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John Somerville and the Presbyterian Book of Praise

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The 1894 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada appointed a committee to edit and produce a new hymnbook, with hopes that it would be a less divisive and unsatisfactory experience than the 1880 *Hymnal of the Presbyterian Church in Canada*. That book had been developed immediately after the 1875 union of four denominations, only some of them fully comfortable with hymns. There were parts of the combined church that eschewed them entirely, and forbade the pipe organ which usually accompanied hymns. The Free Church had been the most straitlaced in this respect, using no music in its worship save the traditional metrical Psalms.

Hymns had found a place in Sunday schools and weekday prayer meetings long before they were accepted in the more formal Sunday services. In Scotland one of the forerunners of the United Presbyterian Church had a hymnbook in print in 1792; in 1851, four years after the United Presbyterians were formed, they produced *The Presbyterian Hymnal*. The Church of Scotland published an official hymnbook in 1864, and even the conservative Free Church there had one by 1872. In addition there were many unofficial hymnbooks, either borrowed from other denominations or produced for Sunday schools and other special purposes. Hymnbooks were also produced in Canada, most of them unofficial — one actually bore the title *Hymns for Practice, Not to Be Used in the Solemn Worship of the Sanctuary*. Only one of the pre-1875 Presbyterian bodies in Canada, the Kirk in Ontario

and Québec, had an official hymnbook (*Hymns for the Worship of God*, 1863, which succeeded *The Presbyterian Psalmody*, 1851).

Thus when a hymnbook was proposed as a way “to secure uniformity” in the congregations of the newly united church, there was violent opposition at the 1877 General Assembly — some of it on the grounds of taste (“uninspired hymns” might creep in, a speaker said) and some on general principles. The pipe organ of St. Matthew’s Church, Halifax, had been used in the Assembly worship service, and one speaker angrily declared that it was offensive to God. In 1878 a motion was introduced calling the idea of a hymnbook “doubtful, if not unsafe”. Said another speaker: “The cure lies in dropping the use of hymns, which would end the confusion, and certainly put a stop to heresy”. But the decision, finally, had been that a hymnbook should be produced, drawing the bulk of its material from the existing Scots and North American books.

At the 1879 Assembly, the committee received such criticism that several members resigned in disgust. But eventually a compromise was patched together and the committee went back to work, completing a draft hymnbook in time to bring it to the following Assembly as a *fait accompli*. The book was endorsed, with a few dissenting votes. It was to be printed in one volume with “the psalms and paraphrases in the form in which they had been transmitted by the Scottish Fathers”, and the Assembly recommended the resulting book to “such congregations as use hymn books in addition to the

Psalms and paraphrases”.

Despite these clouds, the 1880 hymnal was an immediate success. The first editions, containing only words, were priced from 8 cents to 35 cents a copy, the church receiving ten per cent of the sale price and the rest going to the publishers. As more expensive editions saw print, the committee began to turn over regular sums to subsidize the Aged and Infirm Ministers’ Fund, which remained the beneficiary of hymnbook profits for many years.

But dissatisfaction continued, not only from those who opposed all hymns, but from those who disliked one thing or another about this specific hymnal. Its music was too complicated for use in small rural congregations, the 1884 Assembly was told. There was demand for a companion edition of the Psalms which should include tunes — no longer did Presbyterians sing the entire metrical Psalter to the twelve tunes which had come down in folklore as the work of King David. The hymnal committee negotiated with the Free Church of Scotland, and in 1884 arranged to produce a Canadian edition of its new *Psalter with Music*. And discussion began about producing a second Canadian hymnal.

When, a decade later, the Assembly finally appointed a hymnal committee, it was not certain whether the new book would be a strictly Canadian venture or an international one. At a conference in Toronto in September 1892, delegates from Canada, England, Australia, and the three disunited Presbyterian churches of Scotland had discussed the possibility of “a common Hymnal for the churches in the British Empire holding the Presbyterian system”. The idea was popular, but progress was feeble. In 1895 the committee reported the Scots churches would not welcome a hymnal containing as many “of what are usually called Evangelistic Hymns” as the Canadians thought necessary. In the spring of 1896 it finally became clear that the differences were too large for compromise. The book would be strictly Canadian, and, as the work of a large committee, would try to reflect all the conflicting social, theological and aesthetic strains in the church. (The secretary of the committee, W. B. McMurrich, a lawyer and former mayor of Toronto, told the story later in a *Historical Sketch of the Hymnal Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, published in 1905.)

