CHURCH DOCTRINE REPORT ON HUMAN SEXUALITY
(A&P 1994, p. 251-274)

Overture No. 22, 1987 - Presbytery of Westminster (A&P 1987, p. 468-69, 17); Re: Defining the Church's Position on Human Sexuality
Overture No. 9, 1989 - (A&P 1989, p. 516-17); Re: Human Sexuality
Church Doctrine Recommendation No. 1, 1993 (A&P 1993, p. 223, 34, 47); Re: Report on Human Sexuality

The Committee on Church Doctrine has spent a number of years and significant amounts of time preparing this report. Initially it was written to respond to the overtures mentioned above and more recently, to respond to the hundreds of responses that came from presbyteries, sessions and individuals across the country. As requested by the 119th General Assembly, we now present a final draft of our report.

1. Introduction - Where We Find Ourselves In The 1990s

1.1 In the past three decades, human sexuality has been extensively studied, discussed and debated. Changes in culture and society have brought to the fore questions about human sexuality and appropriate standards of sexual behaviour. Family patterns have changed dramatically. Traditional gender roles are being redefined. Old assumptions about sexual behaviour are being challenged, giving rise to confusion, conflict and the opportunity to re-examine sexual issues from a Christian perspective.

1.2 This statement seeks to address issues relating to human sexuality in accordance with the decision of the 1987 General Assembly instructing the Committee on Doctrine to "produce a statement defining the Church's position on human sexuality" (A&P 1987, pp. 17, 468-469; cf. Appendix to this Report) Our aim is to provide a biblically-based and theologically-sound guide to members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada concerning some of the moral issues which this involves. The Church has a responsibility to preach and teach Christian belief and practice, in sexual as well as in other matters, with honesty and humility, candour and compassion, showing a pastoral concern for all those who struggle with these difficult issues in their daily lives. The Church must also invite further discussion and dialogue among its members on issues such as human sexuality.

1.3 In presenting this statement the Committee seeks to avoid being swept along by the tide of current beliefs and practices. It is essential, in response to the challenges confronting us, to explore and state our Church's position in contemporary terms as clearly and as persuasively as possible.

2. The Authority and Sources For Christian Faith and Life

2.1 The ultimate authority for the Church and for Christian faith and life is God, revealed in Jesus Christ, witnessed to by the Holy Spirit speaking to the Church in the Scriptures. The Preamble to the Ordination Vows for ministers and ruling elders of The Presbyterian Church in Canada states:

> The Presbyterian Church in Canada is bound only to Jesus Christ her King and Head. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the written Word of God, testifying to Christ the living Word, are the canon of all doctrine by which He rules our faith and life. We acknowledge our historic continuity with the Holy Catholic Church and her doctrinal heritage in the ecumenical creeds and confessions of the Reformation. Our subordinate standards are the Westminster Confession of Faith ... and such doctrine as the Church, in obedience to Scripture and under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, may yet confess in her continuing function of reformulating the faith.

It is clear that the Preamble states that the primary source and norm for discerning God's will is Scripture. Yet the Church's understanding of Scripture takes place within a long and living tradition of interpretation and application. At the same time, theology makes use of reason and experience in the whole process of "faith seeking understanding".

2.1.2 Scripture, tradition, reason and experience each have a role to play in discerning God's will. Yet our ultimate authority and our primary source for our knowledge of God's will remains the revelation of God, in Jesus Christ, witnessed to in Holy Scripture, speaking to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. A Christian sexual ethic will make wise use of tradition, reason and experience, but will evaluate these in the light of the witness of Scripture. Experience and rational reflection may act as spurs which drive us back to Scripture to look again at neglected or misunderstood aspects of the biblical revelation.

2.2. Scripture

2.2.1 Living Faith, our Church's statement of Christian belief describes the authority of Scripture as follows:

> The Bible has been given to us
> by the inspiration of God
> to be the rule of faith and life.
> It is the standard of all doctrine
> by which we must test any word that comes to us
> from church, world, or inner experience.
> We subject to its judgment
> all we believe and do. (5.1)

2.2.2 The New Testament witnesses to the same God who is revealed in the Old. However, the understanding of revelation unfolds in new ways and all Scripture is to be read in the light of the supreme revelation of God in Christ.

2.2.3 If the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are, as The Preamble to the Ordination Vows states, "the canon of all doctrine by which Christ rules our faith and life", then that rule must apply to every aspect of our lives, including our sexuality. Since our sexuality is an inherent aspect of our whole being, that is, our humanity, the Bible's teaching about human relationships, including sexual relationships, should never be divorced from its teaching about the whole human person.

2.2.4 The use of the Bible in Christian ethics is a difficult and demanding task. Scripture is in part shaped by its particular historical and cultural circumstances. We too are conditioned by our own time and culture and we all bring to Scripture our own presuppositions. The hermeneutical task is thus that of joining "the horizon of the text" with "the horizon of the interpreter". This involves four major components which are constantly interrelated.

a) We are prompted by the Spirit working on the horizons of our experience to listen afresh for God's Word witnessed to in Scripture.

b) We seek to understand the Bible in its original historical setting, recognizing the variety of material it contains. For this a wise use of historical-critical methods is essential.

c) We look at the biblical material as a canonical whole. The dangers of quoting isolated proof texts are well known. At this stage we look for the underlying unity and diversity, continuity and discontinuity in Scripture, paying particular attention to the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Therefore in studying any ethical issue it is essential to consider all the relevant biblical passages that we can identify.

d) We bring the biblical materials to bear on our contemporary situation. The gift of discernment is especially needed here. What biblical precepts still apply in our day? What specific prescriptions were directed only to the original historical situation, and what principles lie behind such rulings? How are broad ethical principles to be applied in the changed circumstances we find ourselves in today? In what other ways can the biblical material guide our ethical deliberation? We must pray for the guidance of the same Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture. Such deliberation is most appropriately carried out in the context of the Christian Church, the community which knows itself called to serve God in response to his love revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

2.2.5 Throughout Scripture, faith and life, theology and ethics are inseparable. The Old Testament contains a wide range of ethical material in the Torah (Law), Prophets and Wisdom literature. In the Old Testament, law is not primarily a means of earning God's favour. God graciously delivers the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and enters into covenant with them through giving them the Torah. Torah, meaning "teaching", "direction", or "law", is a gift of God and provides guidelines for the life of God's covenant people. It includes both moral and ceremonial law. The prophets assume the covenant relationship and speak of God's judgment when Israel fails to live in accordance with God's commandments; but they also speak of God's coming salvation when all humanity will live as God intends. Wisdom draws on observation and experience to map out the difference between the wise way to live, and the foolish. The Old Testament contains broad ethical principles (e.g. Leviticus 19:18, Amos 5:24, Proverbs 14:34). It provides precepts which require particular modes of conduct (e.g. Exodus 20:12-17, Jeremiah 7:9-10, Proverbs 19:5). And it frequently gives more specific prescriptions for conduct (e.g. Exodus 21:1-6, Isaiah 5:8, Proverbs 11:1). Though the latter especially are usually tied to specific historical situations, there is generally a broader ethical principle to be discerned behind them.

2.2.6 In the New Testament, as in the Old, ethics can only be understood in a theological context, as a response to God's grace in Jesus Christ. There are interpreters who contrast Law and Gospel, taking their lead from Paul's saying that "Christ is the end of the law" (Romans 10:4). There are also those who see the ethics of the New Testament focused in the commandment to love God and neighbour (Mark 12:28-34), or simply in "love" as the one guiding ethical principle. Others deny that the New Testament provides even general principles; Christians must simply be guided by the Spirit. Others again emphasize Christian character, Christian community, or response to the God revealed in Christ as the context for ethics. There are varying degrees of validity in all these approaches, but by themselves they are inadequate if they fail to recognize the positive role that law continues to play in the New Testament. At the same time, the requirements of the ceremonial law are superceded or reinterpreted by New Testament writers. With respect to the moral laws, Jesus not only reaffirmed them but defined their intent more clearly and fully (e.g. Matthew 5:27-30). Love and law are not to be set against each other. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Similarly, the Apostle Paul did not oppose love and law. While emphasizing that salvation does not come by works of the law, Paul stated that the law is not abrogated but fulfilled in love. Believers are to "fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2), and Christ is "the end of the law" not in the sense of abolishing it but in the sense of bringing it to fulfillment and completion. The moral law revealed in the Old Testament, and known to Gentiles through conscience (Romans 2:15), remains binding on Christians, not in any legalistic sense but as a revelation of God's will for humanity. The Ten Commandments, for example, are still guidelines for Christians (e.g. Mark 10:19, Romans 13:8-9), and the New Testament epistles provide specific ethical directives as well as general guiding principles.

