



Liberated Christians

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Promoting Intimacy and Other-Centered Sexuality

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SEXUAL FREEDOM, POLYAMORY AND CHRISTIANITY: THE CASE FOR COMPATIBILITY

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Introduction: Another Christian's Pilgrimage

While planning a new article on sex and Christianity for this newsletter, I came across an article by Scott LaMont printed in "Loving More" magazine's Winter '96 issue. Scott, also a supporter of Liberated Christians, describes himself as a conservative, evangelical Christian who had been interested in poly relationships for years before and during his marriage. Eventually he began to research these issues to determine whether what the church had always taught him was true.

He says: "I had always been assured that in the new covenant, Jesus had abolished polygamy, but nobody ever had the verse handy."

He continues: " I looked up everything Jesus had to say about marriage--but I still could not find anything about monogamy or polygamy. Well, maybe it wasn't Jesus, maybe old sex-negative Paul? No dice. None of the other Apostles either. Perhaps one of the prophets at the end of the old testament era? Nothing..."

"So now I had established that Jesus had not outlawed polygamy, nor had anyone else in the biblical era. I

had also found a whole bunch of other stuff that indicated that I had been misled during all of my church life with regard to what the Bible had to teach about human sexuality."

Thoughts on My Pilgrimage

I very much identify with Scott's experience and his conclusions. On the single subject of nonmonogamy it might appear that nothing more needs to be said. Since there are many related subjects to deal with and since theologians won't be put off from expounding their views, I will use this opportunity to update and expand some of my views on sex in general and polyamory in particular as these views have been presented in various articles in the Liberated Christians Newsletter.

People from many different religious backgrounds subscribe to this newsletter. Many from more conservative backgrounds appreciate discussions of a biblical and theological nature that help them understand and deal with the specifically Christian dimensions of past hang-ups about sexuality. Many others do not have some of these issues and simply want ideas about how to explore their sexuality more productively. I hope that this article will offer something constructive to many types of readers.

As the readers of this newsletter know, Scott is not the first or last Christian to ask the same questions about sex and poly relationships, become disillusioned with the church's answers and finally seek the truth. The church has always taught us that sexual gratification and most sexual relationships are unspiritual and that polygamy was outlawed somewhere in the New Testament. Many Christians today are discovering, like Scott, that sexual freedom and poly relationships are in fact very compatible with a true faith in Christ.

I, like Scott, consider myself a "biblical Christian," that is one who takes the Hebrew and Christian scriptures seriously as the word of God. This position may not be very welcome among swingers and other poly-oriented groups because the people in these groups have usually seen Christianity as the enemy since it seriously condemns their lifestyle choices.

At one time I would also have been the enemy of these lifestyles, but as those acquainted with Liberated Christians know, I was "converted" from those old traditional ways and now believe in and promote responsible sexual freedom and variety in intimate relationships. What may seem odd to those in poly lifestyles is that I still fellowship in evangelical or "born again" type Christian circles. There is much error in the church regarding sexuality and sexual relationships. This does not negate the good to be found there. Personally, I will not be intimidated by this error, but will seek to correct it as much as I can and yet remain part of the church that God has established for the good of his people, humanly flawed though it is.

My personal spiritual life has been radically improved as a result of being liberated in my sexuality. Why? Because sexuality is at the core of our humanity and if that part of our lives is unhealthy, imprisoned and restricted, one's entire person will be unhealthy. Consequently our relationship with God is damaged as well as our relationship with others.

The Gospel of Christ and Sexual Liberty and Fulfillment

A central problem in the church's misunderstanding of sexuality has to do with its perception that sexuality is somehow fundamentally sinful, thus rendering most if not all sexual acts also sinful. In the section below I will discuss the origin of this problem. Here I want to point out that if we are to follow the basic teaching of the New Testament, we should see sexual sin not so much in terms of **acts** as in terms of **alienation** from the healthy, normal sexuality and sexual fulfillment intended for us by God. The New Testament view of sin is one of alienation from God; this is the condition remedied through the redemptive work of Christ: Christ restores the relationship between mankind and God.

It is only through this restoration that human life takes on its fullest **meaning** and only in this way are human beings rendered truly free to live life to the fullest. Thus, a sexuality that has meaning and can reach the

highest fulfillment in a spiritual sense is that which has been restored to its proper relationship with the God who ordained it. It is here that we find the fundamental link between **sexuality** and **spirituality**. It is also here that we find the basis for a true sexual freedom, a freedom that **in love** honors both God and the human lives and relationships that experience it.

The gospel of Christ is a gospel of the freedom, a freedom that enables human beings to live life to the fullest. A sexuality that is bound hand and foot with artificial and legalistic religious restrictions cannot participate in that freedom and thus cannot be a true **Christian** sexuality.

The Church and the Problem of Pleasure

It will go without saying to most readers of this newsletter that the dominant attitude of traditional Christianity towards sexuality has been a negative one. This attitude has spawned innumerable religious rules and regulations designed to restrict, repress and otherwise regulate the sexual behavior of church members and even the behavior of those who may not be associated with organized Christianity, but who merely live in Christianized societies.

What is often overlooked by both critics and supporters of this Christian sexual ethic is that underlying or closely associated with Christian sex-negativism is the "problem of pleasure." Yet, in recent years myriad authors who have plumbed the depths of Christian history have discovered and explored this link. Very early in Christian history Christian teachers began to associate sexual pleasure with sin. From a theological point of view, the primary source for this belief was a mistaken view of the nature of the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The notion early gained acceptance that original sin had something to do with sex and sexual pleasure. The great theologian Augustine, the man to whom all branches of Christianity owe their greatest debt for the early systematizing of their theology, developed the view of original sin which prevails today in the church. This view holds that the sin of Adam and Eve is somehow transmitted throughout history by inheritance from these original parents.

As I write this, I have on my desk an excellent book dealing with these issues. It is "Adam, Eve and the Serpent," by Elaine Pagels. On its cover is a reproduction of a classic painting depicting Adam and Eve taking the forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. As they are typically shown in artistic renderings, our first parents are naked, but the leaves of a grapevine conveniently cover their genitals. We have all seen such paintings. We should be conscious that they are but a parable of the pervasive embarrassment in Christianity regarding our sexuality.

Theologians have differed for millennia over exactly how this transmission of sin occurs. For some, sin takes on a quasi-physical character and is transmitted via physical conception. For others the path is of a more "spiritual" or psychological kind, yet definitely progresses from parent to child down through the generations of human history. Whatever view has been held, however, the notion of a sinful taint somehow related to the sex act has prevailed in the church. Upon this foundation an almost implacable opposition to sexual pleasure has accompanied the Christian teaching on sin and redemption.

It can be clearly documented from many sources that the basic negative attitudes towards sexuality that permitted the development of such an opposition to sexual pleasure did not originate with the Hebrew people of the Old Testament, from whose spiritual fountain Christianity flowed. Nor can these attitudes be found in the teachings of Jesus or the writers of the New Testament in spite of centuries of effort by the church to use these sources to justify such attitudes.