The Rev. John Somerville, minister of Division Street church in Owen Sound, Ontario, quickly became a central figure in the project. Ordained in

1875, he had become known as a good committee man, serving on the Senate of Knox College, on the home missions committee and in other roles. (In 1906 he would become treasurer of the church and joint clerk of the General Assembly.) His congregation in Owen Sound, Ontario, a United Presbyterian foundation before the 1875 union, had been using the *English Presbyterian Hymn Book* along with the Psalms since shortly after his arrival, and three years later the people had daringly voted in favour of an organ. For the next several years, the minutes of the session show repeated discussions of who was to play the instrument, choose the selections and lead the choir. When the General Assembly’s hymnbook was finally available, the Session accepted it with the proviso that the minister be asked to choose hymns which were in both the new book and the one that had been in use. At least one couple opposed the use of the organ strongly enough to leave the church, and thereafter they walked several miles to services at the village of Leith. Music was even better provided for when Division Street, prospering, built a new stone church in 1886. It had — and still, as Division Street United Church, has — such fine acoustics that concerts could be given in the sanctuary and some recordings have been made there.

Somerville, with a reputation for being interested in music (and good at telling jokes, a skill that cut the tension at difficult meetings), was immediately appointed to the new hymnbook committee — which, indeed, had made a good start on the work before the 1894 Assembly made the project official. “The task before the Church,” Somerville wrote three years later in *The Westminster*, “was to prepare a hymnal which would be suitable for the expression of the religious feelings and spiritual aspirations of the one hundred thousand families of the Church, ‘old men and maidens, young men and children,’ of all grades of literary culture and religious experience.”

The committee was given a series of nervous and conflicting instructions about the place of the metrical Psalms. The principle of “selections” led to disputes about which Psalms were dispensable. In 1894-95 the committee worked intensively on the details of the book; Somerville found himself convener of a subcommittee on “litanies”. Later he was also acting convener of the subcommittee on tunes, and then a member of the “editorial committee” which made the final revisions. According to his recollections in *The Westminster*, the committee had been scrupulous

about ferreting out the original words to hymns, reversing the mutilations of “hymn-tinkers”, but was more flexible about tunes, seeking “the richest harmonies which were thought to be in reach of the majority of our choirs and congregations”.

The book, as approved by the 1896 General Assembly, contained 621 hymns, arranged by subject from “The Holy Trinity” to “Doxologies”. Hymn 1 was “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty”, which was familiar as the first of the “general” hymns in the Anglican landmark *Hymns Ancient and Modern* and had occupied the first position in the 1880 hymnal. Its traditional tune, “Nicaea”, is the one still in general use; the 1897 book offered both “Nicaea” and a tune by Samuel Wesley, “Trinity”, which has dropped out of use.

The committee called for tenders from printers, and gave a ten-year contract to the Oxford University Press, which would do the work in England. It “was thought advisable”, said McMurrich afterwards, to send someone to supervise; the duty fell on Somerville and the new chairman of the music subcommittee, Alexander MacMillan, minister of St. Enoch’s Church in Toronto. They were given considerable powers, as McMurrich tells it, presumably because of the difficulty of communication between Oxford and Toronto: “Instructions were at the same time given to the representatives to make any further corrections necessary, substitute tunes in any cases in which serious copyright difficulties might arise, complete negotiations as to copyright, convey the manuscripts to England, and supervise publication there. The preparation of alphabetical and metrical Indices of Tunes was committed to Mr. MacMillan.” Somerville and MacMillan sailed on the *Teutonic* in the first week of December 1896.

They spent their first few days in London, getting to know the Press officials at Paternoster Row: then as now, Oxford University Press did more of its work in the metropolis than in Oxford itself. Type styles and details of bookbinding had to be arranged, and there were page-by-page decisions about how the words and music should be arranged. They also made a start on the indexing. The *Presbyterian Book of Praise* has five indexes, and if MacMillan was responsible for those dealing with tunes, it seems likely that Somerville prepared the Index of Subjects and the Index of Scripture Texts Quoted.