2.2.7 Calvin found three uses of the moral law in Scripture: as well as convicting persons of their sin, and restraining unrighteousness, it offers positive guidance to Christians regarding the will of God, confirming them in their obedience to it, though not in any legalistic way. In the Institutes, Book II, 8, Calvin devotes an entire chapter to a discussion of the moral law structured on the Ten Commandments and giving a positive interpretation of each law. Reformed catechisms (e.g. Heidelberg, Geneva, and Westminster Shorter Catechism and Longer Catechism) expound the relevance of each commandment for the living of the Christian life.

2.3 Tradition

2.3.1 Biblical understanding occurs within the context of the historical Christian community of the past two millennia, and in formulating a Christian sexual ethic, that community, in its contemporary manifestation, must take seriously the tradition which it has received and in which it participates. "Tradition" simply means something handed down from the past to the present. It is a living, dynamic thing and not simply the dead hand of the past. In Christianity, this term embraces the beliefs, practices and institutions which have been handed down from previous generations and which continue to guide the Church today. In the New Testament Paul speaks of what he has received from the Lord and delivered to the Church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:23; 15:3). The author of Jude speaks of the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). Jesus Christ is the tradition to which all other traditions are subordinate, and because it is Scripture that witnesses to Christ, Scripture remains, according to Reformed teaching, the standard by which all Christian traditions are to be measured and evaluated. For example, although a strong ascetic tradition which exalted the ideal of celibacy developed, especially from the fourth century onwards, the Reformers rightly rejected this as inconsistent with the main thrust of the biblical teaching on sexual relationships.

2.3.2 While tradition may be accepted as a rich resource which provides continuity and stability, still as the Westminster Confession of Faith states:

> The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. (I.10)

2.4 Reason and Experience

2.4.1 Various positive roles can be assigned to reason in the process of theological reflection. Any theology which aims to produce a coherent and consistent statement of Christian belief must obviously make use of reason, for example, in its discussion of Scripture and tradition. Reason is also employed in reflecting on and seeking to make sense of experience.

2.4.2 Scripture acknowledges reason as a means for discerning the revelation of God in creation. Paul recognizes that Gentiles who have no knowledge of the revelation in Scripture, nevertheless are able to

perceive God's power and deity in creation (Romans 1:20), and through conscience have God's law inscribed on their hearts (Romans 2:15). The Westminster Confession of Faith (I.1) acknowledges that "the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence ... manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God." Calvin, too, argues that with respect to "earthly things", Ä i.e., politics, law, economics and the liberal arts Ä reason operates in a positive way (Institutes II,2,12f).

2.4.3 There are limits to the speculative use of reason as a means of knowing God's will. Historically, a misplaced reliance on reason's competence has led to the rejection of some of the most basic assertions of the revelation of God in Scripture; e.g. the denial of the divinity of Christ, of the doctrine of atonement and the Resurrection. Conversely, an uncritical use of Scripture has led to seriously distorted interpretations such as the defence of apartheid, slavery and sexual abuse. Reason then, may be regarded as an essential means towards ends appropriate to its use.

2.4.4 Experience is ordinarily taken to be a special form of knowledge and source of authority. Traditionally this has been understood as Christian experience in the sense that Christian faith is a way of life to be experienced and not just a theory to be believed. Calvin made use of the ancient notion that "experience teaches" and he could say "we teach nothing not borne out by experience" (Institutes III.22.1). Some later Reformed theologians (e.g. Schleiermacher) argued that the experience of the life of faith comes from participation in the community of faith. In this they recognized that experience does not stand or act alone; it is never an independent source of truth but rather confirms and applies Scriptural truth. More recently, some have claimed a greater role for experience. In some liberation and feminist theologies, for example, the experience of oppression and discrimination can lead to a radical questioning of traditional Christian attitudes. This is to be welcomed insofar as it challenges theology which is divorced from actual human experience, and insofar as it uncovers aspects of the biblical revelation which have been neglected or distorted. However, when this type of experience is understood as constituting an exclusive source or even the norm of truth, the question has to be asked whether experience can function in this way to overrule Scripture.

2.4.5 Experience and reason are combined in the procedures adopted by science. Since the writing of the Bible, the natural sciences have greatly advanced our knowledge of the external world and universe in which we live. Yet Scripture is not concerned with providing a modern scientific account; its focus is not on "how?" but on "why?". John Calvin recognized that it was not providing a scientific account in his Commentary on Genesis and answered those who censured the author of the book for not speaking with greater exactness by saying: "For as it became a theologian, he had respect to us rather than to the stars" (on Genesis 1:15). This intent has not always been understood and it has led wrongly to a conflict between religion and science, as in the case of the condemnation of Galileo and again in the rejection of the theory of evolution. Science may challenge the Church to rethink its interpretation of the Bible as it was forced to do so under the impact of Galileo's discoveries confirming the Copernican theory over against the Ptolemaic view and again as it was challenged to do so by Darwin's theory of evolution.

2.4.6 Science works with data and uses reason to construct various models in an attempt to understand and explain human behaviour. These models (e.g. Freudian, Jungian) can help us clarify the nature of human sexuality and some of the ethical issues which surround it. Science can provide valuable information and concepts which must be taken into account in articulating a theology of sexuality. For example, the discussion of moral issues relating to genetic engineering or euthanasia must take into consideration information which science provides on such matters. However, while biology, psychology, anthropology and sociology can provide helpful insights into the human condition, they cannot in themselves determine in any final way the criteria on which our ethical decisions should be based. For instance, the pervasiveness of certain types of sexual behaviour (e.g. prostitution) does not mean that such behaviour is acceptable from a Christian point of view. In brief, science can help the Church reflect on human sexuality. It can also assist the Church to challenge cultural assumptions, including our own, about sexual behaviour. It cannot, however, tell us whether certain forms of sexual behaviour do or do not conform to the will of God. We believe that the true nature and calling of humanity cannot be rightly known apart from the knowledge of God and of God's will.

2.4.7 Members of the Church should be encouraged to reflect upon and discuss the question of authority and the sources for ethical decision-making, subjecting their own views and attitudes to critical scrutiny, and listening to the views of others in an open, sympathetic and caring fashion. Ethical discussion and decision making are not merely a matter of individual judgment but should take place within the context of the community of faith.[1]
(see Endnotes for a full range of the literature that has informed these first sections)

3. **Biblical and Historical Insights on Sexual Norms**

3.1 In dealing with any aspect of the human condition, the Church traditionally begins its discussion with the Creation text: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27) Though this classic text does not spell out for us precisely in which sense human beings are created in this "image of God", the phrase does tell us that it is in our likeness to God that we discover our humanity.

3.2 The image of God in humanity is expressed through both male and female, and it is in men and women working and living together that the wholeness and goodness of God's creation is reflected (Genesis 1:26-31). Genesis 2 expands our understanding of the first chapter. It is "not good" for the newly created "adam" to live alone, and so a "partner" (Genesis 2:18) is created, an equal in creation. The description of the creation of the partner is followed by a reference to sexual union of the male and female partners. "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Jesus, interpreting the Genesis passage (Mark 10:6-8), portrays marriage as the proper context for the expression in sexual intercourse of humanity's sexual longings. Though Paul's personal attitude to sexuality and marriage is ambiguous, he does affirm Jesus' teaching that marriage is the proper context for sexual relations.

