E. J. Carnell, Fuller’s president, caused Carnell to feel Lindsell as a “lump in the stomach” throughout his presidency.

Carnell’s inaugural address had emphasized *the primacy of the law of love* and that biblical note only reinforced Lindsell’s bellicose suspicions that Carnell was a “liberal”. But, to the contrary, Regent College theologian John G. Stackhouse, Jr. observes: “Any theology or mission that does not ‘love your neighbor as you love yourself’ is offering a truncated and therefore heretical gospel.”

“Ex-gay” Frauds and Failures, and Evangelical Credulity and Culpability

In 1963, in his little book, *The Homosexual Condition*, Christian psychiatrist Ernest White concluded on the basis of his clinical experience with fifty homosexuals in the UK: “If anyone believes that the experience of [Christian] conversion will take away homosexual desires and lead to a normal attraction toward the opposite sex, then he is mistaken. ... I have met no single case of a man being set free from them by spiritual measures.”

White went on to lament that so many Christians have “rejected psychological teaching lock, stock and barrel. Such an attitude is unfortunate because”, as White pointed out, “insofar as truth has been discovered by psychological investigation, such people are blinding themselves to an important aspect of truth.” White’s observation explains much

of the evangelical blindness to what has been learned in psychological research into homosexuality and why so many evangelicals have been susceptible to the faulty claims of the “ex-gay” movement.

Evangelical psychologist William T. Kirwan, in his 1984 book, *Biblical Concepts of Christian Counseling* (Baker), commends White’s lamenting Christians’ rejection of psychology. But Kirwan himself is blind to the psychological research on homosexuality and deals in discredited Freudian notions while promising, against White’s findings and mounting evidence of that decade’s “ex-gay” frauds and failures, that, “some Christian psychologists are finding that certain homosexuals, when motivated by Christian convictions and thoroughly committed to a therapy program, are able to change their orientation to heterosexual.” But Kirwan’s notions were out of synch with psychological and psychiatric views of that day and a decade after the *Diagnostic and Statistical* revision on homosexuality.

At the time, New York psychiatrist Lawrence J. Hatterer “probably treated more homosexuals than any other American psychiatrist”, according to psychiatrist Lionel Ovesey. Ovesey, Irving Bieber and Charles Socarides were then the major advocates of therapy to reverse homosexuality. Blair debated Socarides, who, in 1992, co-founded the “reparative therapy” NARTH network while his son became an advocate for gay rights.

In 1970, Hatterer wrote *Changing Homosexuality in the Male*. In spite of the title, he stated bluntly: “As far as the cure of fixed homosexuality is concerned, it is unrealistic to try to eradicate the homosexual’s desires for members of his own sex”. And, he added, it’s “cruel for a parent and a therapist to attempt to change a person who is strongly identified as homosexual.” Hatterer referred clients to Blair, with whom he appeared on panels at mental health conferences.

George Gallup, Jr., himself an evangelical, declared 1976 as “The Year of the Evangelical” and secular media began to notice a phenomenon not before seen on their radar screens. In the “born again” Jimmy Carter’s identification as “evangelical” and the beginning stages of the Religious Right, unfortunately linked with “evangelical”, at least a version of “evangelicalism” came to the forefront of secular America’s awareness.

In February 1976, at the same National Association of Evangelicals convention during which EC was publicly launched after having been founded in 1975, NAE gave space to an early, “ex-gay” effort led by Guy Charles. It was called, “Liberation in Jesus Christ”. He had a booth at the convention’s Shoreham Hotel. Meanwhile, EC held meetings at the Sheraton Hotel across the street in order to protect the privacy of interested individuals.

In that same year, evangelical psychologist Gary R. Collins wrote *The Secrets of Our Sexuality* (Word). Guy Charles wrote the chapter on homosexuality – with no credentials other than his claim to be an “ex-gay” and his running an “ex-gay” program. Claiming that God had taken away “the lusts, the desires, the fantasies and the act”, Charles was promoted as proof of homosexual healing in *Christianity Today*, *Christian Life*, Logos International’s *National Courier* and other evangelical media.

On May 19, 1976, Blair participated in a round-table debate with Charles and his advocate, B. Sam Hart of Philadelphia’s Grand Old Gospel Fellowship, on Barry Farber’s nationally heard WOR radio program. Charles again testified that he was now totally free of all homosexuality and he angrily resented any suggestion that he wasn’t fully “delivered”.

The next year, after some young men accused Charles of engaging in so-called “David and Jonathan” sex with them, his sponsor, Truro Episcopal Church, a Charismatic congregation in Fairfax, Virginia, announced his resignation “for personal reasons.” He then moved to Chicago as an openly gay man.

Guy Charles’ program was one of the first in four decades of such claims and promises (albeit with litanies of doubletalk and obfuscation), sexual abuse of “ex-gay” seekers by “ex-gay” leaders, disillusionment, clients’ loss of Christian faith and suicides. Despite Exodus International’s closing, with profound apologies, in 2013, the Religious Right, *World* magazine, *Christianity Today* and other evangelicals still push “ex-gay” promises and so-called “reparative” therapy. They make no apologies for doing so, while even *National Review* notes bluntly: “There is a good deal of quackery in ‘reparative therapy’” and “conversion therapy sometimes ends in tragedy”.

Among many other troubled “ex-gay” leaders was Colin Cook at the SDA-sponsored Quest Center in Reading, Pennsylvania. Blair debated Cook at the Anabaptist Mennonite Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. Gordon-Conwell Seminary’s Richard Lovelace, author of *Homosexuality and the Church* (Revell) wrote that, for “the person who wants to be free” from homosexuality, Colin Cook’s “ex-gay” approach is, “an authentic theological masterpiece ... a jewel ... a theological pearl ... a silver bullet against evil”, and Lovelace pronounced, “the best book available for those whose sin is homosexual”.

In his “Homosexuals Anonymous” program, Cook said that his clients should “claim the heterosexuality of Jesus” for themselves. But, following complaints that he’d been sexually abusing several young men in his program, SDA officials concluded that 12 out of 14 of them were telling the truth and SDA closed Cook’s Quest and Homosexuals Anonymous. Cook then moved west and set up another “ex-gay” operation in Colorado.

Fortunately, not all “ex-gay” leaders were sex abusers, but several were. Untrained and lonely, themselves, they were unprepared for unsupervised close contact with other vulnerable gay men seeking comfort and understanding in a hostile environment. They deluded themselves into thinking that, by “claiming” victory over homosexuality, they’d achieve it. Seeing no change in their orientation or in those who came for change, they became depressed and defeated. Still, the preachers who promoted them told them that the only alternative to claiming victory over homosexuality was landing in the fires of Hell forever. Meanwhile, Anita Bryant had cited Lindsell’s sarcastic remark against Christians who accept their homosexuality: “Hell will be partially populated by ‘caring, honest, whole persons’ who are proud they are gay.”

In the late ‘70s, a young man known as “Jack”, was so tormented by his not being able to become “ex-gay” that he killed himself. He trusted that God loved him and knew how hard he’d prayed and how hard he’d tried. But he didn’t change, so he couldn’t see his way to go on. He left a note that said, in part: “It is this constant failure that has made me make the decision to terminate my life here on earth. I do this with the complete understanding that life is not mine to take. ... I must face my Lord with the sin of murder. [But] I believe that Jesus died and paid the price for that sin too. I know that I shall have everlasting life with Him by departing this world now, no matter how much I love it, my friends, my family. If I remain it could possibly allow the devil the opportunity to lead me away from the Lord. I love life, but my love for the Lord is so much greater, the choice is simple.”