The visitors had a chance to see something of the largest city in the world: “We have been shocked

with the sights of London today. Every bar & Saloon gaily lit up — crowds of well dressed men & women thronging into them. At the open door as we pass we see young women of 20 standing at the bar glass in hand.... So you see the whiskey bars — and the cigar shops and the churches are all open together — a very peculiar trinity.”

At Christmas they went to Scotland — en route almost losing the trunk containing the hymnal papers, Somerville reported by letter. On Christmas Eve they reached Glasgow, where they apparently visited with distant relatives of Somerville; MacMillan, too, had family in the area. A letter home describes a visit to Stonehouse, where the Somerville ancestors were buried, and where there were still “half-cousins” to meet. On the Sunday after Christmas Somerville preached at the village of Newton Means, enjoying what one author calls “the hospitality of the three P’s: plate, pillow, and pulpit”. There was a visit, too, to Edinburgh, grey and beautiful city where so much of Presbyterian history is concentrated. “Edinburgh is like Jerusalem,” said a letter home, “beautiful for situation — and the joy of the whole earth is Scotchmen”.

In January the delegates of the hymnal committee were in Oxford itself, where Somerville felt himself a part of another history. A monument marked the site where Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop who wrote most of the Book of Common Prayer, died a martyr in 1556. “It brought the tears to my eyes to see that Stone Cross,” Somerville wrote. On the same day he wrote to his daughter Mary that he and MacMillan had settled down to work on the hymnbook.

It did not all go smoothly, a letter from London suggests: “We have had a good deal of trouble in getting the printer to follow our plan.... He will insist on arranging it so as to have the tune of a hymn at the bottom of the left-hand page and its words at the top of the right hand page. We want to have music at the top of the pages where possible. It is slow work teaching an Englishman who knows it all — and far more”. But the January issue of *The Westminster* could cheerily announce: “Revs. Dr. Somerville and Alex. MacMillan, who are at present in Oxford, report a good beginning.”

By mid-January, Martha Somerville was with her husband in Oxford. After a few weeks MacMillan left Oxford for the more congenial surroundings of Edinburgh, where he lived in the house of his sister Margaret while correcting proofs and staying in close

touch with the printers. (Margaret MacMillan was herself a talented musician, and did the arrangement of one tune, “Meinhold”, which appears twice in the *Presbyterian Book of Praise*. If Alexander MacMillan himself did any of the arrangements, he took no credit for them.) He returned to Canada early in March. Somerville had come back sooner, though overstaying the two months’ leave which the Presbytery of Owen Sound had given him at the beginning of November: he was back in time for meetings in the second week of February.

The proofreading continued from a distance, and with the local help of Margaret MacMillan. It was a frustrating experience for all parties: “We have had considerable trouble with the Index of Scripture Texts,” Horace Hart of the Press was writing to MacMillan at the beginning of May 1897. That was a last-minute problem: but early copies of the book were on hand in June when the General Assembly met in Winnipeg. It was to be available “in one hundred and twelve different styles of binding” at varying prices.

Three members of the hymnal committee — MacMillan, Somerville, and the chairman, old William Gregg of Knox College — together presented the results of the work. Gregg assured the delegates, particularly those sensitive about the place of the Psalter, that they were “at liberty” to choose either a book with Psalm selections (122 of them, preceding the hymns) or one with the entire Psalter. Somerville’s remarks were along other lines: “Dr. Somerville spoke of the kindness of Mr. [Henry] Frowde, manager of the Oxford Press, and his desire to carry out the spirit of the contract even when the letter was not explicit. He then went into details showing how much better the arrangement of the pages, especially in the music editions is as compared with former editions or other books”.

Somerville did, however, have reservations about the quality of the eventual product, even hinting at some of them in print, when he wrote in *The Westminster* (May 1897) about the limitations of basing the new book so closely on the old one: “Experience showed that it would have been a more satisfactory method of preparation had [the committee] undertaken to make a complete table of contents embracing all the departments required to be represented in a Church hymnal, and then selected from the whole realm of hymn literature those most worthy to fill these departments. Had this plan been followed, the

work would have been more systematic, the book would have been more comprehensive and better balanced in its several parts even than it is.”