3.3 There is a strong tradition running through Scripture that holds a positive view of sexual relations.

3.4 Both Old and New Testaments narrate misguided and, at times, calamitous sexual relations. Rape is a brutal form in which sin and lust are expressed. (See, for example, Genesis 34, Deuteronomy 22:25-27, Judges 19:11-30, 2 Samuel 13.) Adultery is another betrayal of God's intention for sexual fidelity in marriage. (See, for example, Deuteronomy 22:22-24, 2 Samuel 11, John 8:1-11). The human sexual story, like all our other stories, has been perilously marred by sin. Our rebellion against the Creator, our refusal to obey God's commands, has resulted in a distortion of everything good, including the sexual aspect of our humanity.

3.5 In the Christian tradition, sexual desire has often been seen as essentially sinful. Particularly in the male it has been described, for example, by Augustine, as an irrational and dangerous force which can overpower the will, distract from spiritual concerns, lead into mortal sin, and cause much suffering to others and oneself. This view is reinforced by Paul's reference to the failure to exercise self-control in sexual matters (I Corinthians 7:9). The widespread problem of sexual abuse forces us to recognize that there is a dark side to sexuality which makes it a gift not only to be enjoyed, but to be disciplined.

3.6 Another factor which contributed to the de-emphasizing of marriage and the family was the conviction of some in the apostolic church of Christ's imminent return. Paul, in I Corinthians, looked for the coming of Christ in his own generation. The most authentic Christian life was seen to be one concentrating on that event. Therefore, marriage and the family were possible impediments to the service of the kingdom.

> I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. (I Corinthians 7:26, 27)

3.7 Accordingly, the elevation of the celibate Christian life along with the traditional linking of sexual desire (concupiscence) with sin came to dominate the Church's teaching in the fourth and fifth centuries. This was particularly the case with Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo, who gave a profound analysis of the human condition but one in which sin was strongly identified with concupiscence. A number of early Christian thinkers taught that sexual desire had to be struggled against, disciplined and controlled. In particular, Augustine, held that original sin was transmitted from one generation to another through sexual intercourse. Closely aligned with this attitude to sexual activity was a view of women as temptresses and as the gateway by which sin entered the world. This attitude toward human sexual relations had a profound negative impact on subsequent history.

3.8 At the same time, Christian teaching on sex and marriage is seen by some historians as an advance on Roman views and a modest contribution to women's emancipation. In the twelfth century romantic poets praised heroic feminine qualities thereby enhancing the dignity of women. This represented, some have argued, the next stage of emancipation. Yet the romantic ethos was also responsible for the social and legal institution of the double standard of sexual morality that already had a long history.[2]

Before 1000 most people were not married in a church ceremony. After the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 declared marriage to be a sacrament, church marriage became the prescribed norm. Divorce was

controlled by the church and was not uncommon. Secret marriages were discouraged, although the practice continued in both England and Scotland well into the seventeenth century.

3.9 The Protestant reformers, Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564) were strongly influenced by Augustine but they came to question the identification of sin with sexual desire and they rejected the medieval view of celibacy as a higher kind of Christian discipleship. By accepting marriage for themselves, both reformers endorsed the committed sexual relationship as a faithful response to the Gospel. Calvin argued for the sanctity of marriage in the warmest terms, employing Paul's metaphor of the Church as the Bride of Christ as a proof of the high esteem in which Scripture held marriage. In Calvin's view, "the intercourse of husband and wife is a pure thing, good and holy" (Commentary on I Corinthians 7:6).

3.10 At the same time, the Protestant reformers emphasized that marriage was instituted not only for the purpose of procreation, but also for the social good and for the joy, companionship and mutual help of husband and wife. According to the Westminster divines a century later, this was seen as the first purpose of marriage:

> Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed, and for the preventing of uncleanness (W.C.F. xxv.2).

3.11 Throughout history marriage has also served economic, political and social purposes. The legacy of Christian teaching regarding sexual activity is ambivalent. On the one hand, the Church has accorded to the married state and sexual intercourse within the context of marriage a largely positive value. On the other hand, in linking sexual desire with sin, sexual sins were perceived to be among the most serious and shameful. This gloomy, negative attitude was often combined with the view that women were to blame for being the cause of sexual temptations.

3.12 Today's western culture tends to focus on individual, personal experiences of sex and thereby underemphasizes social responsibility. Physical sexual activity is often separated from moral considerations and commitment. This can result in casual or callous sex with disregard for who one's partner is. Furthermore, this pervasive individualism under-values other essential aspects of sexual activity which involved the concerns and needs of the wider community.

3.13 The Church needs to uphold a more positive view of sexuality and marriage. Living Faith provides a helpful understanding:

> God's purpose for us can be realized in both single and married life.
> Marriage is not God's will for everyone.
> Fullness of life is offered to all,
> both single and married.
> Christian marriage is a union in Christ
> whereby a man and a woman become one in the sight of God.
> It is the commitment of two people
> to love and support one another faithfully for life.
> God's law forbids adultery.
> Loyalty is necessary for the growth of love.
> Disloyalty destroys the union of marriage.
> Sexual union in marriage is intended to provide
> mutual joy and comfort as well as
> the means of creating new life.
>
> Living Faith 8.2.2 and 8.2.3

4. **Contemporary Context**

4.1 Personal responsibility for the Christian individual in the midst of sexual pressures and pleasures, anxiety and yearning, begins with a sense of Christian vocation. Each individual is a child of God, created with unique gifts and called to use them in a life of worship and service that is shaped by relationship with God in Jesus Christ. As one strand of our identity, sexuality is woven into the fabric of what each person offers to God and the world. Other human capacities, intellect and imagination, manual skills and gifts of personality, art and energy, are equally significant to identity and the integration of each human life. In the framing of a theological understanding of sexuality and sexual ethics, the rich potential created by these other aspects of human identity and ability ought not to be overlooked or underestimated.

4.2 Responding adequately as a community to peoples' deep personal longings requires careful and caring consideration of human sexuality. The word "sexuality" is relatively new to the English language. The Oxford English Dictionary (unabridged) places its earliest usage in the nineteenth century. Its definition encompasses "the quality of being sexual or having sex", "sex" referring to the reproductive elements of either male or female biology. It also includes "the possession of sexual powers and the capability of sexual feeling". A dictionary definition, however, is not exhaustive in identifying the range of human experience related to this term. In recent thinking, sexuality refers not only to the physical characteristics of the human body and feelings of sexual attraction to another person, but also includes emotional, cognitive, spiritual, social and cultural dimensions.[3] Section four presents an exploratory consideration of some aspects in contemporary discussions of human sexuality.

4.3 Both the understanding and the experience of sexuality are shaped by social expectations and cultural norms, expressed in literature and art, and now, particularly in advertising and mass media. Notions of beauty as well as appropriate dress, roles for women and men, and taboos for unacceptable behaviour all reflect a society's views about sexuality. Recent exploration of the nature of human sexuality has begun to address factors in human identity to which Scripture and Christian tradition did not attend directly. Theological and pastoral reflection now encounter experience and information presented from new perspectives.

4.4 Perhaps the most striking example is provided by the work on women's sexuality undertaken in the last thirty years. Many studies show that men and women differ not only their physical experience of sexual identity but also in the ways they value and interpret the many dimensions of human sexuality.[4] Working out relationships which respect and explore these differences is an important dimension in contemporary considerations of sexuality.

4.5 A broader understanding of the facets of human sexuality also has a profound impact on our appreciation of human development. Our experience of sexuality grows and changes as we develop physiologically. The infant and the child, male and female, grow aware of their bodies and their identities as boys or girls, picking up early cues regarding self-worth and appropriate gender behaviour and response. Physical and verbal expressions of affection for the child are the early foundation to healthy sexuality. How girls and boys learn to value each other is also subject to early influence, often with lasting impact.

4.6 The onset of adolescence typically raises new experiences of and questions about sexuality. Physical and emotional response to sexual attraction must now be integrated with moral values and ethical decisions which guide behaviour. At an increasingly early age, young people face social pressure and opportunity for sexual activity.

4.7 Although young people today may reach physiological puberty earlier than in previous generations, they do not necessarily develop the maturity, self-understanding and relational skills needed to form appropriate intimate relationships until they are long past adolescence. The alarming incidence of eating disorders among teenage girls and an increase in reports of date rape and sexually transmitted disease among teens testify to the failure in church and society to help teens value themselves and each other as God values them. Aware of physical and emotional risks from early sexual encounters, the Church is challenged to bring to bear on adolescent life insights from the Gospel and the moral and spiritual values which arise from them without denying or degrading human sexuality as part of the goodness of God's creation.

