

*Abusing Scripture: The Consequences of Misreading the Bible* by Manfred T. Brauch, (IVP Academic, 2009) 293 pp; *First Peter* by E. M. Blaiklock (Word, 1977) 113 pp; *Connecting Christ* by Paul Louis Metzger, (Thomas Nelson, 2010) 328 pp.

A kids' quiz asks, "Which One Doesn't Belong?", e.g., red, blue, cat, yellow? Grown-ups fail that test at I Corinthians 6:9. Paul reprimands Christians who, in suing one another in pagan law courts instead of settling disputes among themselves, are as evil as thieves, swindlers, slanderers, drunkards, the greedy and those to whom he refers with a now indecipherable term. Yet, today, while suing each other in pagan law courts – especially over gay issues – careless and incompetent Christians use that obscure term to slander and otherwise abuse all lovingly committed same-gender couples.

For wanting as loving a marriage as heterosexuals can have, gay folk get *slandered* and *robbed* – like the *victims* Paul had in mind. Pushing today's gay couples into that cryptic category is *scriptural* abuse that becomes *spiritual* abuse *and more*. An eminent classics scholar, Blaiklock reminds us: "Like all minorities, [Christians, too] were slandered. Their conduct was vilified, misrepresented and misunderstood." This is still the case.

Palmer Seminary's Brauch observes: "We live in a world characterized by abuse." And, he explains, "'the greatest story ever told' [is] increasingly falling on deaf ears" because Christians have "frequently told the story badly, lived it brokenly and distorted it terribly." He argues that, "at the core of these broken realities there lies a fundamental problem ... 'the abuse of Scripture' ". Moreover, he says: "We often blithely set aside or ignore the cancers eating away at the communal life and witness of our churches – such as strife, bitterness, gossip, backbiting, greed, divisiveness – all named in the New Testament texts as incompatible with kingdom values". When he cites I Corinthians 6, he doesn't smuggle gay people into Paul's list of evildoers, though this does not mean he has a "pro-gay agenda".

Brauch warns that Divine inspiration doesn't *remove* biblical writers from *their* time and culture. It follows that an understanding of sexual orientation and *gay* phenomena in *our* time and culture cannot be retrofitted to the time and culture of the biblical writers.

Says Brauch: "In the biblical view of human life, authentic personhood is primarily relational rather than individualistic" – both with God and each other. He avers that, "the 'image of God' is not bestowed on individual human beings as such, but rather on human beings in their male-female complementarity." Kids and singles don't bear the image of God? He clarifies: "It is ultimately only in the context of human relationships, in human communities of love, where the 'image of God,' the reflection of God's character and purpose, is realized." Summing this up, he says: "We are created in and for relationship." And that's precisely what makes *enforced* celibacy or *mixed*-orientation marriage so unreasonable and predictably fraught with failure.

Brauch affirms: "It is eminently clear that social sins are taken every bit as seriously in Scripture as sins of the flesh (if not more so)." He cautions that, "all bring to the 'seeing' of the biblical text the lenses of their own cultural conditioning, historical situation, faith traditions, existential needs and personal/group biases". He appeals for humility in order that "the *confidence of faith* ... is yet always open to new insights and perspectives." Sadly, many tend to resist such wise counsel – and often for all the worst reasons.

Brauch asks us to consider the "*precedents found in Scripture*" so as to discern what's "*relative and what transcends all contexts*", e.g., "Above all, love each other deeply!" (I Peter 4:8) He asks:

"What would the implied audience of this text, when it heard or read the text within the author's context, have heard?" Blaiklock illustrates with I Peter 4:6. "Peter knew what he meant. Those who heard or read his letter knew what he meant. We do not, because we have lost some piece of relevant information or some vital clue. [We're] better left without explanation." This honest insight should be taken seriously in today's controversy over the inscrutable at I Corinthians 6:9.

As Blaiklock knows: "Anyone who approaches the New Testament after the more rigorous discipline of classical Greek and Latin is continually amazed at the uninformed and sometimes quite irresponsible attitudes manifested in New Testament studies." No doubt familiar with ecclesiastical resistance to revision of assumptions due to political and financial vested interests, Blaiklock laments: "Facts are too often ignored to safeguard a theory". So, he warns: "To understand any communication in literature, be it prose or poetry, there must be some attempt to conform to the mind of the author."

He cautions: "It is too common a preoccupation of commentators to set down at all costs some interpretation for every difficult passage in the Bible. But it surely does not insult Scripture humbly to admit that there may be contexts to which the key is lost or not yet found. The teacher of Scripture is under no obligation to explain everything, and to claim ability to do so would touch the edge of absurdity."

Clearly, what Paul had in mind was a victimizing of others and that's exemplified in every vice in his list. But, today's committed same-sex couples, loving one another in sickness and in health, do not fit Paul's criterion. Besides, as another classics scholar, Sarah Ruden, explains of Paul's world: "There were no gay households; there were in fact no gay institutions or gay culture at all". Such factors were not in Paul's purview.

Metzger teaches theology of *culture*. But he tosses *today's gays* back into *ancient culture*. That his "heart hurts for the homosexual community" should prompt his going deeper into his "fear of misinterpreting God's Word" so as not to cause yet more hurt. Aware of the problems of a "self-justification" hermeneutic, he rejects only what he scorns as a "homosexual hermeneutic". He calls for "asking the right questions" but asks *wrong* questions and gives *wrong* answers. He zeroes in on "male and female" in Genesis, but takes zero note of Paul's deeper insight on that in Galatians. (J. B. Lightfoot marveled: "Even the primeval distinction of sex has ceased.")

Metzger's fixation on *natural* lineage neglects salvation history's *unnatural* births from virgin and barren wombs and the *unnatural* grafting of pagans into the ancestral and descendant family of God. The *natural* family is not the biblical focus on family among the born again of uncorrupt seed, the ransomed, not by blood relations, but by relation to the blood of Christ. Jesus' kinfolk are those "who do God's will"; they're a whole new order of being. They're God's elect through *supernatural* regeneration and *supernatural* resurrection for a *supernatural* inheritance surpassing forever the "futile inheritance of our ancestors".