Evangelical psychiatrist, J. Ernest Runions of Carey Hall and the University of British Columbia, wrote a letter to *Christianity Today* in the fall of 1977. He said: "As a theological and medical educator, as a pastor, and as a consulting psychiatrist, I know of few subjects as perplexing or troublesome in counseling, church work, family life, or institutional development as homosexuality." He faulted the *CT* editors for superficial thinking on homosexuality and for promoting promises of a "cure." He was firm: "Christian experience [does not] alter the condition." He said, "it is sad that evangelical writers can show little pastoral sensitivity to the heartache of families and to the agony of those beset by homosexual fears and temptations, or understanding of the relief and integration (with apparent personal benefits) for the person who finally 'comes out.' " But *CT* editors refused to examine their prejudice and presuppositions so as to deal honestly with the accumulating evidence against their hype for change.

Instead *CT* published a 1981 cover story bannered: "Homosexuals CAN Change". It was written by Tom Minnery who would later move to Focus on the Family, where John Paulk would head the "ex-gay" effort, before *and even after* he was exposed inside a gay bar while traveling on behalf of Focus' "ex-gay" program. Paulk finally left the "ex-gay" movement entirely, honestly admitting that neither he nor anyone else ever changed, even though his "change" was hyped in his two books and in a cover story in *Newsweek*. He now says that, as an openly gay man, he has peace he never had before. His sons say they've never been happier with their dad who's now, no longer angry and uptight.

The so-called evidence that "Homosexuals CAN Change" that *CT* and Minnery puffed in 1981 amounted to a forecast of the later demise of the "ex-gay" movement, but they had to ignore the signs. Against the evidence Minnery had before him from Mansell Pattison and Pattison's wife, Minnery insisted: "The fact is, many people are experiencing deliverance from homosexuality. The evidence is too great to deny it".

In his April 1981 review of Minnery's report, Blair wrote: "All the ballyhoo of a cover banner, 'Homosexuals CAN Change', the repeating of the all-capital 'CAN' in the article itself, and the empty assertions, *cannot* obscure the fact that *Christianity Today* offers no validated evidence for the claim.

In EC's *Review*, Winter 1981, Blair already had critiqued the Pattisons' original claims and had reported, as Minnery did not, that according to the Pattisons, "these same healing elements" found in these "ex-gay" testimonies that the Pattisons had in hand, are also present in *other* "folk healing" approaches in "cross-cultural healing methods".

None of these "ex-gay" testimonies were from Pattison's patients. They were supplied by EXIT of Melodyland, an "ex-gay" effort, for Pattison's perusal.

CT reported that eleven men "changed their basic homosexual orientation", "eight of them no longer have homosexual dreams, fantasies, or physical arousal", "All Pattison's subjects were true homosexuals", "Four of Pattison's subjects went from six to zero", "one went from four to zero", etc. These statements are *not* supported by Pattison's report. In fairness to Minnery, his source material contained inconsistencies and contradictions. Pattison reported that only two men, "after change", said they had no intrapsychic homosexuality. The claims of these two anonymous men, reported by the Pattisons on the basis of retrospective data and in the absence of any description of replicable method, are unworthy of the excitement *Christianity Today* tried to generate. Even as presented, it's a "cure" rate of 2 out of some 300 who sought the "ex-gay" way out at EXIT. Moreover, Pattison had stated: "The suppression of overt homosexual

behavior or involvement in heterosexual activity does not constitute a ‘cure’ or change in sexual object choice”. None of this ever added up to *CT*’s false headline (meant, no doubt, as an imperative): “Homosexuals CAN Change” and so, they *should*!

A year later, in April 1982 in Atlanta, at a meeting of the evangelical Christian Association for Psychological Studies, Blair challenged Pattison on his report of these testimonies from EXIT. Pattison tried to minimize the significance of their continuing homosexuality. He quipped: “Who doesn’t have homosexual fantasies, especially after a fight with his wife?!” His attempt at humor did nothing to answer serious questions about his so-called “study”, his entirely inadequate method of merely passing on a couple of “testimonies” methodology, and the predictable misuse of his report by anti-gay propagandists. *CT* and other antigay sources were simply trading on the face validity of his being a psychiatrist. He did grant, at the CAPS meeting, that he wouldn’t “be surprised if some [of them] return to homosexual *lifestyles*”. His use of the term “lifestyles” betrayed the fact that he did not see these “changes” as changes in sexual orientation. He left many of these conservative mental health professionals shaking their heads and rolling their eyes.

While Pattison and Blair were *debating* each other, Michael Bussee and Gary Cooper, were *dating* each other. They, along with Jim Kasper, also a soon-to-be former “ex-gay”, were co-founders of EXIT. Bussee and Cooper were lovingly committed partners until Cooper died. They spoke out against years of “ex-gay” failures and keynoted an EC conference in 1990.

Jim Daly, head of Focus on the Family, also refuses to face facts – even long after Focus’ nationally headlined “ex-gay” scandal over John Paulk’s public outing at a gay bar in 2000. Daly says that, in spite of the closing down of the Exodus International network of “ex-gay” ministries, “there are numerous Christian ministries that continue to provide excellent help to those struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction.” His weasel words, “excellent help”, expose a shrinking from prior promises. Still, it’s no more about a *real change* of homosexual orientation than was the case of Focus’ Paulk’s confusion in his 1998 book, *Not Afraid to Change: The Remarkable Story of How One Man Overcame Homosexuality* (Wine) or in his 1999 book, *Love Won Out*, published by Bethany House and by Focus, or in his celebrated *Newsweek* cover story.

Paulk’s much publicized “heterosexual” marriage proved to be no evidence of any sexual orientation change. Yet for decades, antigay evangelicals have pushed same-sex attracted Christians into mixed-orientation marriages. Aside from the fact that such marriages have nothing to do with antigay evangelicals’ notion of “traditional marriage”, they’re doomed from the start. They result in loneliness for both of the spouses, tension and consequences that aren’t good for anyone including the kids. They lead, predictably, to high rates of separation and divorce.

In 2011, Psychologist Mark Yarhouse of Pat Robertson’s Regent University reported that, after an average of 16 years in mixed-orientation marriages, the same-sex oriented spouse is still same-sex oriented. On the basis of self-reports from these couples, there’s no shift toward heterosexual attraction on the part of the same-sex oriented spouse, even though there’s some participation in sex acts within the marriage.

But, when asked about frequency of sexual relations within these orientation-discordant marriages, the *same-sex* oriented spouses reported a figure *twice* as high as that reported by the *heterosexual* spouses, indicating the understandable disparity in interest levels.

Obviously the *heterosexual* mate who was attracted to the *opposite gendered* mate missed what the *same-sex attracted* mate did not look forward to having to do. These findings, involved 106 husbands and 161 wives. The study, “Characteristics of Mixed Orientation Couples”, was published in *Edification*, a journal of the evangelical Society for Christian Psychology.

Alan Chambers entered the “ex-gay” movement in 1991 when he was 19 years old and believed that his same-sex attraction was wrong. He wanted to be rid of it. All through his struggling to change, his same-sex attraction never changed. In 2006, he began to admit to himself that, as with the others he knew all around him at Exodus, they not only were not changing, they never would change. But by then, he was the head of Exodus and, as such, he was expected to fervently testify that the promised change was happening.