4.8 Church communities should support families in helping young people learn what kinds of physical and emotional contact are appropriate and satisfying as their relational skills mature. Church-sponsored youth activities can support youth in the struggle to resist peer pressure and to practice sexual abstinence as they mature. By encouraging young women and men to develop self-esteem as people created in the image of God and by exploring what mutual respect means for relationships between men and women, the Church can be a place where young Christians learn to communicate well about their feelings and ideas, and to form sound relationships. The Church can also be a source of accurate information and open discussion about sexuality and responsibility.

4.9 Each succeeding age group in human development faces its own particular concerns and issues in expressing sexuality. For young adults, decisions about sexuality are wide ranging: searching for and establishing intimate relationships, testing commitments and setting limits within those relationships, deciding whether to marry, whom to marry, and whether or not to bear children are all matters which involve one's understanding of sexuality. In mid-life and throughout aging, sexual relationships change with time and circumstances as do physical abilities and interests. As people choose marriage somewhat later in life, lose a partner through death or divorce, or never find a suitable partner, the

longing for physical and emotional intimacy is more frequently filled in sexual contact outside marriage. As Christian individuals and as church communities, we need to be sensitive to and respond to these changing needs and situations.

4.10 An individual's longing for intimacy and mutuality can be met not only in sexual relationships. Such longings can find fulfillment in the personal affection of friends and the more public affirmation of peers and community. In affirming sexuality as a dimension of God's creation in humanity, the Church ought to be deeply concerned and pastorally responsive to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of all; whether young or old, whether male or female, whether married, cohabiting or single, whether heterosexual or homosexual.

4.11 Sexuality must now be recognized as a profound component of human life for every individual, even before that individual considers or engages in sexual intercourse. The Church's message of self-discipline and mutual responsibility in sexual practice as well as its celebration of human sexuality within marriage ought never to deny the rich reality of each individual's identity and integrity as a sexual being.

5. Marriage

5.1.1 Christians understand themselves as people called by God to live in all aspects of their lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. We are "a people of the way", people who seek to live God's way for us. This "way", this calling or vocation is marked by both gift and limitation. We are given the grace that enables us to live out what we believe God requires of us. But as followers of God's way we accept that our vocation has limits built into it. This way of looking at vocation roots our sexual lives in the fundamental structure of Christian life. Fulfillment and happiness, while important, are secondary to seeking God's meaning for our lives within the larger purposes of God for the world.

5.1.2 Deriving our position from biblical insights, the marriage service affirms that marriage was instituted by God the Creator, who made us male and female (Genesis 1:27). Ordained by God for the life-long companionship, help and comfort of husband and wife, marriage was given to the man and the woman (Genesis 2:18, 24) to be a covenantal relationship of unity, fidelity and mutuality, and for the procreation of children and the continuance of family life as the basis for the welfare of human society. The biblical concept of covenant is wider than a mere contractual relationship. Covenant in the Bible is rooted in the relationship between God and the people of Israel. God promises to be their God and the people promise to obey and worship God. Christian marriage is understood as a covenantal relationship in which promises of faithfulness are made between a woman and a man in the presence of God (Malachi 2:14).

5.1.3 Jesus endorses marriage as ordained by God. "From the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'" (Mark 10:6-8). Sexual relationship within marriage is therefore grounded in creation and affirmed by Jesus. The values of mutuality, equality and communion are echoes of God's purpose for humanity as recorded in both Genesis and the Gospels. These values are also part of the expression of sexuality within marriage.

5.1.4 Marriage was established as a covenant between families in the ancient world. Promises were made, property and livestock changed hands, and laws were established to define the terms of the covenant relationship. The book of Ruth tells the story of such a covenant understanding. The covenant between God and Israel is frequently described in the Old Testament prophets as a marriage relationship, and was both formed and informed by the development of the Hebrew understanding of marriage. There are examples of polygamy in the patriarchal period and the monarchy in ancient Israel, and while polygamy is not explicitly prohibited in scripture, except for bishops (1 Timothy 3:2), monogamy eventually became the norm. The values of mutuality and equality, inherent in marriage, require faithful monogamy.

5.1.5 God's covenant is fulfilled in the love for the world and its people, love revealed in Jesus. He is God's covenant love; a love enacted in his life, death and resurrection. In the New Testament, the Greek word agape is the word used to describe this self-giving love in Jesus, a love to be made evident in all Christians in their dealings with all people. This includes the relationship of husband and wife.

5.1.6 In the first century the wedding ceremony was a state ceremony. The Church, more concerned with the quality of life in the marriage than in the actual wedding ceremony, emphasized that for Christians, marriage was to be in the Lord and spouses were to love and serve each other as Christ loved and

served the Church. Within such a relationship, the partners were enjoined to keep their marriage vows of fidelity in every respect.

5.1.7 The Church has traditionally used Paul's expression of sexuality and marriage as referred to in Ephesians 5:22-33, Colossians 3:18-19 and also 1 Peter 3:1-7, to define the marriage relationship. While Paul espouses the idea of mutual submission in marriage in Ephesians 5:21 ("Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ"), he does so within a patriarchal and hierarchical society, whose ideology we rightly reject today. The Ephesians passage advocates the mutual submission of husbands and wives to Christ. That it also advocates the submission of wives to their husbands has frequently been misused to support the abuse of women.

In advocating these passages as normative of the marriage relationship, the Church still has not adequately addressed the ways Pauline theology has been interpreted to support the abuse of women. The Church must insist that there can be no question of superior or subordinate partners. While the roles of husband and wife may differ and evolve over time, the sharing and the responsibility should be mutual and remain constant. This includes the area of sexuality. A marriage certificate does not make forced sexual intercourse legitimate. This is still rape. It is not the case that one partner has conjugal rights, while the other has only conjugal duties. The principles of mutuality and consent apply. Similarly, "sexual favours" should not be used as weapons, given or withheld in order to gain favours in other areas of marriage. In a marriage of equality and mutuality, deepening sexual pleasure join with love to make a satisfying relationship.

5.1.8 Sexual fidelity in marriage includes mutual respect and caring, a valuing of, and a commitment to, the marriage relationship, and a desire not to damage what is precious. When adultery occurs, that is, when a married person willingly engages in sexual intercourse with someone other than the spouse, it is a damaging betrayal of the fidelity and loyalty which a marriage partner is to have for the other.

5.1.9 The Church acknowledges that often we fail in this commitment. Jesus allowed for this possibility when he permitted divorce for the reason of marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 5:32, 19:9). The Westminster Confession of Faith (24.5.6.) allows divorce on the grounds of adultery and willful desertion. Living Faith (8.2.5) states that when a marriage is shattered beyond repair it is sometimes better for it to be dissolved than for the family to continue living in bitterness.

5.1.10 For Christians, marriage is a union in Christ. Marriage finds its ultimate meaning and joy in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We are called "to marry in the Lord" and to live by the biblical teachings concerning how we are to express our sexual natures in marriage - not as legal codes of conduct, but as the expression of our life in Christ. We are called to deal compassionately with those who struggle and fail and hold out the forgiveness and renewal which alone comes through our Lord.

5.2 Singleness

5.2.1 Recognizing marriage as the appropriate relationship in which sexual intercourse takes place, the Church is challenged to help those who are not married to deal with sexuality in positive ways. Some single people will find the call to limit sexual intercourse to the marriage relationship as a strict limitation on their freedom and desire, and a personal hardship. Others may find that self-discipline in sexual relations frees them to seek out and build relationships which respect their full humanity.

5.2.2 People are single at different stages in their life cycle when at such times they may understand their sexuality and seek to express it in different ways. Often, however, the Church has overlooked the difficulties faced by single people; for instance, those who have never married, or find themselves single again after divorce or death of a spouse. In calling single people to abstinence from sexual intercourse, the church community needs to provide pastoral support for single people in times of loneliness, yearning for relationship, and when they experience rejection. Recognizing both the needs and the gifts of single people, the Church must promote and express in its programmes and fellowship, patterns of relationship that are inclusive of singles.