But the church welcomed its book with joy. Somerville, MacMillan and Gregg were voted an honorarium of \$250 each, “in connection with the special services rendered by them”. And commercially the *Presbyterian Book of Praise* was a stunning success: a year later the hymnal committee could report that it had sold 366,100 copies of its new book, at prices ranging from 8 cents to 90 cents. Somerville’s home congregation at Division Street had such confidence in the book that the session voted to adopt it even before it was published. The 1898 Assembly happily voted to divide the profits between its two benevolent funds, that for Aged and Infirm Ministers and that for Ministers’ Widows and Orphans, neither of which was ever solvent on any other basis.

In spiritual terms the new book was also a success — at any rate, wrangling over the proper place of hymns in worship virtually disappeared after it was published. In 1898 the “life and work” committee of the Synod of Toronto and Kingston said it thought the new book, with its convenient selection of Psalms, had actually worked to increase, rather than decrease, the use of the Psalter in ordinary worship.

However, it was clear that the Psalter was imperfect; there were new and improved versions that were not in widespread use, and there were doggerel passages from the old *Scottish Psalter* which could do with replacing. By the time it triumphantly delivered the new hymnal to Winnipeg in 1897, the committee was also reporting that it had joined in an international effort to produce “a revised and improved metrical version of the whole Psalter” — in cooperation this time not with the Scots, but with six Presbyterian and “Reformed” churches in the United States. Hymnal committee members attended annual meetings at which the Psalms were worked through in painful detail; at last in 1905 the Assembly was told that the job was finished, and it authorized the purchase of sample copies for presbyteries to inspect.

After about a decade, talk of a new hymnal began again. The 1906 Assembly meanwhile voted to give Oxford a publishing contract for another five years, and to authorize a “supplementary” leaflet of tunes to accompany the present book. Revenue continued to come in — \$2,800 in royalties in 1907, to be handed over to the benevolent funds by the hymnal committee treasurer. (McMurrich died in 1908; Somerville

succeeded him as committee treasurer, MacMillan as secretary.) The following year the income was still higher, as westward expansion of the church created a demand for 82,092 hymnals in various editions. It rose again in 1910, but by that time the committee was soliciting suggestions and new material, with an eye to a revision of the book before much longer.

Hugh McKellar, in a 1986 paper, observes that “By 1912, when proposals for revising the hymnbook again surfaced at Assembly, in view of the impending expiry of the publishing contract, union with the Methodist and Congregational Churches appeared far more imminent than the outbreak of a major war. Since the Methodists were known to be in the process of revising the hymnal which had served them since 1880, MacMillan and his colleagues were directed to explore the possibility of easing the way into union by preparing a hymnbook satisfactory to both churches. The Methodist committee, while most cordial, explained that altering the mandate of their General Conference which had set them to work was beyond their power; also, they wanted far more hymns by Charles Wesley, and far fewer metrical psalms, than the Presbyterians deemed tolerable. However, they intended to include over 300 hymns which were already familiar to Presbyterians; such a substantial shared repertoire must enhance the prospects of a union which was then considered more desirable than inevitable.”

The hymnal committee — renamed the “committee on church praise” from 1913 — reported in 1915 that it had given up on the Methodists, but its work had been given an impetus by the full-time employment of MacMillan as the church’s agent for hymnody. In part he was to do the paperwork of the committee, but more prominently, he was to travel to the colleges and congregations, teaching ministers and choir members how to make musical praise more varied and effective. Proposals for new hymns, and old hymns to be dropped from a revised book, had been circulated to the presbyteries, and their comments were being found useful, the 1915 report suggested. The new book would have more hymns suitable for young people, two new sections (“Brotherhood and Service”, “The Nation and Commonweal”) and a selection of “hymns suitable for evangelistic meetings”. By 1917 Somerville was chairing the editorial subcommittee.

Minutes of the hymnal committee survive to show much of the detailed work. On March 26, 1913, there

was discussion of “Shall We Gather at the River” — a little emotional for Presbyterian tastes, but it had been found useful in “work amongst men”. In April 1916 the committee considered English translations of “O Canada”, which was not yet recognized as the national anthem, but voted instead for Albert Durrant Watson’s hymn to the same tune, “Lord of the Lands, Beneath Thy Bending Skies”. The book includes the Canadian hymn “From Ocean Unto Ocean Our Land Shall Own Thee Lord”, by Nova Scotia’s Robert Murray, which had been sung at the 1908 General Assembly. In November 1917, meeting by this time in Somerville’s office in Toronto, the committee voted to drop the “Battle Hymn of the Republic”, which had earlier been added. And at last the editorial work was done.