Rather, these views were cultural, philosophical and religious concepts imported from Mid-eastern and Greek sources. Early on these views became confused with some of the teachings of the New Testament which bore superficial resemblance to them. Eventually these views took over the theology of the church relative to sexuality.

The opposition to sexual pleasure has often been accompanied in the church by an opposition to many or most of the other physical or "earthly" pleasures of life and even those associated more directly with human intellectual or emotional life. Many early Christian teachers believed in a rigid asceticism which denied the spiritual value of food and drink, comfortable clothing and shelter, the pleasures of social activities, even laughter and play.

A major part of the distrust of the physical realm has been a distrust of the **senses**. This has been particularly true when it comes to sexual pleasure, but Christians have also often depreciated all of the senses as leading to over much indulgence in physical pleasure, whether those are associated with food (a major competitor with sex for lowest value) or even the enjoyment of seeing and smelling the roses. All have been suspect at times as taking the Christian's focus from God. The tragedy is that it is God himself who has given us not only the senses, but those things in the world to which the senses respond.

Connected with this distrust of the senses has been a suspicion of the capacity of the mind to imagine sense experiences which may or may not be fulfilled in reality--in other words, **fantasies**. The church's problem with fantasies has been particularly troublesome in the realm of sexuality, for the unlimited and uninhibited nature of sexual fantasy has underscored the fear of the loss of rational control in the sexual pleasure experience. Yet fantasy is simply the capacity of the mind to create wonderful experiences, sexual or otherwise, for the sheer joy or fun of exploring them.

In its opposition to physical pleasures and such things as fantasy, it can truly be said that in many ways the church has been the world's biggest wet blanket!

Behind much of this opposition to the physical pleasures in particular lies the unbiblical view that the physical world, including the human body, is essentially corrupt and therefore the source of much temptation and moral decadence. This idea is the product of the same Mid-eastern and Greek philosophy mentioned above. This view, often referred to as Gnosticism, very early came to be incorporated into Christian teaching and has corrupted the church's understanding of human life ever since. The linkage between this anti-body philosophy and the church's negative attitudes to sexuality is easy to see.

Opposition to pleasure has typically been linked with the view that the Christian life is one of hard work, personal denial and rigid devotion to religious ritual. The central flaw in this dark theology is the notion that God is a hard taskmaster whose favor and acceptance must be earned through a kind of abject, unwilling servitude.

Even though this negative thinking about pleasure was not very conspicuous in the church until the second or third centuries, early forms of it were **opposed**, not **supported** by some of the New Testament writers. It is significant that one of the most important biblical texts on this subject was written by St. Paul, who is often portrayed as anti-sexual and even anti-marriage. In 1Timothy 4:4-5 Paul writes against some teachers in the church "who forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer."

This is an astonishing statement. In it Paul, in effect, opposes those who forbid sexual pleasure. The purpose these teachers had for opposing marriage in the early church was to promote an ascetic spiritual "purity," untainted by the "flesh." What we should actually understand from Paul's teaching is that God himself has ordained and approved of such pleasure and has given it as a **spiritual gift** for the good of those who can receive it, as from him, with thanksgiving.

Even more remarkable is the fact that Paul associates these anti-pleasure teachings with those who "depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons."! (1Timothy 4:1) He even calls

them "liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron." (verse 2)

What are we to conclude from these teachings? Simply, in my view, that **God celebrates physical pleasure and provides it for the good of those who believe in him**. Let's make no mistake at this point; rather let's be quite clear: this teaching turns on its head the traditional anti-pleasure, anti-sexual view of traditional Christian doctrine.

I would go as far as to say that this understanding places on very perilous spiritual ground those contemporary Christian teachers (and there are many) whose ministries tend to focus on efforts to reverse the so-called sexual revolution and turn both church and society backwards in terms of the sexual openness and positiveness that has been accomplished in recent decades, flawed and incomplete as those efforts may have been.

And speaking of doctrine, it is my view that any teaching which claims to be Christian or biblical must be judged not only by its technical agreement with Scripture, but also by its **effect** or **legacy** in the lives of those who teach and follow it. It cannot be denied that the anti-pleasure, anti-sexual doctrines of Christianity have left a trail of emotionally and spiritually disturbed people in their wake. These are people who have punished and imprisoned themselves and others in a life of guilt and shame relative to the good gifts of pleasure that God has given them, people who have never experienced the boundless riches of joy which could have been theirs and for which God could have been thanked and glorified in their lives. These are people who are alienated from their God-given sexuality and to that extent "living in sin" more than those who do not profess a Christian faith but are nevertheless fulfilling their sexual selves.

Lest I be misunderstood on the one hand or on the other hand some conservative thinker reading this article should attempt to trap me by my own argument, let me urge two cautions:

First, what has been said is not an endorsement of an irresponsible pursuit of pleasure, sexual or otherwise, in disregard of the biblical principles of **love** which call on us to guard the well-being of ourselves or others in all of our activities. In terms of the sexual sphere, the way I have interpreted Scripture does not provide an excuse for an obnoxious, discourteous or careless approach to sexual activity, which might include such foolish behavior as disregard for the emotional sensitivities of others or the neglect of various safety and health concerns in alternative sexual lifestyles.

Second, I am not unmindful of the reference to marriage in the biblical passage quoted above. Some might use this to oppose my liberal views regarding premarital and extra-marital sex (I am not referring here to cheating affairs, but to consensual swinging and other forms of polyamory). Premarital sex and responsible poly lifestyles will be specifically discussed later in this article, as will extra-marital affairs.

To sum up this section, Christianity has traditionally and systematically opposed most of the physical and even intellectual and emotional pleasures of life, most especially those associated with sexuality. Such opposition, however, cannot be defended from the Bible. Instead the Bible supports a celebration of such pleasures as God's gifts to his creatures. The gospel of Christ and the teachings of the New Testament in particular point the way to a spiritual freedom in reconciliation with God and to a sexual freedom that flows from that reconciliation.

The Power of Sex-negativism: The Institutionalizing of Christianity

According to Jacques Ellul, a uniquely insightful Christian historian, there were several paths that early Christianity could have taken in terms of its organized structure. The path chosen would determine whether Christianity would become a force for the full freedom of mankind as offered in the gospel of Christ or a force for the control and restriction of freedom. One path would have been to live in a free spiritual community like that portrayed in the early chapters of the book of Acts. Such a community or communities

would have had to be small in order to prevent abuses of the freedoms enjoyed. A second path would have been to try to live in this same freedom but in larger numbers, necessitating an organized or institutional social body. Such a situation, Ellul believes, would have rapidly deteriorated into moral anarchy. ("The Subversion of Christianity," p. 70)

It was another and fateful path which Christianity ultimately chose. This was the path, begun near the end of the second century, of converting the masses to Christianity, "to bring them into the church, but with no hope that these thousands of people can live as if they were in the kingdom of God" (that is, in a full spiritual freedom). Such a freedom is not practically possible in such large numbers so quickly "converted." Thus, these people "will have to be trained and their manner of life controlled." The critical point is that from this time forward "Christianity thus becomes morality, the very opposite of what was intended by Jesus...." (p. 70)

This "morality" is the system of religious rules and regulations that were necessary to control the lives of these masses of converts, ostensibly to bring them into obedience to the teachings of the Bible, but in fact to primarily secure and maintain a kind of religious social order.