5.3 Cohabitation

5.3.1 The question of the legitimacy of cohabitation as a Christian expression of our sexuality confronts the Church today. Common-law relationships are more common, and many involve Church members. Often ministers meet people who wish to be married after having cohabited for a period of time. It may be that one partner desires to formalize the commitment in a wedding ceremony, but the other, not having the same conviction, sees it only as a pointless social convention and feels no need of "that little piece of paper". Fearing loneliness, the one partner acquiesces to the other. For young people who

delay marriage for social and economic reasons, cohabitation is more and more common. Older people may also cohabit for economic reasons. Someone who has been through a disastrous marriage may hesitate "to go through it again", but may still crave companionship.

5.3.2 In some cases, in long term cohabitation, the church would regard such a relationship as a de facto marriage, where it is so regarded by the couple. The task of the Church is to affirm the central values we believe are at the heart of marriage: love, commitment and fidelity. Those central values are what the Church needs to support and encourage. Couples who cohabit for social, economic or other reasons need to be enjoined to consider the implications of God's call to order sexual relationships in a legal marriage. Those who come seeking to formalize their commitment testify to their need to be joined together in such a covenantal relationship, and to them the Church can offer pastoral counselling and a marriage liturgy that proclaims the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

6. Homosexual Relationships

6.1 Debate over the legitimacy of homosexual relationships is one of the most controversial in the contemporary Church. In every branch of the Church, homosexual relationships raise acute theological and pastoral concerns. Hence the lengthier treatment accorded in this Report.

6.2 Though homosexual relationships were widely condoned and often celebrated in the Graeco-Roman world in which Christianity was born, the church, throughout its history has largely concluded that homosexual relationships were evidence of distortion in God's creation. Since the 1950's, however, there has been a radical rethinking of the nature and validity of homosexual relationships both by the church and by society. Such relationships among consenting adults are no longer subject to criminal prosecution or classified as evidence of psychiatric illness. Indeed, current legislation in Canada is increasingly sensitive to and supportive of the human rights of homosexual partnerships.

6.3 Significant opinion is being expressed, both from within and without the church, to re-evaluate its traditional condemnation of homosexual practice. The church should not seek to evade such issues, even if they are both complex and controversial. The church is precisely the place where people are free to raise questions and where the direction of God's will for our living and our sexuality must be constantly rediscovered.

6.4 The question before us is not so much the general issue of the nature of homosexuality. Scripture does not deal with homosexuality in any theoretical sense. Nor are we debating the merits of homosexual relationships in either the form of promiscuity or pederasty. What we wish to explore is this: Is a faithful, committed, homosexual relationship ever a Christian option?

The following outlines a few of the options that have been put forward within the Christian community that deserve a respectful hearing in ongoing discussions in the church:

a) that we welcome homosexuality and its sexual expression as an appropriate lifestyle, though not that of the majority of the population. Scripture, for such advocates, is so 'culture-bound' that on this topic it can be set aside. (e.g. Norman Pittenger)
b) that we welcome homosexual relationships as valuable in certain contexts, that is, when those of homosexual orientation commit themselves to a church-blessed homosexual 'marriage' covenant, marked by love and faithfulness. (e.g. Mollenkott and Scanzoni)
c) that we see homosexuality as one among many signs of disorder in God's creation, but that we allow homosexual relationships as pastoral accommodation to human weakness, just as we do for example, with accepting divorce, which in Scripture is clearly not God's intention for marriage. (e.g. H. Thielicke, L. Smedes and the report of the House of Bishops of the Church of England)
d) that we see homosexuality as one among many signs of disorder in God's creation, and encourage church-blessed homosexual unions that allow for companionship, physical intimacy, but not genital intercourse. (e.g. Chris Barrigar)
e) that we see homosexuality as one among many signs of disorder in God's creation creating a painful tragedy for those of homosexual orientation, who should be asked by the church to uphold chastity, while supported by different and same-sex friendships within the wider family of God. (e.g. John Stott and J. White)
f) that we view homosexuality as an abomination from which those who are caught in it need to be rescued. (e.g. Leanne Payne)

In line with the principles of authority outlined earlier in this report, we will begin with an examination of the light which Scripture sheds on this issue.

6.5 The Old Testament texts commonly taken into consideration are Genesis 1:26-31; 2:24; 19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; and Judges 19:22-25. The Genesis 1 and 2 texts, as noted in sections 3.1 and 3.2 of this Report, provide the basis for arguing that heterosexual marriage is the proper context for the expression of sexual relations. We believe homosexuality should be considered in the light of this norm.

First of all, we note that the term "homosexuality" is not biblical. It is a modern term, composed of Homo (Greek, meaning "same") and sexualis (late Latin word referring to sex or the sexes). Literally, it means "same-sex" and refers to sexual activity between male and male, or female and female.

6.6 The story in Genesis 19 has traditionally been interpreted as an account of homosexual sin. More recently, D. Sherwin Bailey and many following him, have argued that the sin of Sodom was that of inhospitality and injustice. They point to later texts which, though listing the crimes of Sodom, do not include homosexual practice (Isaiah 1:9,10; 3:9; Jeremiah 23:14; Ezekiel 16:49). But in the story, the desire of the men "to know" the angel visitors, Lot calls "wicked", and his offer of his daughters as sexual surrogates makes clear that "to know" (vs. 5) means to have carnal knowledge. (see section on Sexual Violence)

The lurid story in Judges 19 is thought to be a retelling of the account in Genesis 19. The context, however, is entirely different. The Judges 19 story illustrates the threat of moral decadence after the occupation of the land of Palestine by Israel's tribes and before the establishment of the theocratic kingdom (Judges 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). The outrage against hospitality in the intended form of homosexual gang rape is perpetrated by scoundrels of the tribe of Benjamin in the town of Gibeah (Judges 19:16,22). All Israel is summoned to Mizpah to inflict the punishment of death on the reprobates and thus "purge the evil from Israel", (Judges 20:1,12-13). The offence actually committed was a heterosexual one: gang raping a woman to death. While these texts accord with Scripture's negative evaluation of homosexual acts, they deal with violence, rape and affronts to the code of hospitality, and therefore do not directly speak to the current debate over the legitimacy of consensual and committed homosexual relationships.

The two texts in Leviticus are found within the Holiness Code, one of a number of codes which form the Mosaic legislation. They embody the regulations laid down by God for Israel, his covenanted community. Israel vowed to observe all God's regulations of its life, in distinction from the practices and institutions both of Egypt and Canaan (Leviticus 18:3,4).[5] The law prohibiting same-sex relation states: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (vs.23). And it prescribes severe punishment (Leviticus 18:23; 20:15-16).

6.7 Some scholars negate the relevance of these texts for today. One argument considers them part of a now outmoded system of taboos belonging to early Jewish culture. Others contend that Christ brought the end of the law and released Christians from an obligation to keep it. It is evident that the legislation in Leviticus, also that in Exodus chapters 20-40 and elsewhere in the Pentateuch, contains some material of continuing ethical significance on which the New Testament bases a Christian ethic. The question arises to what extent the prohibition texts of the Holiness Code still apply. On the one hand, the New Testament continues to speak against homosexual relationships; but on the other hand the New Testament does not mention the prohibition in the Holiness Code of intercourse during menstruation. The use of the Holiness Code in Christian ethics needs further exploration.

6.8 The New Testament provides three texts referring to same-sex practices, I Corinthians 6:6,10; I Timothy 1:8-10 and Romans 1:26-27. I Corinthians 6:6,10 and I Timothy 1:8-10 contain lists of the types of persons who are regarded as "unrighteous" and "ungodly". The list in I Corinthians 6:9 includes the terms "male prostitutes" and "sodomites" (NRSV), and I Timothy 1:10 "sodomites". The term "male prostitute" translates the Greek word malakoi (from malakos) and means literally "the soft". It is used with reference to men and boys who are passive partners in homosexual activity. The term "sodomites" translates the Greek word *arsenokoitai*, meaning literally "male-bedders"' and is used with reference to male homosexuals and pederasts. Most scholars agree that the use of the latter term arsenokoitai echoes the Greek version of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.[6]

6.9 Elsewhere, Paul states that God calls believers into his kingdom and thus to live a life worthy of God (I Thessalonians 2:22). However, in I Corinthians 6:9, 10 the practice of homosexual sin (one among many forms of sin listed, sexual and otherwise) threatens one with exclusion from God's kingdom. In I Timothy 1:10 homosexual activity is equally condemned as absolutely incompatible with "the glorious gospel of the blessed God."