The war, which meant paper rationing in Britain and difficulties in North Atlantic shipping, brought delay in publication of the book. This third hymnal of the Presbyterian Church in Canada finally printed in 1918 reached Canada just as the November armistice was signed. The Westminster Co., publishers of *The Presbyterian* in Toronto, was in charge of distribution, selling the various editions at prices ranging from 20 cents to \$2. The reviews were favourable.

The new *Book of Praise* remained in use in the Presbyterian Church in Canada until 1972, and by former Presbyterian congregations that entered the United Church of Canada until the new United Church *Hymnary* was published in 1930. Alexander MacMillan would become secretary of the committee which compiled the 1930 book, whose eloquent Preface declares that it draws on all the United Church’s traditions: “Here will be found the stateliness and tenderness of the Scottish Psalter, the glowing passion and evangelical fervour of the Wesleys, and the lyrical qualities by which Congregational Hymnody has been ever distinguished.” But John Somerville was not involved; he had died in May 1919.

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This paper draws on Hugh McKellar’s paper, “150 Years of Presbyterian Hymnody in Canada,” presented to the Canadian Society of Presbyterian History in 1986. Specific references to John Somerville come from his personal correspondence, in the Archives of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and from church records. See also Singing the Lord’s Song in a Strange Land: Hymnody in the History of North American Protestantism, edited by Edith L. Blumhofer (2014).

A Review Six Books on Human Sexuality by Peter Bush, Winnipeg

In response to the Assembly's request for a year of prayer and discernment regarding human sexuality, *Presbyterian History* presents the following review of six recently published books offering a range of Christian responses to questions regarding human sexuality.

This review follows Brownson's pattern, using "traditionalist" and "revisionist" to broadly describe the two views present in this conversation. Given space constraints the reviews will not be comprehensive.

Grant's book is not about LGBTQ discussions, instead is a devastating critique of present-day thinking about and practice of sexuality both inside and outside the church. He suggests romanticism and realism dominate ethical thinking about sex, either promoting the view there is a perfect match out there to fulfill all one's needs, or declaring as long as two people are consenting adults no one has a right to comment. Both views arise from a consumerist view of the world, "Sex clearly holds a privileged place within our culture; if we worship in the temple of consumerism, then sex is its god." (165) Signs of consumerism's "insatiable quest for personal gratification" (175) are evident in how sex has been separated from relationship and intimacy, even being separated from the need for another person as the explosion of pornography illustrates.

Hope is to be found in reclaiming a Christian vision of sexuality, which applies equally to married and single. A Christian vision is eschatological, our sexuality is part of God's larger unfolding plan for creation; it is metaphysical, aligns our sexual lives with the kingdom of God, both present and yet to be revealed; it is formational, shaping our character as we journey towards spiritual maturity; it is missional, giving purpose to our sexuality as a witness to God's mission in the world. (143ff)

Borrowing from the early church and Bernard of Clairvaux, Grant argues the way to live this vision is not through the acquisition of more knowledge, instead it is for the individual's heart to set its desire, its passion, on the Triune God. He uses the term "thinking heart" to describe the intimate linkage needed between knowledge of God and God's ways and the desire to be in relationship with God. When the thinking heart is properly directed towards God, the vision can be lived. This re-directing of one's desire is not done alone, it is to be accomplished within a community of faith where all, single and married, together have a desire for God. Grant

emphasizes the need for churches to become such places that disciple people, who are sexual beings, to orient their desire towards God's vision for sexuality.

Grant's book is deeply practical, in conversation with the realities of present-day sexuality, providing an important grounding for any conversation about a Christian understanding of human sexuality.

Brownson, noting the difficulties in both the traditionalist and revisionist positions, sets out to solve the problems faced by revisionists. He argues justice and love are not enough upon which to build a sexual ethic encompassing same-sex and opposite-sex eroticism. Such an ethic requires Biblical foundations.

A careful reader of the Biblical text, Brownson argues it is not enough to simply ask what the Biblical text says, it is essential to ask why the text says what it says. This he describes as the moral logic of the text. Further, he distinguishes what is normal (commonly occurring) from what is normative (something that is the prescribed way it should be).