In this system of morality the freedom which Christ came to bring to mankind through his redemptive act is "subverted" into a system which limits freedom in the interests of order and control. This version of Christianity does not conform to the gospel of Christ or the teachings of the New Testament as a whole.

"The Controllers:" Church Hierarchy and its Results

As in any organized or institutional social system, if there are people to be "controlled," there must be people to do the controlling.

Having taken the path of mass conversions and the creation of an elaborate system of religious morality to minutely regulate the lives of the "faithful," it was inevitable that a human power structure be developed to oversee the administration of this moral system.

This power structure, this hierarchy of human leadership, was developed in direct contradiction to the words and example of Jesus and the teachings of the apostles. Both the gospels and epistles of the New Testament abundantly demonstrate that the intended leadership of the church should have consisted of those whose goal it was to serve the flock of God as undershepherds to Christ the Chief Shepherd. As he gave himself for the good of the flock, so the undershepherds were to do the same. The purpose of this pattern was no less than to liberate the people of God in practical terms from the tyranny of spiritual oppression.

This purpose is in direct opposition to the idea that leaders should rule the people. In the biblical teachings it is the leaders who are clearly the servants, not the people, although all are taught ultimately to serve one another.

One text from the teaching of Jesus and one from the Apostle Peter will serve to illustrate these principles. In Mark 10:42-45 Jesus, speaking to two of his disciples, says: "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In 1 Peter 5:2-4 Peter exhorts the elders of the church: "Care for the flock of God that is your charge...not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will obtain the unfading crown of glory." There is an interesting play on words in this text, which is repeated almost exactly by Paul in Acts 20:28 in his exhortations to the elders of the Ephesian church. In the Greek, the word translated "care for" and the word for "flock" come from the same root. The

flock consists of those who need care. The task of the elder or shepherd is to provide that care, not by domineering or dictatorial control, but by gentle guidance and nurturing.

What is the point of all of this? Jesus and his Apostles are doing nothing less than turning upside down the traditional roles of ruler and servant that were not only common in their day but remain so today. The ruler becomes the servant, although it is taken a step further in other New Testament texts in that all of the people of God become servants of one another, caring more for others than for themselves.

The church was intended to be a **fellowship** of people who would share their gifts, abilities and material goods with one another for the mutual benefit of all. This is the teaching of the New Testament. Lest I be accused of being too hard on the church and its leadership, it must be pointed out that throughout the church's history many of its leaders, even those who were clearly part of a defective power system, have given themselves unselfishly for the good of the people of God in obedience to the teachings and example of Christ and the apostles. So have countless numbers of the laity. Many lives have been laid down, many people healed, many people loved sacrificially by such Christians and the world is surely a better place for their example. This ought not to be forgotten, but the failure of the church's power structure to truly liberate those under its care must also be remembered. The repression of human sexuality and freedom in relationships is not least in the litany of the sins of this power structure.

In terms of formal structure the church did not heed the teachings of Christ and the apostles and, indeed, perhaps could not do so given the path taken as mentioned above. Instead, a massive ruling hierarchy developed in which power became concentrated in the few who controlled the development and application of the church's teaching. This teaching, which tended in the direction of moralistic rules and regulations, became more and more repressive as it and the power of the hierarchy grew greater.

Marriage, Monogamy and the Power Structure of the Church

Not only did "moral" authority become concentrated in the hands of the few, but the idea also gained preeminence that a "higher" spirituality also resided in those few. The non-Christian idea that a higher spirituality lay in celibacy led to the notion of celibacy for the church leadership. This elevated these people even further above the plane of the laity who were "permitted" to marry in order to escape the sin of lust, but who clearly could not attain the level of spiritual purity of the clergy.

Many books have documented the connections between the rise of a celibate clergy and the oppression of sexuality in the church. One of the most sweeping results of this oppression for sexual freedom and for the development of the basic social system of Western culture came from the development of the notion of church-sanctioned marriage and enforced monogamy.

Until the Middle Ages the church did not regulate marriage in a formal sense. The marriage customs of various cultures were considered acceptable. With the consolidation of the power of the church in the Roman Papacy and the flowering of the church's opposition to sexual activity, the church took on the task of controlling the sex lives of the faithful in many ways, not the least of which was in demanding final authority over marriage rights. Not only was marriage generally discouraged in favor of lifelong celibacy, even for the laity, but elaborate rules were created relating to sexual relations between married people that were intended to both restrict their conjugal activities and instill guilt and fear as well. The penitential manuals of the medieval church, used by priests in levying penance for sins, are full of excruciating moral punishments for engaging in what we understand today are the most natural and normal of sexual acts.

By this point the church had ignored the teachings of the Bible to such an extent that it apparently never occurred to the leadership that no authority whatever for the regulation of marriage or even sex by the institutional church can be found in its pages.

As for monogamy, Scott LaMont's comments quoted at the beginning of this article are pertinent, namely that nobody ever seems to have a biblical text handy to prove that monogamy is the highest form of human relationships or the only marital form sanctioned by God. The fact is that there is no biblical proof that monogamy was ever prescribed for the church as a whole. The only realistic text on the subject in the New Testament is 1 Timothy 3:4 (repeated in Titus 1:6) in which Paul exhorts church leaders to be "husbands of one wife." Debate has raged for centuries as to the meaning of this passage. The most likely meaning is that it is indeed an exhortation **to the leaders of the particular local churches in question** to be monogamous. It is likely that the purpose of this exhortation was to prevent scandal in churches whose largest membership was of Jewish origin at a time when polygamy had generally passed away among the Jews. Paul and Peter give exhortations regarding dress and head covering for women (1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 1 Peter 3:3) for the likely purpose of encouraging Christian women to distinguish themselves from the common appearance of prostitutes of the day. In the same way the application of the Timothy and Titus passages is limited to the cultural and time setting of the day and the injunction cannot be construed as a blanket requirement for either leaders or laity beyond those contexts.

Many scriptures have been twisted in the history of the church in an attempt to prove a monogamous rule, but the interpretations do not stand up under serious scrutiny in their contexts. The classic example is Genesis 2:24, the text on leaving father and mother and cleaving to one's wife. This text is repeated various places in the New Testament, including by Jesus in Matthew 19:4-6. In the first place, the Jews of the Old Testament never understood this text as prohibiting polygamy and it is never cited for this purpose in the Old Testament. No Jewish authority in history called for a ban on polygamy until 1040 AD, although for social and economic, not moral, reasons the practice had probably begun to disappear among the Jews during the captivities.

Jesus' use of the passage in Matthew 19 is in the context of a exhorting the Jews regarding their careless practices of divorce (see verses 7-9) and has no application to the question of monogamy.

