

Living in Sin

John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988),

CHAPTER 1: SETTING THE STAGE

For centuries sexual attitudes, sexual taboos, and sexual practices have been used by dominant groups in society to keep others subordinate. Those who possess power define those who are powerless and then impose their own definition on the ones defined. The guiding principle is to ensure the comfort, the convenience, the happiness, and the well-being of the dominant ones.¹

Behind prejudice there is also fear. We reject that which we cannot manage. We condemn what we do not understand. We set up a means of control to render powerless those dynamic realities we know to be powerful. No aspect of our humanity is invested with more anxieties, yearnings, emotions, and needs than is our sexual nature. So, sex is a major arena in which the prejudice of human beings finds expression.²

The Bible is a major source feeding the ethical decision making of Christian people, and its message must take by Christians with utmost seriousness. But the Bible itself is not free of contradictions, of expressions of prejudice, and of attitudes that have long been abandoned. The same could be said about the ongoing tradition of the Christian church. Church history also reveals sin, prejudice, and misleading appeals to long-abandoned practices. Therefore, arguments that issue from the authority of sacred Scripture of sacred tradition must state what part of Scripture of tradition is being upheld and on what basis that part is retained while other parts are abandoned.³

CHAPTER 2: BIBLICAL CALL TO INCLUSIVENESS

The church throughout its history has perceived a God who rejects whatever the church rejects. In almost every instance, it was ignorance that fed prejudice. Whatever the church did not understand, it excluded. For centuries women were not actually members of the church but only "auxiliaries." Others whose ethnicity or economic status caused them to be thought of as "foreigners" were relegated to the galleries of churches and allowed to serve only in subservient roles. In South Carolina, in the early years of the twentieth century, the leaders of The Episcopal Church debated with both seriousness and intensity whether a black man was human enough to be ordained and commissioned to serve as a suffragan bishop for "colored work."⁴

All sorts of people were victims of the church's prejudice. Left-handed people were called "the devil's children" by church leaders. People who committed suicide were refused burial from within the walls of the church. Mental illness made people different and, therefore, feared and rejected. Divorced persons who remarried also were not welcome at the church's altars, for the failure to keep one's marriage vows was thought to be an almost unforgivable sin. In incident after incident, on issue after issue, throughout the history of the church the attitude of Jonah has been the attitude of the church. God's love was understood to be given and withheld just as those who spoke for God to the world gave and withheld their love.⁵

In the sweep of history and barriers guarding exclusiveness have been challenged and dismantled time after time by an ever-deepening understanding of the love of God—a love powerful enough even to challenge the

¹ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 23.

² John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 23.

³ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 25.

⁴ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 38.

⁵ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 38.

prejudices enshrined in Holy Scripture. Beyond the comfort level of human life, there is always a Nineveh that calls us to set aside our fear and be open to the humanity in those we reject. Nineveh beckons today in the lives of those who do not fit the church's narrow definition of sexual morality. Such persons elicit from the religious establishment much the same response that the people of Nineveh elicited from Jonah. I believe that God is calling the church today to go to these men and women, so that God can show the church what God once showed Jonah, namely that God's love and acceptance are not bound by the limits of our love and acceptance.⁶

CHAPTER 3: THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

Strange things are happening in our world. Women, breaking the stereotypes of the ages, are entering into every field of human endeavor. India, Israel, the Philippines, Norway, and Great Britain have all been governed by an elected female head of state in this century.⁷

The feminist movement is surely related to a changing awareness of human sexuality and to the unwillingness of half of the human population to accept the sexual definitions of a previous age. Environmental concerns are linked to feminism also: We live on Mother Earth, and the call to stop violating her and to seek a harmonious way to live with nature is deeply related to the growing respect for the feminine in life. The peace disarmament movement also has this feminist dimension. At its very core, the peace movement raises questions about the meaning of war, which since the dawn of civilization has been a ritualized sexual activity demonstrating virility. It is the ultimate expression of that competitive masculine quality that the male-dominated world has extolled as virtuous for thousands of years, today it is questioned continually.⁸

At the heart of these swirling tides of change there is a primary shift in the understanding of the proper balance of power between men and women. The organizing rule of life in the past has been the patriarchal mind-set. Patriarchal principles, accepted as "the way things are," formed patriarchal prejudices that then reinforced the principles. That mind-set gave us kings, male deities, and the sexual stereotypes of dominant man and submissive woman. That patriarchal world, unchallenged for thousands of years, is colliding with the new understanding of life emerging on every side. Fritjof Capra, the philosopher-physicist, observing the signs of our times writes, "We have reached the end of the reign of male domination." In language influenced by Eastern religious thought, he argues that the masculine, "yang," having moved to its ultimate limit, now is in full retreat before the feminine "yin." In the new age the feminine moon will shine as bright as the masculine sun. The male drive to conquer and subdue the earth must recede before the recognition that such a conquest is not the path to success but to death. Survival will depend on learning to live in harmony with Mother Nature. Harmony with nature will replace conquest of nature. The male mentality, ever seeking to exert its power and control over all of life, finally achieved the scientific breakthrough of splitting the atom. With that knowledge the masculine spirit has developed a weapon that renders meaningless and absurd all the war games that boys and men have played since the dawn of the patriarchal era. Interdependence, not domination of others, will be the newly perceived pathway to life.⁹