At the end of 2011, the antigay, “ex-gay”-promoting, *World* magazine named Chambers, *World’s* “Daniel of the Year”, i.e., “one Christian from the millions around the world who have put their faith in God and gained the strength to stand up against ungodly trends”. He was heralded in this annual cover article. But very shortly thereafter, he began to have the courage of a *real* Daniel against the truly “ungodly trends” of the Religious Right’s self-righteous masquerade. He began to admit publicly that his same-sex attraction had never changed and neither had anybody’s, and, in early 2013, he led the closing down of Exodus – with painful apologies for all the harm done.

In June, 2013, on CNN, he replied to Anderson Cooper’s question as to whether or not he now believed homosexual orientation *can* be changed: “No, I don’t.”

But, blindsided by their willed blindness, and embarrassed so soon after anointing Chambers as their “Daniel of the Year”, the editors at *World* played to their Right-wing readers. They twisted Chambers’ unambiguous apology and refutation of “reparative therapy” into an example of the very spin for which Chambers apologized. *World* spun it this way: “Chambers still believes that change is possible for homosexuals, but he says he’s realistic about the process: It’s usually a lifelong struggle.”

In announcing its 2014 “Daniel of the Year”, *World* gave “updates from some past Daniels of the Year”. “Some” included *every* “Daniel” through 2010. Why stop with 2010? Chambers was “Daniel” 2011 and *World* is still in *denial* over that Daniel’s honesty and courage.

So, *World* now pushes another man’s claim of “change”. *World* runs full-page ads with this teaser: “Can someone who identifies as homosexual change?” Notice that sneaky term, “identifies”. This avoids an inconvenient reference to *sexual orientation*. It’s not about the involuntary sexual attraction for someone of the same gender. It’s not even a claim, at least explicitly, of going from *homosexual orientation* to *heterosexual orientation*. Of course, that’s what’s to be inferred somehow. This new “ex-gay” icon used to *identify* “as a homosexual”; now he *identifies* as “a ‘Son of the Father’.” That’s as logical as saying: I used to identify as a homosexual, now I identify as a Hoosier. He says he’s been “freed to be who my Father says I am. He calls me changed. I am changed!” Simple as that! What higher endorsement of “change” could be claimed than from “The Father”? The Name of the Lord is thus abused to endorse yet another “bait and switch”, a mere rebranding. It’s not a recovery; it’s a cover-up. But that’s just what the old “ex-gays” did. They were coached into repeating over and over, no matter what they *felt*, “I’ve been changed!”

It should be noted that, if one really believes that it's wrong to engage in same-sex relationship, that one should not do so. It's spiritually and psychologically unwise to violate one's conscience. But commitment to celibacy is not the same thing as trying to rid oneself of homosexual orientation. Celibacy, though difficult – and, from what the Bible indicates, is a gift – is at least manageable. With a more mature sense of Christian liberty, one can even move on from celibacy to a committed same-sex relationship – but not before one has genuinely revised one's belief that such relationship is wrong.

In other full-page ads, *World* is pushing the testimony of a formerly lesbian-identified women's studies professor from the secular academic world of political lesbianism. She now identifies as an evangelical Christian and is married to a man who's a minister. Along with the notions of some Queer activists from her days in women's studies, she, too, still shuns the concept of *sexual orientation*. In fact, she tries to *argue* against it.

Now, there is, of course, some fluidity of sexual orientation, attraction and experience in some females that's not really typical of the sexual orientation, attraction and experience of males. So, it's not strange that, speaking from her own experience, she says: "People who identify as heterosexual and homosexual have much to lose." But, her pushing back on this is not necessary and it is misleading. Honest acknowledgment of one's *experienced* and *involuntary* sexual attraction, to whomever, doesn't mean that that attraction, as such, *defines everything else* about the person. And the vast majority of folks, whether they identify or experience themselves as straight or gay, don't do that. They know they're *more* than that. But they also know that their own good and unavoidable awareness of themselves *includes* that.

One former lesbian that both the Right and the Left try to ignore or explain away from within their disparate ideologies, is perhaps the *most prominent* woman among all "ex-lesbians": Chirlane McCray, wife of New York's ultra-Left Mayor Bill de Blasio. In 1979, McCray wrote, "I Am A Lesbian", for an essay in *Essence* magazine. No doubt the "ex-gay"-advocating Religious Right refuses to showcase her because her politics doesn't fit its narrative and the "ex-gay"-denouncing Left refuses to showcase her because her politics doesn't fit its narrative. So much for straightforward reporting by either the Right or the Left!

Another group that's trying to pick up the pieces of the failed "ex-gay" fiasco is calling itself, "People Can Change". Not surprisingly, it explicitly does *not* define *change* as a change in one's *sexual orientation*. "People Can Change" defines *change* as, "any degree of change toward greater peace, satisfaction and fulfillment, and less shame, depression and darkness", i.e., *change in anything but the sexual orientation change for which folks would turn to People Can Change*. This may be, superficially, a tad less double-talking than the now defunct "ex-gay" movement's old promises but it's still that same old "bait and switch" routine. People with unwanted same-sex attraction are looking to have their unwanted same-sex attraction changed. That's what they've always been looking for. And that's what they've never found.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Detroit, Allen Vigneron, tries to do his own twist on the Exodus theme. In his closing homily at a 2015 antigay conference, he said that *splitting up a same-sex couple* is comparable to Moses leading Jews out of Egypt. Does that accomplish anything but what AA calls "pulling a geographical"?

Southern Baptist Al Mohler, in obligatory denial over all the "ex-gay" failures and Exodus International's finally shutting down with deep apologies for all the harm that

was done, issued this statement: “The greatest tragedy is that persons experiencing same-sex attractions or involved in same-sex sexuality will be further confused by the capitulation of Exodus International.” No. The confusion preceded and continued for decades because Exodus continued to mislead. The closing clarified and brings some closure to what was ill conceived all along.

Sadly, as with all the eventual apologies for slavery and for racial segregation policies of the past, today’s apologies from former leaders of the “ex-gay” movement and from their evangelical enablers don’t undo the damage done in the past. And, sadly, they don’t stop the determined deniers from doing still more damage.

At some point in probably the not too distant future, many more if not most evangelical Christians will be apologizing for the earlier damage done to gay men and lesbians, and for the related damage done Christian liberty and to the law-free Gospel of Christ. But again, that will not undo the damage that was done. Once more, in the long history of the church’s sorrow over having burned alive rival Christians, having endorsed the slave trade and slavery itself, having championed racial segregation and fought against interracial marriage, etc., and more lately, having oppressed same-sex attracted persons, it will be “too little, too late” for all of the victims who lived and died before the Christians came to their Christian senses. Once more, too, it will be true that Jesus’ Golden Rule would have proved a much more reliable guide for how to relate to others, how to treat others, than by rummaging around for some Bible verses for confirmation bias rooted in self-righteousness.

Evangelical Support for Persons with Same-Sex Attraction

Perhaps *CT*’s Mark Galli is not even aware of the many evangelical leaders who already have been supportive of same-sex couples for half a century and even longer. During the Religious Right’s reign, fearing negative donor reaction, evangelical administrators tried to stifle all in-house expressions of support for same-sex couples. But they couldn’t and didn’t hide it all. Compassionate evangelicals were not intimidated into mouthing the antigay party line. Still, financial losses and other unwanted consequences are suffered for expressing realistic, loving support for persons of same-sex attraction and for same-sex couples where the party line remains antigay.