One of the errors in the attempt to support monogamy from this passage has been to take the reference to "one" flesh as a numerical reference and therefore as meaning that each person shall have only "one" mate. But this interpretation is completely off the point of the text. The reference is not to numerical oneness but to the unitary oneness of Adam and Eve. The interpretation and application of this text elsewhere in Scripture must follow this meaning and, indeed, that is what we find in the New Testament. In particular, the well-known teaching about marriage by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 quotes this same Genesis passage and clearly shows that the unitary sense was understood by Paul. Greek lexicons also support this meaning of the Greek word for "one" in the Matthew passage and in other places where the Genesis passage is quoted in the New Testament.

In summary, there is no support for the notion of monogamy in Genesis 2:24 or in any text in which this one is discussed, for it is true that a person can certainly be in meaningful union, emotionally, spiritually and sexually with more than one mate.

As for the **form** and **definition** of marriage, neither is described or prescribed in detail in Scripture as if God endorses or requires one and only one idea about this social structure. As noted above, until the Middle Ages the church simply accepted the ideas of marriage that were practiced by various cultures. This may come as a shock to most Christians, but there is absolutely no mandate whatever in the Bible for either synagogue or church, as a religious institution, to regulate or even define marriage!

This truth means that in God's eyes neither the idea of the church sanctioning marriage by its ritual, nor the state doing the same by its laws has any spiritual relevance whatever. (So far as I know, in the European context, the state began controlling marriage because the church sought its assistance in controlling the sex lives of the faithful.)

This leads to the further conclusion that spousal unions which are faithful to the biblical principles mentioned above, but are typically referred to as "common law" are just as valid before God as those which included a "wedding" before a clergyman or state authority.

Nor does the Bible ever really define marriage in the intellectual terms that are the obsession of Western thought and which Christians of our cultural heritage would like to see. Thus, Christianity has created its own definitions to supplement or even replace the simple, spiritual principles of the New Testament. Those principles are best summed up by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 when he says that husbands and wives are to love one another, serve one another and care for any children born of their union. In 1 Cor. 7 Paul also says that spouses ought to give sexual pleasure (yes, PLEASURE) rights to one another (no mention here, by the way about any requirement of procreation). Beyond these basics, no further pattern is prescribed and people are free to develop any relationship structures whatever, based on personal and cultural circumstances.

In some cultures husbands and wives even live in separate houses. In ours they may sleep in different beds without signifying any emotional or sexual estrangement. Couples may share many interests, both general and sexual, or may diverge from one another in many areas. The key is love, commitment and communication. Spouses are not identical in temperament, backgrounds, emotional and intellectual interests, etc. Marriage should enhance and support their divergent interests and skills and promote growth in these, as well as support their shared interests and goals.

In the sexual or otherwise intimate relationship area, many couples prefer to function strictly as couples. For others a more "open" marriage structure may not only work, but will provide a kind of fulfillment not otherwise possible for one or another of the spouses. In such structures, spouses may create secondary relationships in which their primary partners do not participate. It is challenging to attempt such a pattern and it will certainly not work for everyone. A great deal of mutual trust as well as an unusual security in the primary relationship are both necessary.

My own belief, based on the simple biblical principles cited above, with the corresponding freedom God gives us, is that many kinds of relationships, lived out in a variety of circumstances and numbers of partners, qualify as marriages.

The principles and conclusions in the paragraphs above also suggest that alternative relationships, such as exist in the poly community, also qualify as marriages in God's eyes, whether they are full-time "residential" unions or not.

At the risk of being too personal, I had a relationship that lasted two and one-half years with a woman I loved more than any in my whole life, in which all of the relevant biblical principles mentioned above were fulfilled to the best of our ability in our circumstances. What were those circumstances? Primarily that we lived two thousand miles apart! Each of us openly considered ourselves married and we felt tremendous fulfillment in our relationship. For me, that fulfillment was in many ways greater than I had in twenty-three years of church and state sanctioned marriage to someone else. For a variety of reasons the relationship did end, although I believe that each of us will always consider the other as a permanent part of ourselves.

So, whether or not marriages are "made in heaven," the reality on earth is that they are what we make them and we can make them in many ways and still please God.

There are several books which are excellent guides for thinking about expanded relationships that go beyond the form of traditional swinging and push the envelope toward more completely shared-life living. These are listed in the Resources section at the end of this article. A web site connected with the publishers of one of these books is also listed.

Men and Women and Authority in the Church

No more repressive segment of the moral system I have described has ever existed in the church than that which developed relating to sexual and other relationships between men and women. The negative attitudes towards sexuality mentioned in the early part of this article became the hallmark of the church's ethic in this area of human life.

It is much too complicated to discuss in depth in this article, but scholars have clearly shown that no small reason for the development of the anti-sexual teachings of the church was that all of the church's theology was developed by **men**, that is, **males**.

Nor can we speculate very productively as to what theology, ethical practices or ministry emphases might have been developed had women played a larger part in these developments. What is clear is that in areas where women, whether lay or "religious" (nuns), conspicuously served the needs of the church, the church became a "kinder, gentler" place. If the beliefs of some thinkers are correct that such traits are more naturally those of women than men, we could speculate that the greater input of women in the official ministries of the church might have resulted in a very different structure and very different attitudes toward life and relationships than has actually been the case.

What can be done here is to remark that it is demonstrable that the anti-sexual attitudes of early Christianity derived from the **anti-female** attitudes of much of Greek philosophy. The Greek attitude that women were ill-formed men, clearly inferior in intellectual and moral capacity, was handed down directly to the male hierarchy of the early church. The same was true of the notion that held that women were responsible for the moral corruption of men by sexual temptations, which turned them away from the pursuit of "spiritual" things.

No less an evil than the "madonna-whore" syndrome has infected the church (and society) throughout its history as the result of this package of unbiblical attitudes. Men, on the one hand, have elevated women to unrealistic heights of "purity" and at the same time sought to use them selfishly for their own pleasure. The effects of this neurosis can be seen throughout our culture in the many contradictory ways that women are treated.

If the New Testament is studied with an open mind, it will be seen that neither Jesus nor his Apostles were the woman-haters that many have made them out to be and the anti-woman elements of Christianity mentioned above cannot be laid at their feet. If anything, we may find in their teachings a kind of "holy feminism."

Before this last statement is misunderstood because of its use of a "hot-button" word, let me make it clear that this feminism is not the **angry** feminism of the late twentieth century, often embraced by women in retaliation for the real offenses of male society and embraced by men in an attempt to alleviate their own guilt for such offenses. Below I will discuss some variables relevant to the roles of men and women which will, I hope, make my views in this area more clear.

Jesus receives both men and women equally. He cures sick women as well as men and receives and forgives the sins of adulteresses and prostitutes. He reveals his resurrection first to women who then carry the news to the disciples.

In the early church women are often its founders and pillars, often act as missionaries and even bear responsibility for churches. And so on and on.