Arguing the Bible regards neither gender complementarity nor procreation as essential to marriage, Brownson frames marriage as a committed kinship bond. The place for sex is within such married two-person relationships, "Of course, all people are called to exercise sexual self-control for periods in their lives, both before marriage and during those periods in marriage when sex isn't possible or appropriate." (141) Within Brownson's understanding of sexual orientation as fixed (not fluid) and binary (heterosexual or homosexual, there appears to be no space for bisexuality in his proposal), his proposal addresses a number of the challenges faced by those wanting same-sex relationships affirmed by the church.

Brownson's discussion of Romans 1 leans heavily on his contextualizing the passage as addressing the sexual excess of Gaius' imperial court. He argues Paul would have known nothing of relationships between men coming close to what exists in contemporary culture. This contextualization and the argument appear shaky in the light of the fact that Plato wrote about relationships between men in ancient Greece which have strong parallels to contemporary experience. Thus it appears that Romans 1 applies to a wider field than Brownson allows, raising questions about Brownson's interpretation of the text.

Brownson's discussion of celibacy challenges the far-too easy way traditionalists suggest LGBTQ persons should be celibate. He argues, on the basis of the Biblical text, celibacy is a spiritual gift like other spiritual gifts, such as teaching and tongues. The traditionalist argument would require the gift of celibacy to be given to entire group of people, something it appears the Spirit has not done.

Brownson's book has been widely cited since its publication, shaping the conversation about a Biblical understanding of same-sex relationships.

DeYoung, focusing on the Biblical material central to the debate, makes an articulate traditionalist argument. As he himself notes he is not saying anything that has not been said before, however because of his wide reading he has marshalled a collection of unexpected sources most readers will be unaware of.

He cites Thomas Hubbard, an expert on gay and lesbian experience in the ancient world, noting of first century Rome,

...homosexuality in this era may have ceased to be merely another practice of personal pleasure and began to be viewed as an essential and central category of personal identity, exclusive of and antithetical to heterosexual orientation. (84)

If Hubbard is correct, then the New Testament writers were aware of homosexual orientation as a category of personal identity not just as an activity.

DeYoung's careful work on the difficult texts of I Cor. 6:9 and I Tim. 1:10 is helpful in the conversation of the "7" Biblical texts.

One of the book's best parts is the call to uproot "the idolatry of the nuclear family." (119) As long as the primary locus for Christian communal life is the nuclear family there is no place for the single (either by choice or circumstance) person to belong. The church is the new community into which all are welcomed. For the church, the people of God become the new family.

DeYoung assumes procreation is essential to marriage, even as he notes some "one man-one woman" married couples are infertile or past the age of child-bearing. At this point his argument is less than compelling, but more troubling is an example of a place where the book feels pastorally insensitive and even harsh. While DeYoung claims to have LGBTQ persons within the congregation he serves, his words and approach do not seem welcoming of those who would disagree with him. This does not mean his arguments should be rejected, but traditional-

ists using his arguments will need to be more measured in their tone if they are going to find a hearing.

VanderWal-Gritter was the director of an "ex-gay" ministry seeking to support gay and lesbian persons desiring to become straight. The book, in part, recounts her journey from being traditionalist to her present position, best described as revisionist. To be precise, her suggestion is the church (she is a member of the Christian Reformed Church) set aside attempts to settle the debates about same-sex relationships by having the issue declared "a disputable matter". That would allow space for congregations to find their own way through this debate.

Central to her book are stories told by LGBTQ Christians, both of the ways in which they tried to change but found that road impossible, and how they were ostracized from the church. These narratives are harrowing to read, leaving the reader frustrated by the lack of welcome shown to people who desired to find a place where they can express their faith in Jesus Christ. She tells the story of a gay man, a lapsed Pentecostal, who wanted her help in finding a "Holy Spirit centered" church to attend. VanderWal-Gritter phoned a congregation and asked if they would welcome a gay person in worship. She was told a pastor would need to interview the man before he would be welcome to attend worship. That a congregation would take such a position is deeply opposed to the picture Jesus paints in the parable of the sower, the good news of the gospel is shared without discrimination, or a prior interview.