Pew Research reports that, from 2001 to 2014, compared with other religious groups, *evangelicals* had the largest percentage of increase in support for same-sex marriage.

Right in the middle of that period, in 2008, two professors at the evangelical Bethel Seminary, David K. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw, wrote *Readings in Christian Ethics* (Baker Academic). They mentioned Evangelicals Concerned, its founder’s evangelical credentials and his belief “that a person can be a committed Christian, acknowledging the lordship of Christ and biblical infallibility, and a practicing homosexual in a loving, monogamous relationship”. They then ask, “Is a monogamous homosexual union permissible for a Christian?” Reflecting on that question, they write: “No responsible Christian endorses casual promiscuous sex between homosexuals any more than between heterosexuals. But Blair and an increasingly vocal minority of Christians believe that a committed partnership between two homosexuals is another matter.” And, in the seven years since they wrote this, many more evangelicals have become increasingly vocal in

endorsing same-sex committed partnerships and even legal marriage for same-sex couples.

Today, homosexuality is no longer a faceless abstract. Evangelicals are getting to know same-sex attracted individuals and couples as co-workers, classmates, neighbors, fellow church members, etc. They're finding that these *persons* are quite different from the *caricatures* they hear about in church. And dear family members are coming out earlier, more frankly, yet having suffered in silence for far too long. It's becoming more and more difficult for evangelicals to dismiss these *loved ones* as "abominations" that simply need to leave some stereotyped and demonized "gay lifestyle". Aside from their same-sex orientation, they're still the loved ones the folks have known all along.

Year after year at the Ravi Zacharias Founders fundraising weekends, as friendly introductions were exchanged around a table at informal breakfast times, Blair would be asked what he did in New York City and a predictable scene would unfold. He'd answer that he was a psychotherapist in private practice. Someone would then remark, with a sardonic smile, "Well, I guess there's plenty of need for a psychotherapist in New York City!" Ahem, not Amen. "And do you specialize?" someone else would ask politely. "My practice is with gay people." Someone would then say, rather too enthusiastically: "Oh, we hear that they're doing great things with gay people these days." Knowing full well the allusion was to "ex-gay" claims, Blair would nonetheless ask: "What do you mean?" "Gay people are being changed!" Blair: "Nobody's sexual *orientation* changes." Usually, at this point, someone would change the subject. However, invariably, as breakfast was winding up and these donor guests were leaving the table to get ready for that morning's plenary session, someone or a couple would stay behind and whisper to Blair: "Could we talk with you a little about homosexuality? We have a son [or a sister, or a brother, etc.] who's been struggling so much with this and nothing seems to be helping." At a seemingly random table of evangelicals, a conversation stopper can be, by Providence, a conversation starter.

In the *American Conservative*, Rod Dreher is just now catching up with the fact that even evangelicals support same-sex couples. But he thinks he's coming onto something *new*. With a "Psst!", as it were, he hints that, "It's only scuttlebutt so far, but insiders at various Evangelical colleges, schools with a reputation for conservatism, are telling me that there are strong movements among faculty and administrators to change the school's policy on same-sex marriage and gay rights. Some of the names of these schools will shock people when and if they flip." He is soliciting tips, "anonymous if you have to", about these evangelical supporters of gay people. Without waiting for his already tardy "breaking news", let's look back over *many decades* during which many evangelicals have been supportive of same-sex couples.

In 1977, when Dreher was only 10 years old, religion historian, Richard Quebedeaux, wrote in his book, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (Harper & Row): "Right and center evangelicals may continue to say 'no' to homosexual practice explicitly and homosexual orientation implicitly; but it seems that left evangelicals will finally come out closer to Ralph Blair than Anita Bryant". It was but a year later that Bryant's antigay "Save Our Children" crusade collapsed in chaos and divorce.

For many decades now, not only "left evangelicals" but, "center" and "right evangelicals" have supported same-sex couples, not only saving them from loss of evangelical Christian faith, but also facilitating the flourishing of their evangelical

Christian faith. They've been supporting Blair's Evangelicals Concerned ministry since the founding.

Since the beginning in 1975, Blair has conducted a weekly Bible study in New York and annual Bible study winter weekends in the eastern Pennsylvania mountains.

EC has been sponsoring summer retreats since 1980. So far, these 73 annual connECtions in various venues around the country have featuring over a hundred evangelical leaders as keynoters.

In addition to the sermons preached at EC's annual Fall Festivals in Ocean Grove, New Jersey, EC commemorates anniversaries of great Christians of the past at these events at "the Shore". Those in attendance hear the bios and see displays of autograph letters and other mementoes from these forebears of faith. The honored have included, e.g., Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Lottie Moon, Mahalia Jackson, Bob Jones, Jr., F. F. Bruce, William Holman Hunt, Hannah Whitall Smith, et al. This gives some idea of the character and ambiance of an EC event.

Since 1976, Evangelicals Concerned has published forty volumes of EC's quarterly *Review*, assessing many hundreds of journal and magazine articles as well as books on Christianity and homosexuality. The quarterly EC newsletter is *Record*, documenting, over these many decades, the evolving news of homosexuality and Christianity. At the top of the first page of every issue of *Record* are Paul's words of confidence that *nothing* will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. (Rom 8:38) If "neither death nor life ... nor anything else in all creation" can separate us from God's love, how is it that evangelicals think that a lovingly committed same-sex union kills God's love?

One of Blair's fellow students from their 1960s days at Dallas Seminary, wrote him in terms typical of other letters and emails over the years: "Just a note to tell you that you do good work." This pastor adds that the quarterly EC publications are "read in many closets across the land. Keep us honest."

With every quarterly mailing (until *Review* and *Record* went digital), EC included a commemorative bookmark and, annually, a commemorative calendar, in honor of those unlikely to be honored by any other mainly gay and lesbian organization. EC bookmarks featured, e.g., Martin Luther, Charles Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, John Bunyan, Francis Asbury, D. L. Moody, John Newton, William Cowper, Thomas A. Dorsey, et al. EC calendars featured, e.g., Fanny J. Crosby, Frances Ridley Havergal, Charlotte Elliott, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Frances E. Willard, Hannah More, Dorothy L. Sayers and even Jesus' mother, Mary (for the AD 2000 calendar), et al. Each mailing also contains "Worth Repeating" quotes from, e.g., Flannery O'Connor, Teresa of Avila, Nicholas Wolterstorff, John Updike, Alice Meynell, Eugenia Price, Moishe Rosen, Malcolm Muggeridge, et al.

In the very first issue of EC's quarterly *Review*, Blair critiqued Jay E. Adams' 1973 book, *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Baker). In 1958 Blair invited Adams to speak under IVCF auspices at Religious Emphasis Week at BGSU. He was then working for the denominational predecessor of the PCA.

Adams' description of what male homosexuals find attractive in another male is the very opposite of what any male homosexual finds attractive. In Adams' ignorance, "It is the effeminate-looking person that the practiced homosexual is looking for. The choice of a partner that approximates (as closely as possible) a member of the opposite sex shows that the problem does not exist in a lack of interest in heterosexual characteristics,

but just the opposite. Other factors are basic to the perversion. But note, interest in an effeminate person by another male shows his basic need and even desire (though warped) for a female rather than a male.” Even in 1973, his theory was hopelessly disoriented.