But this attitude towards women did not prevail long in the early church. No sooner had moralism and a male hierarchy begun to develop than anti-female attitudes also developed. These have always accompanied the

anti-sexual attitudes of Christianity. No worse fate could have befallen the church than to combine the oppressive rule of a male hierarchy with anti-sexual attitudes which degraded women.

Myriad texts can be quoted from the early leaders of the church as well as by ministers, scholars and laypersons, not only men but **women themselves**, down through the Puritan era of British and American Christianity, which are nothing less than nauseating in their views of the moral and physical corruption of women.

There is no question that moralistic (law-based), repressive ethics, a male hierarchy, anti-sexual and anti-female attitudes have always been bedfellows in the church.

Remember the tendency of Jesus and the Apostles to turn human patterns of authority upside down, to make servants out of rulers? This is done again and again in the New Testament and no less in some of the specific teachings about the relationship of men and women.

Human patterns throughout most of history have placed men in cultural dominance over women. The New Testament does not reverse this in the sense of now placing women in dominance over men. The feminism of the New Testament does not lead to the notion that men and women are to change places willy-nilly in home or society or that there are not natural qualities and abilities that give each advantages in terms of various social and physical functions. This feminism does not take a hatchet to the wonderful, God-given differences between men and women which enable them to complement and complete one another, give to one another what none of the same sex can in many areas, make them the beautiful beings they are to and for one another and render them in every way indispensable to one another.

I want to stress here that there is room in the fellowship of Christians for divergent views on many points of doctrine. This is the case in terms of the specific debates about the roles of men and women in the home and church. We should not disfellowship one another over these issues. Many Christians who hold a view of male-female roles which places men in positions of authority over women have deeply loving relationships as husbands and wives in which each is happy and content with the traditional pattern. In a word, it "works for them."

It is not my intention, nor should it be the intentions of other Christians who hold to a view which sees men and women more as equals in authority, to question the motives of those who function differently or to dismantle their system of relationships.

Two thoughts, one practical, the other speculative, may be in order here. First, it may be that in many cases a role pattern, which seems to be **technically** contrary to modern interpretations of the New Testament, is, for reasons beyond my wisdom and insight, the **right** pattern for these couples. The reasons for this may lie in the different personalities or backgrounds of the partners involved and the resulting needs for fulfillment that can be better met by a pattern that is more traditional in its form.

It is my conviction that God is the basic author of our personalities and the controller of the environments in which we live. This does not mean that all personality traits or environmental factors are necessarily good when held up to the light of the scriptural goal of full spiritual health and maturity. It does mean that God leads us through the paths that he knows are best for us to travel towards that maturity, including those that are difficult and even painful. It is also true that God's focus is on US--our spiritual and emotional freedom, our growth and our maturity. His focus is not on abstract principles, no matter how "biblical" they are. His love is for PEOPLE, not principles. While he does not violate his principles, he applies them to US as HE wills and WHEN he wills for OUR GOOD, not to parade the principles themselves. His ways are not our ways and he may lead some in ways that seem contradictory to the ways he leads others.

It is often true that newer, innovative biblical interpretations are overly reactive to the traditional ones which they attempt to correct. Well meaning interpreters often overstate their case and any of us can fall into the trap of finding support for our views where none really exists. This can certainly be true of us who seek better understanding of all issues relating to sexuality and intimate relationships. Thus, humility and teachability ought to be the rule, rather than arrogance, about the rightness of our views.

These realities lead to the a second thought: As time passes we may find that there is a "third way" of looking at the biblical material concerning male-female roles which will bridge the radical gap that seems to exist today between traditional and modern views.

For the present there should be tolerance of one another's views and practices, a commitment to further open-minded study and a determination not to allow our theological positions to compromise our fellowship with other Christians.

Two Sticking Points for Christians: Pre-marital Sex and "Affairs"

Pre-marital Sex

This subject has been dealt with extensively in various articles in the Liberated Christians newsletter and in an Internet posting entitled "Fornication and Adultery." Here I want to include some brief remarks in order to make the coverage of important topics in this article as complete as possible.

The traditional Christian doctrine on this subject, a doctrine which strictly forbids sexual intercourse with anyone prior to church-sanctioned marriage, is primarily based on the usage of the term "porneia" in the New Testament. This word is usually translated "fornication" or "sexual immorality." It is interesting that neither of these English translations really defines the sin involved. This has to be determined by the context and the historical situation that appears to be involved and unless these factors throw specific light on the meaning, the terms themselves do not help us.

While the term "porneia" has various uses in the New Testament, including the idea of being born illegitimately, possibly of a prostitute, the most relevant texts for personal sexual behavior are those in the letters of the Apostle Paul. The most likely meaning of "porneia" in Paul's writings has to do with the practice of cultic prostitution in the pagan temples of the New Testament world. Even the possible reference to being born of a prostitute (John 8:41) may be a reference to cultic prostitution, although it is more likely that ordinary commercial prostitution is in view.

Paul's admonition is that it is inconsistent with the worship of the true God for Christian men to be frequenting these pagan temples (1Cor. 6:9, 13, 15-18). Not incidentally, the primary issue here is not even sexual acts but idolatry. In any case, this exhortation has nothing to do with what is thought of today as pre-marital sex.

Another passage that has been used against sexual activity before marriage is Matthew 5:27-28. This is the famous passage in which Jesus quotes the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery," and adds: "But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

The most important thing to remember about this passage is that what Jesus is really discussing is not sexual activity with a person other than one's spouse, but actually divorce (v. 31-32). The real point of this passage (and of a similar one in Mt. 19:3-10, mentioned earlier) is to discourage Jewish men from frivolously divorcing their wives after spotting a more desirable mate who probably belonged to someone else, thus violating both the traditional view of male ownership of wives and the greater principle of true emotional possession. (See section below regarding the meaning of "adultery.") This "skirt chasing" is what is being

referred to in Mt. 5 in terms of "lusting." This has nothing whatever to do with sexually admiring or even fantasizing about someone of the opposite sex and likewise has nothing to do with premarital sex.

In his very helpful book, "The Poisoning of Eros: Sexual Values in Conflict," Raymond J. Lawrence, Jr., notes that for Paul the meaning of "porneia" would have followed the meaning and usage of the Hebrew word "zanah." This meaning would be: "illicit sexual behavior as defined by the Torah." (p. 35) The point is that in these Mosaic writings there is no prohibition against "fornication" as it is defined in our modern culture in the sense of premarital sexual activity. Consequently, Paul is not creating a new category of sexual immorality here and thus is not prohibiting what we know today as premarital sex.

Adultery

Numerous articles and reports published by Liberated Christians have discussed at length the meaning of adultery as it presented in the Bible and the relevance of these teachings in our modern setting. The reader is referred to these for extensive information. Here I only want to summarize these writings by saying that the essential meaning of adultery in the Old Testament setting was the idea of stealing another man's wife, who, in the culture of the day, was regarded as his physical property. In the New Testament Jesus expands on this idea in such passages as Mt. 5 and 19, referred to above, and introduces the idea of "emotional property," an idea which is further expanded by the Apostle Paul in such passages as Ephesians 5.