Story is powerful, but it is always worth asking whose stories are being told, and are there stories that are not being told or are not being allowed? Further a theology built entirely on personal stories, has no tools with which to evaluate any new proposals beyond personal experience. And historically following experience and the emotions related to experience has, at times, led to some devastating results.

VanderWal-Gritter does recognize the complexity of gay Christians in the church in the face of world Christianity. Her swift and un-nuanced answer, the traditionalists in Africa and the Caribbean (the places she cites) will have to bend, demonstrates little appreciation of post-colonial thought.

VanderWal-Gritter's work invites churches to think through how welcoming they are of difference, be it of gay Christians or others. For this she is to be thanked.

Hirsch, a traditionalist, has given us a book which demonstrates through story what a welcoming (but not

affirming) church could be like. She describes crashing a mid-week prayer meeting in a very conservative church along with her other housemates who had a variety of sexual orientations and made use of a variety of drugs. They were invited to join the prayer meeting and also to worship the following Sunday. They went and found a welcome. The pastor built connections, mentoring them in the faith. He held to his convictions regarding sexual practice and drug use, but realized those were secondary issues to Debra and her friends discovering God's love for them and God's call in their lives to be the people of God. In this story and others, Hirsch shows what it looks like to show welcome.

Hirsch's welcome stands on a double truth, foremost, human beings are made in the image of God. Regardless of orientation or experience, all people are made in the image of God. The secondary truth is "Every human being on the planet is sexually broken. Everybody's orientation is disoriented. All of us are on a journey toward wholeness; not one of us is excluded." (120) By placing the statements in this order Hirsch can highlight that as broken people we are accepted before we are whole. Human beings are accepted into the kingdom of God beginning a process towards wholeness, a work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Hirsch presents an enhanced Wesleyan Quadrilateral, a way of spiritual discernment. The enhanced model surrounds the regular four elements of Scripture, Reason, Tradition, Experience with a circle which includes Love for God, The Work of the Holy Spirit, A Pre-commitment to Obedience, and Pursuit of Truth. These enhancements deepen the conversation directing it towards God as our first love, which is a helpful evolution of the Quadrilateral.

Revisionists are likely to respond negatively to her biblical interpretation. While traditionalists may think the welcome she describes is too open. Still others will be turned off by Hirsch's gritty language; for example, the introduction is entitled "Foreplay" and the conclusion "Climax." It may be that with both sides of this debate uncomfortable with Hirsch, she has found a space in which revisionist and traditionalist can begin a conversation with each somewhat off balance.

DeFranza raises different questions about human sexuality, is there space for intersex people within the church? Will the church be a place where they can find a home? Intersex persons are born with an ambiguous sex, having XY chromosomes but female genitals, or XX with ap-

parent male genitals. There is a range of ambiguity. About 1 in every 2,500 babies are born intersexed.

There is more in this book worthy of comment than there is space to make comment. Some points:

First, DeFranza presents a movingly positive description of celibacy. While she is not using the term in the narrow way Brownson does, her plea for celibacy (not engaging in or desiring to engage in sexual activity) to be present in the conversation as a healthy option is compelling. She notes 33.4% of women report hypoactive sexual desire (low libido), and 31% of men face sexual dysfunction challenges. A focus on genital sexual activity leads to frustration and alienation for about one third of people.

Second, she quotes C.S. Lewis, "Eros is driven to promise what Eros of itself cannot perform" (220) thereby warning those who believe sex will answer desires that can only be addressed by a different kind of love, agape.

DeFranza's work is sensitive, pastoral, and rigorously theological. Her critique of both traditionalist and revisionist positions for their failure to reflect on intersexed is pointed, and may create the space for a differently shaped conversation about human sexuality. She writes,

Certainly, the complexity of human sexuality, coupled with the challenge of biblical interpretation and application, should lead to humility on the part of all who wrestle with these issues. (268)

With those wise words we end this review.

Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age*, (Brazos, 2015).

James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, (Eerdmans, 2013).

Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?*, (Crossway, 2015).

Wendy VanderWal-Gritter, *Generous Spaciousness: Responding to Gay Christians in the Church*, (Brazos, 2014).

Debra Hirsch, *Redeeming Sex: Naked Conversations about Sexuality and Spirituality*, (IVP, 2015).

Megan DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God*, (Eerdmans, 2015).

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