Another book critiqued by Blair in *Review* was Joseph Nicolosi’s, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality* (Aronson). In stark contradiction to the promise in his title, Nicolosi admits: “Reparative therapy is not a ‘cure’ in the sense of erasing all homosexual feelings”. Nothing in his 355 pages gives a believable basis for hope that reparative therapy erases *any* homosexual feelings. Nicolosi concludes: “In reparative therapy the client ... commits himself to treatment with the belief that ‘irrespective of how I feel, I am a latent heterosexual’.” This isn’t what anyone would think “reparative” meant.

Robert A. J. Gagnon’s *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Abingdon) was met with much fanfare from antigay evangelicals. But, in his review, Blair wrote: “His failure to hear the biblical writers address their own concerns in their own age results in his dominating rather than submitting to their texts. Gagnon claims that ‘the complementarity of male and female sex organs [is] the most unambiguous’ evidence he can offer against homosexuality. But isn’t sexual complementarity a bit more complicated than tinker toys? Surely he knows that genitalia are hardly the only or most frequently involved body parts in sexual expression. What about lips and arms and the brain (the most significant sex organ of all)? His reductionism to mechanics refuses to acknowledge the nature of the fascinatingly other that’s the very essence of psychosexual orientation, attraction and affection – whether enjoyed by a heterosexual or a homosexual couple.”

Blair faulted Tim Keller’s, *Romans 1-7 For You* (Good Book), for projecting “21st century gay romance into an ancient power-structured world of sex abuse.” Keller: “As a cultured and traveled Roman citizen, Paul would have been very familiar with long-term, stable, loving relationships between same-sex couples.” “No!”, Blair wrote. “Keller’s scenario would have been meaningless 200, let alone 2,000, years ago. His agenda-driven fantasy flies in the face of what Brown University classics scholar and *Christianity Today* contributor Sarah Ruden explains of Paul’s world. ‘There were no gay households; there were in fact no gay institutions or gay culture at all.’ As ‘cultured and traveled’ as Paul surely was, he wasn’t aware of what wasn’t there.”

In public debates over the years, Blair has not had a weirder experience than he did in a debate against John MacArthur of The Master’s Seminary and Sherwood Wirt, founding editor of Billy Graham’s *Decision* magazine. In mid-debate, Blair was discussing the misunderstanding that preachers have about Paul’s reference to the *arsenokoitai* in First Corinthians. He was explaining that the *arsenokoitai* were not homosexuals. Wirt perked up and demanded to know: “What was that word?” Blair answered: “*Arsenokoitai*”. Wirt shot back: “Of course they’re homosexuals! Arse! Arse! They put the penis in the arse!” Wirt wasn’t joking. He was conflating part of an obscure word in ancient Greek with modern British slang. Blair told him he was “etymologically incorrect and, besides, they don’t all put the penis in the arse, especially the lesbians.”

That debate was intended for the premiere issue of *Inspiration*, a magazine from the Christian publishers of *Popular Science*. But, after the taping, the producer told Blair it could not be used since, as he put it, “The wrong side won.” He asked if Blair would be willing to debate Francis Schaeffer on the topic. Blair told him he would. However,

Inspiration folded before it ever went to press and Schaeffer was seriously ill and died soon thereafter.

When well-educated Christians such as Adams, Nicolosi, Gagnon, Keller, Wirt and others can be so seriously uninformed and misinformed on the intersection of biblical scholarship and historical and scientific research on homosexuality and yet write and speak so vociferously against same-sex unions, what chance do their followers have of understanding a truly Christian view of the subject?

Well, Eugenia Price well understood. She was one of the earliest and grateful supporters of Evangelicals Concerned. From 1950 to 1955 she wrote and directed the popular WGN radio series, “Unshackled”, dramatized true accounts of redemption at the Pacific Garden Mission on Chicago’s Skid Row. Then, in 1955, she wrote *The Burden is Light* (Revell), her autobiographical testimony of taking the Lord at his word. She followed this account with many other popular and practical books on Christian living and devotion as well as several bestselling novels on the Old South.

In 2000, *Eternity’s* William J. Peterson included *The Burden is Light* among the *100 Christian Books That Changed the Century* (Revell). In 1996 (the year Price died) *CT* celebrated its 40th anniversary. For this occasion, *CT* editors reprinted quotes from what 10 Christian authors had written in the pages of *CT* during its first year. Three of these first year excerpts were, understandably, from *CT* founders Billy Graham, L. Nelson Bell and Carl F. H. Henry. One of the other seven honored excerpts was from Eugenia Price.

Twenty years before *CT’s* honoring of her, Price read Blair’s, *An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality*, originally published in 1972. She wrote to him on June 23, 1976, the day after her 60th birthday. She told him: “I wish I had time today (difficult chapter to untangle on the current novel) to go into detail concerning my excitement and deep, deep appreciation of what you are doing now among homosexuals. YOUR MATERIAL IS, IN MY OPINION, ON DEAD CENTER. True, true, true.” She said she was, “more enthusiastic than these few hastily written (and poorly typed!) lines will convey. Right on, man! Jesus Christ backs you up every step of the way. From my heart (and my mind) I thank you again for sharing with me. The big need in the past has been (in my ‘humble-dogmatic’ opinion) God’s blind people even more than homosexuals.” A month later she wrote to Blair again: “Your approach is the sanest and most Scriptural I’ve found yet! ... My best to you – and I meant that!”

2016 will be the centenary of Genie Price’s birth and EC will be remembering her at the 2016 EC Fall Festival at Ocean Grove.

In 1959, Rosalind Rinker wrote her classic, *Prayer: Conversing with God* (Zondervan). For her revolutionary impact on the way evangelicals pray, *CT* editors, in 2006, *CT’s* 50th year and the centennial of Roz Rinker’s birth, rated her *Prayer: Conversing with God* as *the most important book* to “have shaped evangelicals” during *CT’s* first half-century. Before the 1960s, evangelicals’ prayers “were often little more than a series of formal prayer speeches” full of “thee, thou, and thy” phrases. Rinker said that prayer should be a “conversing with God” as a child talks with a parent. When praying with others, prayer should be a group conversation with God, with each person joining in the conversation.

Twenty-six years before *CT’s* posthumous honor of Rinker, she’d keynoted EC’s 1st western conference in 1980. In 1982 she keynoted EC’s 3rd eastern conference. She later wrote to Blair: “The days passed so quickly, and your program was so well planned! I’m sure the results of that conference will be far-reaching in the lives of all who attended.

May the good Lord multiply your blessings and supply all your needs, and guide you by His Spirit. With my love and prayers, Roz.” She added this note in her familiar, gentle conversationally way: “Jesus was there too! Love, Rosalind”.

Three other authors in that 2006 *CT* list of the top evangelical books in *CT*’s first half century also served as EC keynoters. They were Charlie Shedd, *The Stork is Dead* (Word) and Nancy Hardesty and Letha Scanzoni, *All We’re Meant To Be* (Word). Shedd keynoted EC in 1997 in the east and in 1998 in the west – 9 and 8 years before *CT* honored him. Hardesty was an eastern EC keynoter in 1981 and a western EC keynoter in 1984 – 25 and 22 years before *CT* honored her. In 1980, Scanzoni was a keynoter at the first EC mid-western conference, in 1985 she keynoted in the west and in 1996 she keynoted in the east – 26, 21 and 10 years before *CT* honored her.

The Evangelical Foundation’s *Eternity* magazine declared that the Hardesty and Scanzoni book was, “the most significant book” of 1975 (EC’s founding year). And, in 1980, *Eternity* named two of the 1980 eastern EC keynoters among those that *Eternity*’s editors called the “Fifty Evangelicals Who Influence You”: Virginia R. Mollenkott, NIV Bible stylistic consultant and James S. Tinney, editor of *Spirit: A Journal of Black Pentecostalism* and a Tom Skinner associate.