The notion that adultery equals or means sexual intercourse is not present in these biblical teachings, so that adultery is not properly defined as sexual intercourse, although this sexual act does typically take place and has become the basis of the definition of adultery enshrined in Western legal codes.

For an extensive discussion of the biblical ideas about adultery, including the ideas of property, as well as for excellent discussions of the notions of physical purity inherent in Hebrew culture, notions which have misled Christians relative to sexuality, I would refer the reader to "Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and their Implications for Today," by L. William Countryman. Lawrence's book, referred to above, also contains very helpful material on this subject.

The point of this in terms of modern polyamory relationships is that consensual polyamory has absolutely nothing to do with the biblical teachings concerning adultery. As a Jewish rabbi once said about swinging: "If a man steals my wife, its adultery; If I loan him my wife, it is not."

Extra-Marital "Affairs"

At one level, affairs are an entirely different story from consensual polyamory relationships and the comments of the rabbi are a succinct description of the difference.

The damage done to relationships from affairs stems from the **deception** involved. This deception often becomes extremely elaborate and consequently extremely damaging. A number of years ago I was told of a rather amazing and very sad case that occurred in a church in which I had previously been an elder. It was discovered that two elders of that church were each having an affair with the wife of the other **at the same time** and **no one** suspected his or her mate for a long time! After the discovery, one couple reconciled and remained in the church; the other couple divorced.

In Liberated Christians we have never endorsed affairs and have never even allowed one spouse to join our groups without the participation or consent of the other.

At another level, however, I believe that it is irresponsible for those who seek to promote open relationships to display the same gut reaction to affairs that is common in the Christian and even secular communities. It is important to think about the motives and pressures that lead to affairs. Many things could be discussed here, including the myriad interpersonal problems that can occur in any relationship, including poly ones.

The important thing to remember, however, is that we believe that human beings were never intended to be restricted to only one intimate/sexual relationship, but rather that multiple relationships are entirely normal. This being the case, it is possible to view affairs with much greater compassion than is usually afforded them, without actually endorsing them. To put it simply, the underlying problem with affairs is not sinful, lustful cheating on the part of a spouse, but the struggle to find fulfillment in a variety of relationships in a religious, cultural and legal structure which prohibits this fulfillment.

None of this justifies affairs or solves the problems created by them, but those of us in the poly community should at least heed the admonition about not casting stones unless we are without sin ourselves.

Sex and Other Religions

Much of this article has been devoted to the failure of traditional Christianity to develop a healthy attitude toward sexuality, a failure which has inflicted untold damage on the spiritual lives of uncounted millions of Christians and others throughout the centuries.

Readers of our newsletter are aware that we often refer to positive ideas about sexuality and relationships that we have learned from other religious traditions. It is a sad commentary on Christianity that the founders of Liberated Christians found it necessary many years ago to travel far from their Christian roots to find such positive ideas, ideas which have contributed much to our own sexual healing and which we hope are contributing to the healing of others through this ministry.

It is quite true that other traditions have developed much more positive outlooks on sexuality as well as the normalness of multiple intimate relationships than has Christianity. Other religions have understood sexuality as a normal and good part of human life and have validated it in spiritual ways that are utterly foreign to Christianity. Various articles have appeared in our newsletter discussing some of these ideas.

Here I would only mention that valuable material can be found in various books relating to tantric practices and the ancient Chinese Tao philosophy. Personally I have learned a lot regarding emotional and sexual intimacy from the writings of Jolan Chang and would recommend his books, "The Tao of Love and Sex: The Ancient Chinese Way to Ecstasy" and "The Tao of the Loving Couple: True Liberation through the Tao." The Tao philosophy also recognizes the importance of multiple relationships.

Some basic Thoughts, Conclusions and Suggestions for Healthier Attitudes toward Sexuality and Relationships

What About Love?

Much of our writing and group teaching in Liberated Christians uses the theme of love as its centerpiece. We believe that the heart of being a Christian is love--being loved by God and loving God, our neighbors and ourselves, as taught by Jesus in the Gospels and constantly reinforced by the writers of the New Testament.

Much ink has been spilled by biblical interpreters through the centuries over the relationship between the Old Testament law, especially the Ten Commandments, and the elaboration of that law in the Bible, on the one hand, and on the other hand the emphasis on **love** in the New Testament. I have written at some length on this subject in other articles. What is most interesting is that the foundation for the love teachings of the New Testament lies precisely in the **Old Testament's** explication of the law.

Not only does Jesus constantly expand the obligations of the law in terms of love (see the passages on adultery in Mt. 5 and 19, referred to above, for example), but he specifically grounds his teaching on love in key passages of the law. He does this in Mt. 5:43-45 in a teaching about loving your enemy and does it again in Mt. 22:35-40 in teaching that the commandment to love God and one's neighbor is the heart of the law and the prophets.

Many references in the rest of the New Testament could be cited as examples of how this theme of love based in the law is emphasized by other writers. A key passage is Romans 13:8-10 in which the Apostle Paul teaches that all the commandments are summed up thus: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18)

In Mt. 5:17 Jesus says that he has come not to abolish the law and prophets but to fulfil them. What does this mean? Simply that all of the righteousness that is possible, all the possible conformity to the will (law) of God was resident in Jesus himself and that from the time of his ministry forward all humanity was to look to him and not to a written law code for its model of right living with both God and others.

This theme, with its center of love, is echoed and repeated again and again throughout the New Testament, especially in Paul's epistles to the Galatians and Romans and in the book of Hebrews. In a striking passage in the Book of Acts (chapter 15) the **Jewish** leaders of the first church in Jerusalem clearly state that obedience to the letter of the Old Testament law is not to be required of gentile converts, thus sweeping away in one stroke the notion that Christians are still bound by such obedience. What "binds" Christians, both to God and to one another, is **love**, a force of infinitely greater power than the power of the law.

Because of its negative attitudes the church has never fully acknowledged the relationship of love to sexuality. It has grudgingly admitted that Christian love might have a place in the bedrooms of the lawfully married, but nowhere else in terms of sexual relationships. We've already shown the fallacy of the church's teachings against such traditionally unacceptable relationships as those represented in polyamory and premarital sex. What makes such relationships acceptable to God? Nothing more nor less than the same kind of giving, sharing and sacrificial love that is the proper characteristic of those who claim to be Christian, those who follow the model of love demonstrated by Christ.

After years of studying the Bible with a view to understanding God's perspective on sexuality and relationships, I can find no reason that the exhortations to Christians to love one another should not apply just as much to the sexual realm as to any other. That being the case, a verse in Peter's first epistle (1:22) recently jumped out at me as being appropriate. He says: "Now that you have purified your souls by obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart." In the first place, the idea of "purifying" here has nothing to do with being sexually celibate, a notion that has traditionally been associated with spiritual purity in the church. What strikes me here, by way of application to sexuality, is the idea that we should love each other with zeal and with a caring heart. If we would do this in the poly community what spiritual and emotional rewards we would reap.