Most cogently, the patriarchal definition of masculinity is now perceived to have been instrumental in killing many men's ability to feel emotion. The patriarchal definition of femininity has denied the female almost all her strength, save her sexuality that men have exploited in numbers of ways. The patriarchal mentality is almost inevitably homophobic, for gay men threaten the prevailing definition of maleness, and lesbian women refuse to flatter dominant males by conveying to them any sense of needing that which they are, or that which they have to give.¹⁰

⁶ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 39.

⁷ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 40.

⁸ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 40-41.

⁹ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 41-42.

¹⁰ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 42.

As the need to change becomes more urgent, every sexual pattern based upon these definitions will begin to fall. The patriarchally defined marriage began to fail in this century as the divorce rate soared. The patriarchal double-standard of premarital sexual behavior, prescribing sexual abstinence for women and sexual experimentation for men, has largely been abandoned. The patriarchal assumption that everyone needs to be married has become inoperative, and the single population has risen dramatically in our time. patriarchal condemnation of homosexuality has been countered by a growing willingness on the part of gays and lesbians to claim their identities and to be themselves, openly and honestly. This openness has forced this generation to deal with its sexual prejudices as never before.¹¹

This shift in consciousness away from patriarchal prejudices has also demanded a redefinition of God. The God of traditional Western religious thought has been a male deity designed to affirm the very assumptions that are destined to pass away. All of us are aware of these changes and in varying ways we are all responding to them. .. before the patterns of change began to penetrate our minds, life was thought to be divinely ordered. ...¹²

By godly decree, the role of women in the past was clear. She was created for marriage and motherhood. She was to be the keeper of the hearth, the rearer of children, obedient and loyal to her husband. If she did not marry she was viewed as a failure, called pejoratively "an old maid," and generally pitied. Before marriage, at least in the dominant strand of the social order, she was expected to be chaste. .. The typical male expected his spouse to be virgin at marriage and faithful after marriage. Her goodness and success as a woman were determined by how well she satisfied these expectations. The role of the man in that era was also equally well defined: His task was to be the breadwinner. His masculine power was defined by the effectiveness with which he competed in order to carry out this assignment. He was the patriarch, the king of his household, the decision maker, and his wife and children were expected to serve him. A male occupation was usually chosen for him, within very specific limits set by his father. Today, women not only practice law, but a woman sits on the Supreme Court of the United States...¹³

Change continues despite the resistance, condemnation and the appeal to the divine order. ... One seminary dean wrote that any attempt to rethink ethics, or to change the paternal nature of God, or to surrender the exclusive claim that one small group possesses the only truth, must be "countered at every level." Such stances are grandly impotent.... The world, with its values, its definitions, is changing not because people are becoming immoral but because the human understanding of life is changing.¹⁴

Woman's suffrage (참정권: 선거권): increased educational opportunities for women; coeducational colleges that refused to oversee private behavior; the development of the nuclear family necessitating apartments for unmarried singles where no parental eyes could stare; the social mobility, assisted by ever-improving transportation systems, which increased anonymity; the entry of women into the work force; the opening of executive and professional ranks to women – all these combined with effective birth control to change the shape of history. These were the forces that dismantled the patriarchal control system, and the reasons why the moral norms of a bygone era are not holding.¹⁵

Of course the moralists, most of whose public voices were male, expressed grave concern. the world they knew and loved, the world that had served them well, was and is dying. The era of male domination is on its way out.¹⁶

¹¹ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 42.

¹² John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 43.

¹³ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 43.

¹⁴ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 47.

¹⁵ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 51.

¹⁶ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 52.

What men and women are engaged in today is a battle to **redefine** who they are- in a new era, with new knowledge and new consciousness. **The time has come for the church**, if it wishes to have any credibility as a relevant institution, **to look at the issues** of single people, divorcing people, post--married people, and gay and lesbian people from a point of view removed from the patriarchal patterns of the past, and to help these people find a path that leads to life-affirming holiness.¹⁷

