

*Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* by E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien (InterVarsity, 2012), 240 pp; Kent Van Til, "Singleness and Celibacy", *Perspectives*, December 2012; "Opposing the Truth-Trashers" by Joel Belz, *World*, November 17, 2012; "Our Culture of Deceit" by Joel Belz, *World*, December 15, 2012; "Where 'little lies' Lead", by Joel Belz, *World*, February 23, 2013.

Kierkegaard's bicentennial brings to mind these words of his: "It is not the obscure passages in Scripture that bind you but the ones you understand. With these you are to comply at once. If you understood only one passage in all of Scripture, well then, you must do that first of all. It will be this passage God asks you about." His wisdom warns of abusing clearly ambiguous texts while ignoring clear contexts of calls to seek for others what we want for ourselves. But, oblivious to our misunderstandings, insensitive to our insensitivities, we can do a lot of damage. So, Richards (a dean at Palm Beach Atlantic University) and O'Brien (editor-at-large of Christianity Today's *Leadership Journal*) make real hermeneutical contributions by noting blindness and bias in Western readings of the Bible that, after all, springs from ancient Middle Eastern culture. They warn against imposing *our* assumptions and they point to the Bible's *own*. And they do it with good sense and wit.

They observe that, in the Bible, "honor and shame over against right and wrong" is key and that our "instinctively prioritizing rules over relationships can lead us to misunderstand." They note that, "serious misunderstanding can occur when we fail to recognize all that goes without being said about language and how we use it." They urge us to be "aware of our own mores – and what goes without being said for us [and] consider what went without saying for the original audience." This insight can alert us to today's "traditionalist" and "progressive" assumptions, e.g., antigay anachronism on *arsenokoitai* and the shaming of Israelite brothers by lying with them as with women or pro-gay anachronism on "romance" between David and Jonathan or Jesus and John. They stress that, "to avoid misapplication, we should determine what the text meant *then* before we try to apply it to ourselves *now*." Wisely, they urge us to "embrace complexity", "be teachable" and "embrace error", i.e., "we learn more when we get something wrong the first time than we do when we are right from the beginning."

Van Til teaches religion at Hope College. Reacting to a fine essay by Hope colleague David G. Myers, he says the *infrequency* of texts used against homosexuality is irrelevant. Agreed – especially as *any* such use is anachronistic. And, Van Til concedes, "it may be true that [the context of these few verses] was not a long-term sexual partnership". In objecting to Myers' "implicit denigration" of forcing lifelong singleness and celibacy onto all gays, Van Til nonetheless admits to the extreme hardship of *his* merely *interim* "experience [of] singleness and celibacy [in his] late twenties, before marriage". Yet, he demands *lifelong celibacy* for all gays – an odd application of the Golden Rule! He complains that Myers fails to say *why* it's "harsh" to forbid same-sex marriage. Must Myers supply what's supplied by Van Til's own even *short-term* celibate experience? He claims that there's no "scriptural support" for others' having opportunity for the marital bliss he enjoys. Well, besides the Golden Rule, there's God's taking note that, "It's not good for the human to be alone." Van Til urges all gays to be content with *non-sexual* relationship such as what he enjoys with his children – as though that has no connection to his sexuality and his marriage. Strange how it took

a humble Jewish fisherman so little time to extrapolate from fresh insight on shellfish to fresh insight on goys like Cornelius, while Van Til still can't extrapolate from his own needs for sexual intimacy to those of gays!

*World* magazine founder, Joel Belz, recalls that, "A very wise man told me many years ago that a publishing enterprise, to be successful, needs a good enemy" – one that subscribers and supporters can easily "visualize with an ugly face and with horns". So, Belz wonders: "What evil people or causes do we need to keep highlighting if we're going to persuade you to keep reading *World*, keep renewing your subscription?"

One such "evil" at *World* has been the "ugly face" of an alleged "gay agenda". In early days, Belz noted what he called, "the gentleness of AIDS." I replied then that his was a "notion surely unintelligible to anyone with even an elementary knowledge of devastating illness or an ability to empathize at all with the terminally ill and their loved ones." He said AIDS was God's word on gays. I noted the words of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar and asked: "Does Belz know God's message on the 18 people crushed under the Tower of Siloam? ... Does he know God's message on the 18 children who will die from hunger in the next 60 seconds?" In 2000, Belz did admit that, "fundamentalism's bad habit (from the time of the Pharisees until now) has always been to add to what [God] has said." *World* continues the tradition.

Says Belz: "all we have to do is to tell the truth [with] well-sourced, carefully confirmed, and double-checked news stor[ies]". Yet *World* keeps missing what's *really* going on in "ex-gay" circles and what *gay-affirming* evangelical leaders are concluding. In "Our Culture of Deceit", Belz says: "I don't like being lied to" by a bank's deceptive offer, for example. "Did I feel snookered? You'd better believe it. I felt lied to." He complains of a "willful sustained effort [to deceive with data] designed to be hidden". Yet *World* – by commission and omission – still misleads on homosexuality.

Ten years before *World's* first issue, Vernon Grounds, Conservative Baptist Seminary president, wrote with seasoned historical perspective: "What is critically important is that we struggle to differentiate between traditional *interpretations* of the Bible (which must be open to review and correction because they are the fallible understanding of sinful human beings) and biblical truth *per se*." He added that, on all controversial social issues, "equally dedicated believers may and do differ widely. If only all of us (including myself) followed tenaciously the Pauline (and Holy Spirit) guidelines!"