A *Christianity Today* editor wrote to Blair in 2003: “Thanks for keeping me on your mailing list all these years. Here’s a check to help cover some of your expenses. All best wishes.” Another *CT* editor and noted historian of American evangelicalism, Randall Balmer, keynoted two EC conferences – in 2004 in the east and in 2008 in the west. *CTLibrary*’s website archives the *Re:Generation Quarterly* for which another EC keynoter, Nelson Gonzalez, was the founding publisher. Gonzalez was also a personal research assistant to John Stott.

In 1985, Philip Yancey, longtime *CT* editor-at-large, wrote to Blair to say: “You’ve been a wonderful and great help to some very dear friends of mine, and on their behalf I thank you.” He added: “I appreciate your effort to bring compassion to a difficult situation.” On several occasions, Yancey has mailed Blair a signed copy of his latest book. In his 2001, *Soul Survivor: How My Faith Survived the Church*, he inscribed: “For Ralph, *Definitely* a fellow survivor!” Yancey and Blair had a good conversation at length when Yancey was a keynoter at an RZIM Founders Weekend at The Grove Park Inn at Asheville, NC.

Classics scholar Sarah Ruden is a frequent writer for *Christianity Today*’s publications. She has carefully examined Paul’s Greek texts and the historical settings and concludes, as do other astute scholars, that, in Paul’s world, “There were no gay households; there were in fact no gay institutions or gay culture at all.” Contrary to projections of today’s egalitarian gay relationships into the biblical era – whether in pro-gay or antigay polemics – Ruden explains that, “society pressured a man into sexual brutality toward other males. To keep it unmistakable that he had no sympathy with passive homosexuals, he would tout his attacks on vulnerable young males.” She notes, too, that, in that pagan world, “homosexual rape [was] *divinely* sanctioned” with the “idol of sexual aggression [being] Priapus, the scarecrow with a huge phallus.” She cites a Roman poet’s describing being “cut to pieces” as “the ordinary term for ‘to be the passive partner’.”

Ruden assumes that, as a boy, Paul saw, “at any slave auction ... boys his own age ... knocked down to local pimps at high prices, to the sound of jokes about how much they would have to endure during their brief careers.” So, she observes, what’s behind Paul’s

allusion to same-sex acts “is the passion he had for ending exploitative sex, the only physical expression of homoeroticism he likely knew about.”

In “Paul in Context”, *CT*’s *Books & Culture* interview with Ruden, she repeats her finding that Paul “could have had no idea of anything in homosexuality that was not exploitative and cruel. I think this is the source of his emotion when writing about homosexual practice in his time.” She asks, rhetorically: “What greater contrast could there be to the tradition of using a weaker body for selfish pleasure or a power trip [than Christ’s having given] his body to save mankind?” She says, since, at the time, “no one could have imagined homosexuality’s being different than it was; it would have to go.”

And, what greater contrast could there be between today’s lovingly committed same-sex marriages and what Ruden accurately describes as horribly abusive scenes that were, historically speaking, what the ancient world knew of homosexual behavior?

Besides such sexual domination of slaves, sojourners and enemy soldiers, the ancient world was familiar with same-sex cultic prostitution. The late Gordon-Conwell classicist, Catherine Kroeger, wrote about ancient cult prostitution in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. In castigating pagan religion in Romans 1, Paul knew of these male cult prostitutes who, as she says, “wore veils and long hair as signs of their dedication to the god, while women used the unveiling and shorn hair to indicate their devotion. Men masqueraded as women, and in a rare vase painting from Corinth a woman is dressed in satyr pants equipped with the male organ. Thus she dances before Dionysos, a deity who had been raised as a girl and was himself called male-female and ‘sham man’.”

Kroeger continues: “the sex exchange that characterized the cults of such great goddesses as Cybele, the Syrian goddess, and Artemis of Ephesus was more grisly. [Cf. Rom 1:26f] Males voluntarily castrated themselves and assumed women’s garments. A relief from Rome shows a high priest of Cybele. The castrated priest wears veil, necklaces, earrings and feminine dress. He is considered to have exchanged his sexual identity and to have become a she-priest.” With such gender “exchanges”, these religious prostitutes would engage in same-sex orgies in the pagan temples all along the coasts of Paul’s missionary journeys.

Galli should pay attention to these insightful conclusions of respected scholars among *CT*’s contributors and evangelical scholars. Instead, he joins with the historically ignorant antigay lobby that smuggles today’s loving same-sex peer partnerships into the sexual violence and pagan rituals of ancient cultures and smuggles modern Western peer-partner heterosexual marriage into biblical era marriage.

Galli is an alumnus of Fuller Seminary. Neil Clark Warren, dean of Fuller’s Graduate School of Psychology, went on to found eHarmony and Compatible Partners. The latter is the Internet’s best-based and most effective *same-sex matchmaking* site. Says Warren: “I’ve always had a very gentle feeling towards these people because I feel that being gay could have easily been true for me.” Identifying with the marginalized and doing something about it is exactly what all Christians are called to do. About same-sex marriage, the personal goal of everyone linked to his Compatible Partners site, Warren predicted in early 2013, “Within the next five to 15 years [it] will be no issue anymore. We’ve made too much of it. I’m tired of it.”

Galli should know that, all along, Fuller Seminary faculty have supported EC and keynoted EC retreats. Fuller’s veteran pastoral care professor, David Augsburg, wrote to Blair in 1979: “I have found the mailings, the reviews, and the materials from

Evangelicals Concerned to be useful and helpful in my own growth and in work with others in ministry and therapy. I am grateful for the ways you have worked to build a community among people who had experienced alienation and rejection. [Social] change is slow and at times painful but it does happen. ... I pray we'll see much more of it happening during our lifetime. May God bless your ministry and work richly."

Also in 1979, Fuller's systematic theologian Paul King Jewett wrote to Blair: "Just a brief note to thank you for keeping me on your mailing list. I find your Newsletter and *Review* to be the most informative and balanced thing on the subject anywhere. I do not see how you keep track of all the details, not to mention your speaking calendar and professional responsibilities."

In 1980, Fuller psychology professor Phyllis Hart keynoted EC's first western conference and 1984 eastern conference. Over the years, she and Blair collaborated on programs for the Christian Association for Psychological Studies conferences.

In 1981, after Jewett had read Blair's, *Getting Close: Steps Toward Intimacy* and *Getting Closer: Structure for Intimacy*, he wrote to Blair: "It seems to me that you have done some really pioneering work. I trust you get some positive response and particularly that you will be able to help many escape the terrible bind that they have been forced into. It is always a pleasure to hear from you."

Jewett later wrote about Blair's *With Sunshine and Rainfall for All*: "I read it and had my admiration renewed for your control of such detailed material. It seems you must have a full-time data gatherer. I do not know how you keep it all in your mind. It is surely very informative – and persuasive!"

When he died in 1991, Christine Jewett sent Blair a copy of the printed funeral service and she wrote: "Paul has always admired you and your work as well as your publication, *Review*. So I feel that you are my friend, too."

Fuller Seminary ethicist Lewis B. Smedes (who taught at Calvin Seminary before that) was another strong supporter of EC. He keynoted at an eastern and at a western EC conference. He wept at the close of his first EC retreat, in 1995, expressing how very much that weekend's experience meant to him and how he wished that others he knew could have been there to witness what he saw and felt. He wrote later, with reference to one of Blair's booklets: It "reminded me of how much I owe you. And I thank you for being my teacher. Bless your deep spirit."