6.10 In his letter to Romans, Paul widens his condemnation of homosexual practice to include sexual activity of women with women. (1:26,27) Homosexual practice is distinguished from a catalogue of

depravity (vs. 29-31) as an instance of the divine judgement at work in consequence of the idolatry (vs. 21,22) of worshipping the creature rather than the Creator. The suppression of the truth about God leads to a perversion in reasoning (vs.21,28) and opens the road to the practice of all those things which should not be (vs. 29-31). In particular, Paul condemns homosexual practice as the exchange of "natural" relations between men and women for relations that are "contrary to nature." By "natural" and "contrary to nature", Charles Cranfield writes:

> Paul clearly means 'in accordance with the intention of the Creator', and 'contrary to the intention of the Creator' respectively. For this appeal to 'nature' in the sense of the order manifest in the created world compare I Cor. 11:14, where *ho phusis aute* might also be translated 'the very way God has made us'.

It appears that Paul's appeal to 'nature' in Romans 1 is to appeal to the order of creation. However, Paul's use of 'nature' in I Corinthians 11:14 creates a problem, for it appears to refer not to the natural order of things but to social convention. While we note this different use by Paul, his intention in Romans 1 is clear.[7]

6.11 Some however, like John Boswell in his highly influential book, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexualit*y, argue that what Paul considered unnatural was the perversity of heterosexuals exchanging what was natural to them personally (i.e. intercourse with the opposite sex), for what was unnatural to them (i.e. intercourse with the same sex). That is to say, they were acting contrary to their own individual nature. However, Paul's use of the words 'male' and 'female' (Gen. 1:26-27), in distinction from the words 'man' and 'woman', would seem to point to sexual intercourse proper to the physical nature of each. Furthermore, the phrases 'natural'(*kata phusin*) and 'contrary to nature' (*para phusin*), are not original to Paul, but are frequently found in the writings of Hellenistic moral philosophers, with, at times, specific reference to heterosexual and homosexual behaviour respectively. This use and application is taken over by Hellenistic Jewish writers like Josephus and Philo, who vehemently attack homosexual behaviour as 'contrary to nature.' Paul's thought and vocabulary in this passage stand within this milieu, as Richard Hays convincingly argues.[8]

6.12 Boswell's argument requires the distinction between inversion, the constitutional preference for the same sex, and perversion, in which constitutionally heterosexual persons turn their urges toward the same sex. It also requires the distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual activity. These distinctions are foreign to Paul's point of view in that he deals not with individuals but the root of human sin, namely, the rebellion of the creature against the Creator. Paul does this in the context of a corporate indictment of pagan society. In Paul's presentation in Romans 1, the vices are not the ground for indictment but the consequences of divine judgement (Romans 1:24,26,28). It is homosexual acts which Paul has in view.

6.13 A recent article by Dr. Hendrick Hart suggests that the critical passage, Romans 1:18-32, far from representing Paul's theological thinking, and specifically his attitude towards homosexuality, is in fact a rhetorical device, in which he presents the standard judgmental theology of the synagogue, which he himself had once believed, only to question it in Romans 2:1-4, and to repudiate it in subsequent chapters by contrasting the judgement of wrath with the grace of the cross.

Hart attempts to release Paul from the fierce denunciation of homosexual acts in Romans 1, and at the same time seeks to uphold the integrity of Scripture. Scholars who have worked on Paul's purpose and Paul's use of rhetoric in Romans, have drawn different conclusions on Romans 1:18-32.[9]

6.14 In the light of the biblical norm of the one flesh union of male and female, the Bible consistently rejects homosexual practice. At this point however the question is raised: what homosexual practices are in view which Scripture so consistently rejects? In Genesis 19 and Judges 19, it is quite clearly intended that it is homosexual gang rape. In most Old Testament passages it is clearly homosexual temple prostitution. The Romans passage clearly discusses homosexual activity. Scholars such as Robin Scroggs argue that Paul rejects not homosexuality in principle, but the exploitive, promiscuous and frequently pederastic homosexuality of the Hellenistic culture of Paul's day. It is true that in some of the Old Testament references to homosexuality, the context is clearly that of homosexual rape, or homosexual temple prostitution. In Romans 1 there is no textual evidence that Paul is confining his strictures against homosexuality to pederastic or exploitive relationships. From what we currently know of homosexual practice in the Graeco-Roman world prior to the first century A.D., homosexual relations of all types were common, both exploitive and loving, both casual and committed.[10]

6.15 The conclusions that have arisen from our use of experience and reason in relation to the Scriptural materials and tradition must be placed in dialogue with contemporary scientific research.

6.16 There is great debate with respect to the cause or causes of homosexuality. The debate ranges between those who seek a genetic or hormonal cause and those who seek a location in psychological development. A number of factors plague research. One is the diversity of persons to whom the description of `homosexual' is applied. Does homosexual apply to how people 'feel' or to how they 'act'? Many homosexuals cannot remember a time when they did not 'feel different'. They think of themselves as being constitutionally different. However, some women, for example, embrace lesbianism as a life-style in adulthood only after years of abusive relationships with men.

Research has been directed mainly at male homosexuality. This is problematic. Furthermore, such research is inconclusive. Some psychoanalysts point to a profound disturbance in the parent-child relationships as a critical factor. Research into prenatal hormonal factors leads others to conclude that sexual orientation is largely determined between the second and fifth month of pregnancy.[11]

6.17 Although the research has not solved the "nature versus nurture" debate, it does seem clear that while some may choose to participate in homosexual activity, many people - whether for reasons of genetics or upbringing - feel themselves attracted to members of their own sex. The question becomes, how much weight do we give to this? How do we feel it relates to the biblical sources? Are we, because of our predisposition, excused from moral accountability?

6.18 All persons are born somewhere along a continuum of sexual identity, from an exclusive heterosexuality at one extreme, to an exclusive homosexuality at the other. Surely no one is excused from moral accountability for the choices we make, sexual or otherwise to which our biological constitution may have disposed us.

6.19 The Church is concerned with what we are by nature and what we are called to become by grace. Whatever our interpretation of The Fall in Genesis 3, the Church recognizes that we are all part of a distorted creation, where the power of sin has marred the image of God in humans, and dislocated all relationships, whether with God, with our neighbour or with ourselves. Sexual identity and desire are not exempt. Scripture sees evidence of sexual distortion to God's creation pattern in adultery, rape, incest, promiscuity and homosexual relationships. Indeed, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) In the sexual dimension of our lives as well as in all dimensions, all stand in need of the law's direction. All persons are in need of the redemptive grace that Jesus Christ offers.

6.20 Is homosexual practice a Christian option? Our brief, exegetical review of biblical texts set within the broader biblical perspective on our vocation as sexual beings leads us to say 'No'. Committed heterosexual union is so connected with creation in both its unitive and procreative dimensions that we must consider this as central to God's intention for human sexuality. Accordingly, Scripture treats all other contexts for sexual intercourse, as departures from God's created order. It may be asked, "If sexuality is God's good gift to humanity, why must there be rules to discipline its expression?" In reply, the Bible refuses to countenance any dualism that would divide spiritual life from bodily life. Contrary to the culturally-sanctioned sexual practices of a city like Corinth, Paul proclaimed a divinely-ordained morality where Christians must see themselves, body and soul, as being the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:18-20). Although our society demands the right to sexual expression and largely ignores such discipline, the Church submits to God's guidance.

6.21 Can one argue in favour of homosexual relationships on the basis of their caring quality? There is no question that the love and commitment of some homosexual relationships can be stronger than that in church sanctioned marriages. However, grace and law are not separated. Law and love are companions, not enemies. Jesus said: "If you love me you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15) Love in the Bible is not a sentimental or indulgent emotion; nor is it primarily sexual. Love honours God and cares for the neighbour. It is made known to us in God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Loving God, loving our neighbour, loving ourselves, will often mean, not the fulfillment of every desire, or the meeting of every perceived need, but the acceptance of denial and sacrifice which is at the heart of the Christian faith.