An old and popular argument against the connection between sex and Christian loving has been the notion that because the Greek word "eros," (which really means **passionate** loving and not necessarily **sexual** loving) does not appear in the New Testament, God intends to contrast sexual loving with "agape" loving (Godly or Christian loving) in a negative way. This is a spurious argument on several grounds, among them the fact that the mere omission of a word proves nothing. The fact that sexual imagery is used in the Old Testament to describe God's love for Israel tends to give the lie to this argument as does the highly erotic imagery in the Song of Solomon. It is also worth noting that in the Greek translation of the Old Testament the word "eros" also does not appear, but the word used in the Song of Solomon to designate erotic love is "agape."

Sex as Communion

No, I'm not talking about the eucharist or Lord's Supper. I am talking about sexual relating as drawing people together in a powerful union of spirits as well as flesh, a union which perhaps reflects more than any other the spiritual union of God and human beings.

It has always been observed that the power and ecstasy of sexual intimacy is at least a reminder of spiritual

communion. This has often frightened Christians who think of God as sexless and not very pleased with our sexuality. The surrender to another and the surrender to unbounded pleasure has threatened our ideal of a disembodied and fleshless spirituality.

Fortunately some Christian theologians have begun to help us toward a uniting of our sexuality and our spirituality. In his wonderful book, "The Intimate Connection: Male Sexuality, Masculine Spirituality," James B. Nelson lists a number of shifts that he believes are beginning to occur within the church in terms of our views of sexuality. One of these shifts, he says, is "from understanding our sexuality as either incidental to or detrimental to the experience of God, to understanding sexuality as intrinsic to the divine-human experience." (p. 116)

If this is true, then it is not too much to say that there is a true spiritual communion between partners who engage in their sexual encounters in love to one another and mindful of the love of God who makes the experience possible. It is not too much to say that we may learn much of God and his love through our experience of loving sexuality.

The church has been too long impoverished in this earning and needs to change.

In the February 24, 1997 issue of Newsweek magazine (p. 50) there is an article about the stock market's topping 7000. It includes a list of the "Top 12 signs its time to get out of the market."

Sign # 10 is: "You start dreaming about hot mutual funds instead of sex."

Truly we would be in big trouble if such a state were to be reached, for in our heart of hearts, whether contemplating reality or indulging in fantasy, what occupies our thoughts as much as sex?

Sex is who we are, what we do, how we feel (about far more than just sexual acts) and how we relate. Sex is what it is to be human and spiritual.

Sex is perhaps the ultimate way in which we reach out for connections with other human beings and receive connection from others. This is communion at the deepest human level.

Instead of the curse the church has often made it to be, sex is in reality a **blessing and gift** that God has given his creatures. If it is abused it is because it is misunderstood as a curse; if we are unfulfilled it is because we have not received and enjoyed it as a gift.

There are good and valid reasons the Bible says virtually nothing about sex itself (with the exception of the glorious Song of Solomon, couched in the beautiful imagery of Near Eastern poetry).

First, the Bible is not the analytical style of literature that we are used to in Western culture. The Bible, rather, is **synthetic** , not in the sense of artificial, but in the sense of seeing life holistically, as a unit. For the Hebrews, for example, sex was seen as natural and integrated into the whole of life; thus it was not talked about and picked apart the way we like to do.

Second, I also believe that God's point of view is that sex is so normal and right that the biblical writers saw no need to discuss the thing itself. They rightly **assumed** its goodness, its giftedness from God and, apart from certain abuses, that was the end of it. It was the entrance into Christian thinking of a more analytical mode of reasoning and a suspicion of the things of the flesh through the Greeks and their philosophical forbearers that began to create a negative way of thinking about sex and the passion to pick it apart.

As Nelson indicates in his book, I believe that at this point of time, God is beginning to open his people up to a positive revolution in terms of restoring sexuality and sexual loving to their rightful places as God's gifts to

his creatures.

As we rejoice in at least the small changes that are happening in the church and the greater openness that is occurring in Christians, we ought to affirm the following to ourselves, along with a greater self-esteem as liberated and poly-committed Christians:

Just as the Bible does not give the church a mandate to regulate marriage, likewise there is no biblical authority for the church, as a religious institution, to regulate the sex lives of its people. I mean this in terms of a couple's, a triad's or other marital form's desire or right to either procreate or recreate sexually, to choose partners or to decide what types of sexual activity to engage in.

In a word, the sex life of Christians is entirely outside the regulatory domain of the church, except for its urging the principle of love as the highest goal for sexual relationships. Consequently, no Christian is under obligation to obey man-made sexual regulations issued in the name of the church. All Christians are free before God to pursue consensual, creative and enjoyable sexual activities with a clear conscience.

A creative, joyful and free sexuality is **in itself and by the very nature with which God has invested it, a spiritual witness to the love of God.**

It is worth noting here that I have said nothing in this article about our ideas in Liberated Christians relating to "loving intimacy." When we speak of sex as **communion** we should include these ideas, which are that loving, caring physical and emotional contact, with lots of stroking and cuddling, can be just as meaningful as hot, orgasmic sex. This intimacy is often what is missing in relationships and is what people need most. Almost any of our newsletters contain discussions of these ideas and I would refer the reader to them for further reading. These ideas are also the dominant theme of our workshops.

Some people may enjoy swinging or being exhibitionists or being tied up while having sex. No one has to pursue these or any other type of activity if it doesn't turn them on. If it does turn them on, then why not?

Some sexual activities may be distasteful to some people, but that is not the business of the church or, for that matter, the business of other Christians to criticize or demean. Sex is not "bad," never has been bad and nothing done sexually in love **can** be bad. We may disagree about sexual **taste**; we may even disagree about what is **loving** activity, but neither individual Christians nor the church can be the lord of another Christian's conscience in these matters. Besides, if we will be open to the experiences and perspectives of others we may just learn something that will expand our own sexual horizons or bring healing to our own sexual lives. I myself have learned bitter lessons in this area, so I speak from experience when I urge other Christians to heed these cautions.

What about Loving MORE?

If loving sexually is God's gift ; if loving God and loving our neighbor is the fulfillment of God's will for us; if loving even monogamously is good, then why isn't loving more than one person at least as good as that and maybe "gooder?" I believe that those of us who are Christians and who believe in poly relationships need to stop thinking of ourselves as kind of weird and begin to accept the idea that we may be more "normal" than the folk, even our fellow Christians, who oppose us. We also need to realize that what we practice and advocate is not just sexual and emotional connecting on a higher level than before, but that there is a whole untapped area of **Christian spirituality** that **we** represent, a spirituality that could make major contributions to the spread and health of the Kingdom of God.

We need to find ways of addressing our culture and those of our common faith so as to help them understand that the way we love is simply, but gloriously, a way of "loving more," a way of giving and receiving more love than is possible in couple pairings only, that it is another step in the process of learning to love, and not a

perversion or deviation from true love.