Mel White, another Fuller faculty member and a friend of Blair's since his ghostwriting days for Pat Robertson, Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell, keynoted EC retreats in 1989 and 1991.

Over a hundred other evangelicals have keynoted EC conferences. Distributed evenly between women and men, there have been both heterosexual and homosexual keynoters. They've all affirmed same-sex partnership. EC's policy from the start has been to invite the same person to keynote *only once* at the *same regional* event so that EC can't be accused by our critics of recycling an alleged "rarity" – only a *few* evangelicals who support same-sex couples.

Jack Rogers, another EC keynoter, Fuller Seminary professor and author of *Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical* (Westminster), wrote on his blog in 2006: "Many years ago I was on a plane flight back from a conference and happened to be seated next to Dr. Ralph Blair – a noted psychotherapist, evangelical Christian, and openly gay man. At the time, I opposed the ordination of people who are LGBT. But we chatted amiably during

the flight. During our conversation I was struck by how thoroughly evangelical he was – he loved Jesus and sought to follow him as much as anyone I’d ever met. Furthermore, Dr. Blair knew who he was – he wasn’t wrestling with his sexuality – he knew that he was created and loved by God just like everyone else. ... I’m grateful for Dr. Blair’s continuing graceful witness to Christ’s love and grace”.

Among the many other evangelical leaders who have encouraged EC over the years are the following: *Reformed Journal* founder and Calvin Seminary professor and missionary, Harry R. Boer; Marten H. Woudstra, Calvin Seminary Old Testament professor, president of the Evangelical Theological Society, chair of the NIV Old Testament Committee, editor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church journal, *The Presbyterian Guardian* and author of the commentary, *The Book of Joshua* (Eerdmans); Puritan scholar and Fuller and University of Toronto Old Testament professor Gerald T. Sheppard, *Future of the Bible: Beyond Liberalism and Literalism*, (United Church); New Testament scholar, apologist and theologian Clark Pinnock, author of the *Christianity Today* award winning, *Flame of Love* (IVP); Messiah College New Testament professor Reta Halteman Finger, *Roman House Churches* (Eerdmans); Western Seminary New Testament professor James V. Brownson, *Bible Gender Sexuality* (Eerdmans); Southern Baptist biblical scholar Robert G. Bratcher, translator of the *Good News Bible* (American Bible Society); Thomas Hanks, professor of Hebrew Bible at the Latin America Biblical Seminary; IVCF staffer and Western Seminary D. Min. chair Stanley Rock, *This Time Together* (Zondervan); Hendrik Hart, philosopher, Toronto’s Institute for Christian Studies; Southern Baptist theologian and Beeson Divinity School’s first *Festschrift* honoree, Fisher Humphreys, *The Almighty* (David C. Cook).

Still other EC supporters over the years: George E. Moreland, builder of the Houghton College science departments, *The Wesleyan Message* (Light and Life); Walter R. Hearn, author of *Being a Christian in Science* (IVP) and regular columnist for the American Scientific Affiliation’s online magazine, *God and Nature*; Robert N. Wennberg, Westmont College professor of philosophy, *Life in the Balance* and *Life on the Edge* (Eerdmans); Nicholas Wolterstorff, distinguished philosopher, Calvin College and Yale and Gifford, Kuyper and Southern Baptist Seminary lectureships; Hope College philosophy professor Caroline J. Simon, *Bringing Sex into Focus* (IVP); Messiah College philosopher Jan Evans; Jonathan Edwards scholar Amy Plantinga Pauw; C. S. Lewis scholars Kathryn Lindskoog, *C. S. Lewis: Mere Christian* (IVP) and Michael J. Christensen, *C. S. Lewis on Scripture* (Abingdon); Wesleyan historian Donald W. Dayton, *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (IVP); Nelson Gonzalez, founding publisher of *Re:Generation Quarterly* and personal researcher for John Stott.

Also among EC supporters and keynoters: J. Harold Ellens, Director of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies and founding editor of the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*; Val Clear, Chair of the Anderson College School of Social Work; Clark Barshinger, Chair of Psychology at Trinity (Deerfield); Charles Miley, Chair of Psychology, Aurora College; Hope College social psychologist David G. Myers, author of bestselling textbook, *Social Psychology* (McGraw Hill); Hope College psychology professor Jane R. Dickie; psychologist Mary Franzen Clark, *Hiding, Hurting, Healing* (Zondervan); Kathy Olsen, *Silent Pain* (NavPress).

Other EC supporters and keynoters: Jim Rayburn III, Young Life founder Jim Rayburn’s son and Bob Rayburn’s nephew; Walden Howard, Dean of the Young Life

Institute and editor at Gospel Light Press, *Exploring the Road Less Traveled*, (Touchstone); Steve Schimmele, marketing coordinator and team leader of InterVarsity's "Habakkuk"; Campus Crusade National Women's Coordinator, Patricia Burgin, *The Powerful Percent: Students at the Heart of the Great Commission* (WSN Press); Youth for Christ National Training Director and National Staff Conference Director, Jenny Morgan; Peggy Campolo, popular Christian speaker; *The Other Side* magazine founders John F. Alexander, Joan and Mark Olson and TOS writer John Linscheid; Calvin College music professor Ruth Rus and Calvin College theater professor Stephanie Sandberg; Nyack College English professor June S. Hagen; popular Bible teacher Chuck Smith, Jr.; internationally eminent preachers Roy Clements, *Faithful Living in a Faithless World* (IVP) and R. Maurice Boyd, *A Lover's Quarrel with the World* (Westminster, Foreword by Malcolm Muggeridge).

EC supporters have contributed scholarly articles to evangelical reference works such as *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia* (Moody) and *The New International Commentary Series* (Eerdmans).

Still more EC supporters and/or keynoters have included Ray McAfee, A. W. Tozer's longtime associate pastor and song leader in Christian & Missionary Alliance ministry; Larry Holben, screenwriter for Billy Graham's Worldwide Pictures (including the Corrie ten Boom film script, *The Hiding Place*); Mary Kay Beall of Hope Publishing; Christian singer and songwriter Ken Medema ("Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying"); Christian singer and songwriter Marsha Stevens ("For Those Tears I Died"); Grammy Award-winning singer Cynthia Clawson; Dove Award-winning singer and songwriter Kirk Talley ("He is Here"); Doris Akers, Gospel singer and songwriter ("Sweet, Sweet Spirit"); actor Tom Key as C. S. Lewis; Ron Drummond as D. L. Moody's friend, Henry Drummond, giving his popular talk, "The Greatest Thing in the World".

EC keynoters and supporters whose particular ministry focus is to Christians who happen to be gay or lesbian are Justin Lee, founder of the Gay Christian Network; Jim Lucas of GIFT of Grand Rapids; Kori Ashton of LesBePure; Carol Ann Vaughn Cross, faculty adviser to the gay/straight alliance at Birmingham's Samford University; Steve Slagg of OneWheaton; Jared Porter of the Bob Jones University alumni group, BJUnity; Diana McLean, non-gay Gordon College student editor of Gordon-published testimonies by gay Gordon students.

Keynoters at EC conferences have included former leaders in the "ex-gay" movement: Michael Bussee, Gary Cooper, Jeff Ford, Ann Phillips, Alex Haiken and Jeremy Marks.