6.22 Is 'No' the only word that the Church has for those who struggle with homosexuality? To be merely negative is lacking in pastoral sensitivity. The Church must listen to and share the very real pain of homosexuals and their families. While we cannot ignore the direction of Scripture, at the same time we cannot minimize either the human pain or the human potential of homosexual men and women; nor can we ignore our Scriptural calling to witness to God's love of all God's people and the power of grace.

6.23 God has so created us that we humans need one another. Social intercourse is necessary for all. Sexual intercourse, however, is not. Life can be full and abundant for the single, both homosexual and heterosexual, without sexual intercourse, despite the dictates of current society. Sexuality, which is

inherent to us all, can be expressed in other ways than by genital activity - in friendship, in affection, in touch and in belonging. The alternative is not between the intimacy of homosexual intercourse on the one hand and the pain of isolation and repression on the other. The Church is called to be a welcoming, nurturing, loving and supportive community, a true church family, where all are welcomed, nurtured, loved and supported. Sadly, the Christian Church has frequently shunned homosexuals and failed to minister to them and with them. The Church as a whole must repent of its homophobia and hypocrisy. All Christians, whether our sins are of the spirit or of the flesh, whether heterosexual or homosexual, need God's forgiveness and mutual forgiveness as we pursue together the path of holy living. Grace abounds, and in our weakness God's strength is made known.

6.24 Some will refuse our call for homosexual chastity as impossibly idealistic, or reject it as psychologically unhealthy. Sexual chastity, it is argued, is a gift, and not everyone with a homosexual orientation has this gift. However, the grace offered by the Lord Jesus Christ is neither cheap, allowing us acceptance without repentance, nor is it powerless. The gospel contains within it not only the demand for transformation but the power to achieve it.

7. Sexual Violence and Abuse

7.1 Through sexual violence and abuse, the healthy sexual relations God established within creation are destroyed. Sexual violence disregards the mutuality of choice in which adults give themselves to each other in intercourse. Sexual abuse of children denies the safety a child should be able to expect from a trusted adult and replaces honesty and consent with coercion and deceit. Sexual abuse is a misuse of power and a betrayal of trust. Victims of sexual abuse and violence are left with physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual scars. Response to the proliferation of sexual violence in society needs to address issues of power and control in relationships which express human sexuality.

7.2 In Canadian society, it is evident from reported cases that sexual violence is most often perpetrated by men against women or children. These women are often the wives or partners of the perpetrators; child victims are most often assaulted by trusted authority figures or family members.[12] In all cases of sexual violence or abuse, the victim is objectified and where the perpetrator is known to the victim, trust is betrayed. The consequences of sexual assault and abuse are long lasting and deeply destructive of the victim's sense of self and her or his ability to form intimate relationships.

7.3 Reports from those who counsel perpetrators acknowledge that those who commit sexual crimes are themselves often victims of sexual abuse. This reality does not excuse the acts of those who abuse others, but it makes all the more urgent the need to stop abuse whenever it occurs, prevent it whenever possible, and to respond effectively to victims and perpetrators.[13]

7.4 Until very recently, however, the Church has remained largely silent regarding issues of sexual abuse and violence. The record of society in addressing crimes of sexual violence such as rape is no better. Victims of sexual assault are too often subject to humiliating examination which adds insult and suspicion to their injury. The Church can no longer ignore the sexual abuse and violence in society. Statistics in North America indicate that one out of every four girls and one out of every seven boys are sexually abused before they are eighteen years of age. We can therefore expect that many men and women in our congregations have experienced sexual violence or violation. Perpetrators will also be found in church communities.

7.5 When the Christian community turns to Scripture to examine the interpretation of sexual violence, the patriarchal values of ancient culture are evident. The stories which involve sexual violation are not told from the victim's point of view, but rather are recounted in a wider frame of reference. In the story of the rape of Tamar by her step-brother Amnon (2 Samuel 13), for example, this terrible, premeditated act of incestuous violence unlocks a tragic series of events in which King David and his son Absalom are alienated. Absalom eventually becomes a victim of his own thirst for vengeance, and the king weeps for him. Tamar, violated and thus worthless, is left "a desolate woman in her brother Absalom's house". The male triangle of Amnon, Absalom and David is the focus of the story teller's attention. No attention is given to the victim.

7.6 Other Biblical stories are equally as repugnant to women facing risk of sexual violence in our world. The story of the Levite and the concubine (Judges 19:11-30), the claiming of wives by the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 21:13-24), the rape of Dinah (Genesis 34), and the Deuteronomic and Levitical laws (Deuteronomy 22:13-29, Leviticus 18:6-18) serve to underline the place of women in the ancient world. They were property of fathers and husbands, and thus unable to exercise the power of choice or consent. Sexual violence in this setting was a crime against the family, or more precisely, the father's or husband's property. The model of relations between women and men exemplified in these ancient

texts is not adequate to found an understanding of human sexuality which diminishes the risk of sexual violence in our society.[14]

7.7 The Scriptural foundation for attitudes which will help to eliminate sexual violence is found in texts not specifically related to such acts of violence. Concern for powerless and vulnerable people - widows, orphans, strangers - pervades the Old Testament. As noted in both the Law and the Prophets, those who had no one to protect them, and were vulnerable to cruelty and risk, deserved special care from the community.[15] The New Testament carries on this concern in texts like James 1:27 and Galatians 3:27-29, in Jesus' command that we love one another (John 13.34), and in the example Jesus sets in his relationships with women and children (see, for eg., Matthew 9:20-23; Matthew 18:1-6; Matthew 19:13-15; John 8:2-11).

7.8 Some aspects of Christian tradition have added unhelpful principles and priorities for the Church in its response to sexual violence. The ancient propensity to identify womankind with "the flesh" and its "evil" desire sets up women as targets of that desire who can then be interpreted to deserve or even enjoy what they get. The view of woman as temptress feeds a tendency to blame the victim, ignoring the suffering of those who experience acts of sexual violence. Attitudes about the rights of the husband within marriage have caused the Church to ignore or under-estimate the effects of violence within the home on both women and children.

7.9 Uncritically, the connection Scripture and the church have often made between suffering and punishment is misapplied to victims of sexual violence and is to their detriment. Either God is seen to have inflicted the suffering as punishment upon the victim, or the victim is expected to manage suffering by faith in God. Victims, however, are more likely to feel abandoned by God and intensify their suffering with feelings of guilt, anger and isolation. Pastoral care must show sensitivity in the use of traditional faith language in the counselling of victims. For example, persons who have been assaulted by their fathers may not find reassurance in the image of God as Father "Almighty".

7.10 Another theological complication arises in relation to forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation. Often victims of sexual violence internalize anger and feelings of guilt learning to hate themselves. Especially for those who experienced sexual abuse as children, the process of coming to terms with their past and their future is lengthy and painful. Their relationship to a perpetrator within the family is fraught with risk and no quick or simple reconciliation is available. Such victims are often alienated from other family members. Embarrassment and denial among the family complicate the victim's healing as well as the pursuit of justice. Acknowledging abusive behaviour and recognizing it as a crime is a necessary but often difficult step which must precede forgiveness within the family unit. Reconciliation with a perpetrator is exceedingly difficult for the victim and should not be demanded.

7.11 The Church needs to take seriously its responsibility to identify signs and symptoms of abuse, to find protection for victims, whether adult or child, male or female and to report evidence of abuse or violence. This reporting is a new legal requirement in cases involving minors. Ministers, youth leaders and teachers, take note! Those who counsel victims or perpetrators need training in the complexity of these matters. Victims will need strong support when charges against an offender are pursued. They also need gentle and consistent encouragement to confront their past and to accept God's healing and life-affirming presence. Offenders need to hear a call to repentance reinforced by a clear framework of Christian values for the healthy expression of human sexuality. They also need to acknowledge criminal behaviour and be supported through what is often a long and difficult process of counselling to heal and change their lives.

8. Church Leaders and Sexual Responsibility

8.1 Those in positions of leadership in the Church, to whom trust, loyalty and respect are given in varying degrees, include not only clergy, members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries and elders, but also organists, choir directors, educators and youth leaders.