We ought also to beware of pride and arrogance in our zeal to live in more love and to promote that lifestyle to others. We must not fall into the trap of a spiritual elitism which looks down its noses at those whom we feel don't love as much as we do. If we have learned to "love more," we need to remember that we once loved less and that those who may love less now are those whom we may help learn to love more in the future.

Because we live in a culture that is dominantly monogamous in theory, if less so in practice, it is difficult not only to practice what we believe, but even to have a self esteem that is unique to us and which will help us hold our heads high and be proud of what we are and the way we live.

We also should be careful about our attitudes to others who share poly lifestyle commitments. There are many ways of exploring and living out poly options. For some couples an occasional encounter with the same or different friends is their idea of variety. At the other end of the spectrum are some who would like to establish long-term living situations with one or more persons or couples, sharing not only bed but breakfast as well. In between are many variations on the theme. Sometimes in the poly community we hear carping and criticizing from those pursuing one option towards those pursuing another, as if the latter are not really legitimately poly because they don't live like the former.

These attitudes should not exist among Christian polys. Rather, the kind of love I have discussed should cause us all to support and encourage one another in whatever option we choose, knowing that no option is easy and that we can use all the help we can get.

At the same time, we should also be encouraging one another, in love and without pressure, to stretch our limits so that we may grow to our fullest potential in terms of our expanded relationships.

A Christian Poly Community: The Potential for Fellowship and Power

As the Internet activity of the leaders of Liberated Christians increases, as more and more people "find" us through links on the web sites of other groups, an explosion of contacts is occurring all over the country. This has made it possible to explore the creation of groups elsewhere.

If we take the long view of things, it is possible to envision a day when small communities of Christian polys will exist in many places, creating a whole new culture in which love can thrive. The potential for mutual fellowship and support in these communities and in the larger community is unlimited, as is the possibility for eventually finding that we are a force for real and permanent change in sexual and relationship attitudes in the church. We may have the opportunity to teach a way of loving to the larger Christian community that it has needed for a long time. Right now these may seem like impossible dreams, but I firmly believe that the seeds of these dreams have already been planted and are being watered. We need vision and commitment to reap the natural harvest.

A Word about Families and Children

With the exception of "residential" or quasi-residential group marriages, in which triads or other multiples actually live together or spend large amounts of time together, most forms of polyamory relationships do not very actively involve the children who belong to the various parties. Whether what a couple does is basic "swinging" in its simplest form or more committed relating to others, many people find it very difficult to share with their children, regardless of their ages, what it is that they believe and practice in terms of expanded relationships.

This difficulty underscores both the general control that the monogamous standard has over our culture and the extent to which poly-involved people are influenced by that standard even as they try to break its hold over their lives.

If it is difficult to talk to adult relatives and friends about what we believe, it seems that it is more difficult to talk to our children. It does not seem that this should be so, but the reality of this is confirmed by the parallel difficulty most parents have about just talking intelligently and openly to their kids about sexuality in general.

The tragedy in this situation is that our failure to communicate to our children what we believe and do and to somehow involve them in a natural way in our lifestyle choices, where that is feasible (for example, in social relationships with our other partners and their children) means that for the most part we are not passing down our lifestyle to later generations. This means that we are not doing much to "convert" our culture, much less our churches, to a poly outlook on life.

The greater tragedy of this for Christians is that we are already supposed to be a **family**, the children and family of God, images that are abundant throughout the Bible. It may be hoped that Christians committed to various poly options will become convinced, at least if they find strength in greater numbers, of the necessity of leading their children, difficult as that may be, to embrace in a natural way the convictions and practice of their parents.

Although it focuses on sexuality issues rather than on poly ones, a paper I wrote, published by Liberated Christians, titled "[The Cult of Childhood and the Repression of Childhood Sexuality](#)," may be helpful to parents in thinking about sharing difficult issues in these areas with their children.

An Invitation to Community

If Liberated Christians has made any contributions to assisting Christians in dealing with their sexuality and relationship issues, it is primarily in two ways. First, by the dissemination of information that has helped Christians realize that they are not alone in their radical thinking, but that there are many like them who want to explore options that they have always been told are wrong, but which they sense are normal and natural. Second, by becoming involved in direct dialog with Christians, either by correspondence or through our local groups, and by beginning to create a network of Christians who are communicating with each other.

In these ways ideas are being shared, people are getting connected with one another and we are beginning to see the creation of a real, though scattered, Christian poly community. If other committed groups of people can be created elsewhere there is an even greater potential for creating stronger bonds among us which will strengthen our commitments and assure greater growth in our chosen lifestyles.

I want to encourage my readers to reach out for fellowship in this growing community. We will not grow much if we stay isolated from one another, but the growth could be explosive if we start coming together, finding strength in our numbers as well as in our spiritual common ground.

One of the greatest joys I personally have is the opportunity to be in touch with such a growing number of Christians who are coming out of their closets as they realize that there are so many just like them who are doing the same. I invite the rest of you to dialog with us and through that to find other new friends, perhaps even lovers, who share the same spiritual commitments and through whom you can discover how truly exciting and fulfilling new relationships can be.

We of Liberated Christians are always willing to hear from you and to do our best to share with you personally, connect you with other resources and help you network with others of like mind and faith. I am always available, both by snail mail (Liberated Christians, P.O. Box 55045, Phoenix, AZ 85078-5045) and by e-mail at: bill@libchrist.com.

A FEW RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Many materials of various sorts are available in every area of thought discussed in this article. In the last fifteen years I have collected a library of upwards of one hundred and fifty books, many periodicals, scholarly

journals and videos on these subjects. In addition, the material available on the World Wide Web is growing daily.

Listed here are a few materials and resources for finding other information. All of these listings are those which I have especially found helpful in my own research.

(Note: books cited in this article are not listed again in this section.)

Historical and Theological Materials Related to the Origins of Sex-Negativism in Christianity

"Against the Protestant Gnostics," Philip J. Lee

"Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality and the Catholic Church," Uta Ranke-Heinemann

"The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity," Peter Brown

Sexual Theology

"Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology," James B. Nelson

"Radical Love: An Approach to Sexual Spirituality," Dody H. Donnelly

Materials and Organizations Related to Radical Intimate Relationships and Polyamory

"Breaking the Barriers to Desire: New Approaches to Multiple Relationships," Kevin Lano and Claire Parry, eds.

Delaware Valley Synergy (educational, support and social group for persons in open relationships), P.O. Box 1551, Bensalem, PA 19020-5551; e-mail synergy436@aol.com

Human Awareness Institute (see [report in LC newsletter](#), Fall 1996) Web site: <http://www.hai.org>

"Love Without Limits": Deborah M. Anapol (New edition available in 1997.)

"Loving More: The Polyfidelity Primer," Ryam Nearing

"Loving More" magazine, P.O. Box 4358, Boulder, CO 80306

Loving More web site: <http://lovemore.com> Also, e-mail: RyamPEP@aol.com

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