EC has had keynotes given by evangelical parents of gay and lesbian children, including Southern Baptist Kentucky State Chair Chip Miller and his wife, Nancy; Mary Lou and Bob Wallner; Mary V. Borhek, Beverly Barbo, Mildred Pearson and Shari Johnson.

Some evangelical leaders who've encouraged EC have not been able to keynote an EC conference due to their demanding schedules. This was true for the late Stephen A. Hayner, national president of IVCF from 1988 to 2001. An Old Testament scholar and president of Columbia Seminary, Hayner replied to Blair: "I am indeed honored to be asked to be part of the EC Conference. I have indeed appreciated your work and the work of many in EC over the years. I have kept in touch with many, especially with folks in Seattle and on the west coast." He added: "May the Lord continue to strengthen, guide and encourage you day by day." After another invitation that again conflicted with his

schedule, he wrote: “Yet again I am honored both by your invitation and by your persistence. One of these years this is going to work out, but unfortunately I already have an engagement [that] weekend of June. Graduation is in the middle of May for us, and I frequently have travel and speaking obligations in the weeks directly following that time. I’m sorry. I continue to follow the work of EC with great interest and appreciate the newsletters. Joyfully, Steve”.

The late Gardner C. Taylor, “Dean of the Nation’s Black Preachers” (*Time* magazine) and *Festschrift* honoree by evangelical Beeson Divinity School, was another friend who wasn’t able to keynote due to his heavy schedule and later health. He wrote to Blair: “I am sorry that I cannot accept your kind invitation [in the east] since I am scheduled to be in California.” He and Blair frequently led worship services together at City Church, New York. He inscribed to Blair a copy of his NBC Radio Sermons, “With gratitude for feeding my spirit. ... Your [Sunday morning] prayers which have meant so much to me should not have been left unuttered.”

Evangelicals who disagree with EC have, nonetheless, not been entirely negative, even back in the 1980s. In 1985, Will Barker, the second president of Covenant Theological Seminary and a church history professor at Westminster Seminary, wrote to Blair: “I appreciate your compassion for [homosexuals] as people whom the Lord loves and also the intelligence with which you present your case. There certainly is a hermeneutical issue involved in such discussions, and there is need for a progressive approach to traditional interpretations to Scripture. We need always to be willing to see what further light the Holy Spirit will shed on the Word for God’s people. I find I am not persuaded, however, by your advocacy of ‘a committed, monogamous relationship with someone of the same sex, where shared values and genital sex are successfully integrated with mutuality, familiarity, and closeness over time.’”

Dallas Seminary’s H. Wayne House and Minirth-Meier Clinic’s Richard Fowler write: “Ralph Blair [is] possibly the most articulate theologian of the homosexual movement” (*Civilization in Crisis*, Baker, 1988) J. Robertson McQuilkin, President Emeritus of Columbia International University (formerly Columbia Bible College) writes: “Perhaps the most articulate spokesperson of the [gay & Christian] movement is Ralph Blair, prime mover and president of Evangelicals Concerned. The advocacy of a monogamous homosexual relationship by Blair and others in Evangelicals Concerned is marginal to the gay movement within the church as well as outside the church.” (*An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, Tyndale House, 1989)

Joe Dallas, who still advocates for an “ex-gay” approach, wrote in 2007: “Evangelicals Concerned, a national group of pro-gay Bible studies and fellowships founded by New York psychotherapist Ralph Blair, is probably the most theologically conservative of all the gay Christian groups and is the most articulate in defending the pro-gay theology.” (*The Gay Gospel?*, Harvest House, 2007).

A major evangelical theologian who does not share EC’s position on homosexuality wrote to Blair in 2012 to say: “So great to learn that God is saving people in gay Christian circles. I guess I have felt along with many evangelicals that once someone drops the traditional view of homosexuality eventually all the other dominos will fall and the result will be some kind of vacuous liberalism or secular humanism. From our latest correspondence, that would seem not to be the case. I don’t understand God’s way of working, but what else is new?” In 2013, he wrote: “Ralph, your [EC] keynote

[*Obedience begins with Awe!*] is wonderful. Wish we could have you preach it here.” In 2014, he wrote: “Ralph, I just loved your general treatment of self-centeredness and arrogance. [*Self-Centered to Serve*] May God give you health and wisdom as we trust him through our last decades.” And later in 2014, he wrote: “Dear Ralph, Thanks so much. Your [EC] messages [*Christ and the Cosmos*] have been my devotions. Wonderful gospel preaching.” In 2015, he wrote regarding Blair’s [EC] keynote, *Self-Righteous Enslavement*: “Ralph, thanks so much. I loved it. ... God’s blessings in Jesus.”

Even non-Christians can see EC’s clearly *evangelical* focus. NPR’s A. J. Jacobs, author of the whimsical, *Year of Living Biblically* (Simon & Schuster), dropped by EC’s weekly Bible study in Manhattan and reported later: “In short, Blair is theologically conservative. That’s what makes him an evangelical. ... [The] ninety-minute [Bible] study session glides by without a single mention of homosexuality. If an evangelist from Thomas Road Baptist Church happened to drop in, he might not even notice anything different.” Jacobs joined the EC group for dinner after the study.

What Jacobs observed in the EC Bible study, our guest keynoters have seen at the EC conferences and have remarked on it. In 1986, John F. Alexander, the evangelical social justice activist, co-founder of *The Other Side* and formerly on the faculty of Wheaton College, wrote to Blair: “I want you to know that my time at both the EC conferences I’ve been to has been important to me. I’m not sure why it has been so important to me, and the truth is that it surprises me a little. Partly it is simply that now ... I have little contact with gays and not as much with radical Christians who are open on this issue, and I fear I forget about its importance till I get back in touch with the people who are on the ‘wrong’ end of this argument.

“But I think it’s more than that; something more important has happened to me at both conferences. It is partly you; I was very pleased by both your presentations – your call to a broader faith than gay-is-OK is vital. [The two presentations by Blair were *Christian Faithing & Self Esteem* (1985) and *Jesus Who?* (1986).] Certainly you have every reason in the world to be obsessed by gayness to the exclusion of everything else, but you have refused to let that happen. Thank you.”

John Alexander recognized from his many years in radical political activism and in what he saw in his contacts with EC, that there is no substitute for the Good News that all need to hear. Evangelicals Concerned, as Blair has said from the beginning, must be about “the best of *both words*”: “Evangelicals” and “Concerned”. We’ve received the Good News, the best news the world has ever been given. Thus, we’re *evangelicals concerned* for the peace of all who need to hear of God’s unmerited mercy and who must not be blocked from hearing, simply because some Christians refuse to see in them, the same needs for intimacy that they, themselves, have and pursue in a committed partner. In gratitude for this amazing grace of God in Christ, EC does not and cannot settle for, or stumble over, merely passing religiosities, ideologies or politics of Left or Right or any substitute in between.

F. F. Bruce said it well: The gift of the peace of God is not “the same sort of thing, albeit in a religious idiom, that the United Nations [has in mind] in a nonreligious idiom”. And Helmut Thielicke wisely warned: “When theology says only what the world can say to itself, it says nothing. The feet of those who will remove it are already at the door.”

What is it that the world cannot say to itself? It’s surely not yet another of this world’s self-righteous legalisms or blame-game ideologies. It’s this Good News that, as Paul put

it, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting people’s sins against them.” And, Paul added, God “has committed to us this message of reconciliation.” (II Cor 5:19)