8.2 All followers of Christ, no matter what their role within the Church, are called to model the love of Christ in their relationships and in the conduct of their sexual lives. However, positions of leadership, whether paid or volunteer, contribute to the authority and status conferred upon individuals. Both the trust and authority accorded to those in leadership put a special burden of responsibility on every leader to protect the integrity of those they lead and of the Church they serve. Inappropriate sexual behaviour on the part of any Church leader is a failure of Christian discipleship; it is also an abuse of power that accompanies leadership and a betrayal of trust accorded to those leaders.

8.3 In order not to be abusive, sexual relationships must be formed by mutual consent of the parties involved. The authority of position that accompanies leadership positions complicates the mutuality between persons essential for true consent to intimacy between a leader and someone in a role of lesser authority.

8.4 The Presbyterian Church in Canada outlines behaviours which may constitute sexual abuse in its General Assembly policy for handling sexual abuse and/or harassment. (See, for eg., A&P 1993, pp. 314-26) Behaviour which constitutes sexual abuse or harassment by church leaders is devastating for its victims as well as for the Christian community as a whole. When an allegation of sexual misconduct is made, the response of the Church through its courts and through pastoral care is very important. Church policy assures that all allegations of sexual abuse or harassment will be taken seriously and that every allegation will be received, investigated and acted upon in terms of that policy.

8.5 In order that the interests of all parties to an allegation be protected, all courts of the Church must study the Assembly's policy on sexual abuse and/or harassment and be prepared to investigate complaints without delay. Whenever it is established that a church leader has committed sexual misconduct, it is important that the Church court take immediate measures (a) to assure the victim(s) of the support and compassion of the Church and offer help; (b) to ensure that those accused of misconduct are dealt with by the appropriate ecclesiastical, criminal and/or civil courts; (c) to follow up with pastoral care and discipline for those who have committed inappropriate behaviour, and (d) to see that the community in which the offense has occurred is given access to appropriate healing and restorative resources.

8.6 It is essential that the problem of inappropriate sexual conduct on the part of a minister or diaconal minister not be solved at the expense of another community by processing a Call to another congregation before complaints are thoroughly investigated in terms of the policy on sexual abuse and/or harassment. It is equally important that where a complaint of sexual abuse or harassment against a church leader is substantiated, appropriate discipline as outlined in the Book of Forms and the policy on sexual abuse and/or harassment be applied. The integrity of our witness to Christ as a community depends on our willingness and ability to act justly when complaints of misconduct are made against our leaders.

9. Masturbation

9.1 Masturbation is a widespread practice today, involving young and old, married and single, male and female. There is no reason to think that the practice was significantly less common in the past, including Biblical times. Masturbation among children and adolescents appears to contribute to growing awareness of the body and of the self as a sexual being. For them, as for adults, it is a means of gaining comfort and pleasure relieving physical tension.

9.2 From time to time, the church has condemned the practice of masturbation. Several reasons have been given in support of its condemnation. First, the story of Onan (Gen. 38:6-11) has been interpreted as a condemnation of the practice. It is more likely that the passage condemns Onan for refusing to fulfil his Levirate obligation to raise up an heir for his deceased brother, perhaps by means of coitus interruptus. The Bible provides no direct guidance, whatsoever, about masturbation. Secondly, masturbation was regarded by some earlier theologians as a denial of the dual fundamental purposes for which our sexuality has been given, that is, procreation and communication. Thirdly, masturbation has been regarded as narcissistic. It was said to reinforce the practicer's isolation and to make difficult the entering into of a reciprocal sexual relationship with another person. Fourthly, masturbation was said to encourage excessive fantasization so that reality becomes distorted or is eroded. Fifthly, it was alleged that masturbation reinforced immaturity by encouraging an escape from meeting the challenges of daily life through which maturity is gained.

9.3 While excessive indulgence in the practice of masturbation is undoubtedly unhealthy for the reasons given, it is quite clear from modern developmental psychology and medical science that the practice does not harm the body, damage another person or risk the transmission of disease. Indeed, masturbation can be viewed positively. It can be understood as transitional sexual activity until a person is mature enough to accept adult sexual responsibilities. It can also be acceptable in those situations where a married couple cannot be to each other the source of comfort and pleasure they would want to be.

9.4 Masturbation is not an intrinsically evil or sinful practice. It is not condemned by the Bible. In itself, it does no harm; it is not a violation of the order of nature and does not necessarily represent an extreme self-centredness, reinforce isolation or retard emotional or spiritual growth. Where masturbation is not engaged in to such an extent that reality is distorted, it should not be condemned by the church.

10. **HIV Infection and Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

10.1 People are concerned with the rapid spread of the AIDS virus known as HIV (Human Immune deficiency Virus), as well as the spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as herpes II, syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia and others. Sooner or later, every congregation across the nation will have to face the reality that one of our brothers or sisters is infected with the AIDS virus. As a Church which is called to minister to the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed and the sick (Luke 4:18), we must speak to those with these diseases with Christian conviction and compassion.

10.2 The increase in promiscuous sexual activity is undoubtedly a major cause of the increase of sexually transmitted diseases in the general population. However, it should be emphasized that some of these diseases are transmitted in ways other than sexual activity. HIV infection, a disease of a person's immune system, for example, can be transmitted by infected blood supplied to haemophiliacs and other hospital patients. It can also be transmitted by the sharing of or accidental pricking by contaminated needles and syringes. An infected mother can transmit the virus to her baby before or at birth or through breast-feeding. While HIV infection occurred mainly within the homosexual population in the past, it is now becoming more frequent and widespread in the heterosexual and bisexual populations than in the homosexual.

10.3 In the face of HIV infection, the Church has a responsibility to speak with honesty and clarity as it seeks to be faithful and pastoral in its ministry to persons with HIV infection, regardless of how they became infected. The Christian community must play a direct role in ministering to those who suffer from HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases, and to their families in the name of Jesus Christ. Christian compassion demands that we take steps to help meet the physical, social and spiritual needs of people with HIV infection and their loved ones.

10.4 The Church has a role to play in preventing the further spread of HIV infection. First and foremost, it must preach both effectively and pastorally the Christian sexual ethic expounded in this statement. Secondly, it must encourage and offer educational programmes to educate all about the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases. The Church must take seriously its responsibility to work with parents in educating children and adolescents. Thirdly, it must ask governments to increase support for medical research and for improved facilities for the treatment of those who are infected. Governments must also be urged to protect the civil rights of all persons with HIV infection.

10.5 Sadly, realism demands that we recognize that not everyone will remain celibate or faithful to one partner. Health authorities urge those who engage in sexual relationships that are not committed and mutually monogamous within the context of marriage, to take appropriate precautions. Efforts to promote responsible attitudes towards sexual relations should be supported by the Church.

Conclusion

The implications of this report for pastoral care are far-reaching and deserve much more careful consultation and consideration than your committee has been able to give them. No Christian position on human sexuality can be considered definitive until such implications have been carefully and prayerfully thought through.

Recommendation No. 7 (amended and adopted, page 56)
Recognizing the above statement to be a guideline and a basis for ongoing thought and discussion, we recommend that it be the Committee on Church Doctrine's response to the instructions of the 113th General Assembly and subsequent General Assemblies.

Andrew Fullerton resigned from the Committee on Church Doctrine and asked that the following be included in this report: "I resign from the Committee on Church Doctrine because I cannot find my own mind, or the spirit of inquiry I brought to this discussion, reflected in the report on Human Sexuality."

The following asked that their dissent be recorded (no reasons given): Roberta Clare, Byron Jordan, Iain Nicol, Ted Stevens.

Recommendation No. 8 (adopted, page 63)
That Sessions and Presbyteries be encouraged to make their responses to the 1992 report on Human Sexuality (see A&P 1992, p. 50) available to interested persons.

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Amended Recomendation No. 7 (A&P 1994, p. 57)

That the 120th General Assemlby adopt the foregoing statement on human sexuality, and that it be discussd by sessions, synods and presbyteries and that this input be included in the continuing report of the Church Doctrine committee and that this be the response of the General assemlby to the prayers of Overtures No. 22, 1987 and No. 9, 1989.