CHAPTER 4: DIVORCE: NOT ALWAYS EVIL

CHAPTER 5: HOMOSEXUALITY: A PART OF LIFE, NOT A CURSE

CHAPTER 6: AN AMBIGUOUS SYMBOL OF AUTHORITY

CHAPTER 7: THE CASE AGAINST LITERALISM

The Bible did not drop out heaven fully written. That seems obvious, yet so many use the Bible as if it had. The first step, therefore, in understanding the Bible is to explore pre-biblical history, to look at the antecedents of Scripture, to isolate and explore the documents that lie behind the Bible. Each of the major strands of tradition that come together in Torah (the first five book of the Hebrew Scripture) is unique, describing of the values of its time and place, and reflective of the social, political, and economic realities that produced it. To quote the Torah without being aware of these primary textual distinctions is to presume that every verse is objective and of equal import.¹⁸

According to this approach, scholars believed that there were several sources that were used to write the Bible; the primal strand of biblical material is known as Yahwist narrative, because it refers to God by name Yahweh. It was produced in the southern kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, was the holy city in which the royal house of David ruled. The Yahwist narrative was a court history written to serve the best interests of the royal tradition of hierarchical authority. It portrayed a God who would speak and deal only with those anointed leaders of God's choice. Moses was God's political instrument, and Aaron, Moses' brother, was the divinely designated priestly leader. On God's behalf these leaders mediated God's demands and God's invitation to the people to enter a covenant. The God Yahweh did not communicate directly with the people. Priestly leadership in this period of Hebrew history was derived from political leadership, and political leadership was derived directly from God. The historians in David's court who wrote the Yahwist narrative were quite sure that no authority rivaled the authority of God's chosen political leader. To rebel against the king or the royal family was tantamount to rebelling against God.¹⁹ This was the Jerusalem point of view, as expressed in the initial strand of pre-biblical material. The Yahwist narrative might well be called the Hebrew *Iliad*.

The second narrative that antedates the Bible is known as the Elohist document, because it refers to God by the name Elohim. It is usually dated around 750 B.C.E. and was composed as a sacred history of Israel in the northern kingdom around the capital of Samaria. The northern kingdom had separated from Judah when its people had successfully rebelled against the royal house of David in the closing years of the tenth century B.C.E. Jeroboam, a brilliant military leader had demanded certain reforms of the young king Rehoboam, grandson of King David and Bathsheba (I King 12: 3-5). When these reforms were not forthcoming, he led a revolution that ended with a division of the once united realm into Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Jeroboam was installed as king in the northern kingdom. In time the city of Samaria was built, to be the new capital to rival Jerusalem (I King 16:24). Jeroboam was empowered by the people in his challenge to the divinely appointed royal authority. In the northern kingdom, since the people chose and empowered the king, he was constitutional

¹⁷ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 52-53.

¹⁸ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 97.

¹⁹ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 99.

monarch who either pleased the people or ran the risk of being overthrown. The story of the northern kingdom's history rose out of this experience and was informed by the new set of social values, and varied widely from the account of Yahwist writer. The people remembered the events at Sinai somewhat differently from the way Judah recollected them.²⁰ The Elohist writer believed that God had made a covenant with the whole nation, not just with the leadership. The Elohist tradition is not only one source of the democratic process that vests power in the people who elect, but also of that sense of congregationalism that marks Protestant Christianity today. This was the incipient beginning of the "priesthood of all believers" of a tradition that refuses to accept the unrepresentative decision and excessive claims of an ecclesiastical or political hierarchy. Since the northern kingdom viewed the patriarch Joseph as its primary ancestor, he was portrayed in their folklore as Jacob's favorite child. The Elohist document was a social and political narrative designed to extol the ancestors of the ones writing the story and to develop a sense of history in the long, distinguished, and sometimes perilous sacred saga of the people of the north. The Elohist narrative might well be called the Hebrew *Odyssey*.²¹

In the year 721 B.C.E. when the city of Samaria fell to the army of the Assyrians. The people of the north were dispersed into exile, never to reassemble as a nation. Some escaped to southern kingdom, Judah. In this process two documents - Yahwist and Elohist merged together which is identified as Yahwist-Elohist document. .. Though dissimilar, both versions appear in the blended story, and the contradiction is ignored by those who claim inerrancy for the "Word."²²

In time of king Josiah, a new book of the law written by Moses was found (II Kings 22). It was given the name "the second law," or in Greek the *deutero-nomos*. We call it the book of Deuteronomy.²³ After reading the book Josiah went through reform and produced Yahwist-Elohist-Deuteronomic account. This was the narrative that some thirty-five years later the Jews took with them into exile in Babylon in 586 B.C.E. No experience shaped the religious life of the Jewish people more profoundly than the exile. Their nation was defeated by the armies of Babylon, their people were marched off into exile, and their concept of God was both expanded and narrowed almost simultaneously. Under the driving leadership of Ezekiel and a group of priests, the Jewishness of these exiled people was made indelible on their bodies (if they were male) by mandatory circumcision, and in their hearts and minds through strict observance of the law and cultic practices of their tradition. Sabbath day observance and dietary regulations, both designed to create Jewish separateness, were rigidly enforced. A massive rewriting of the Jewish sacred story was undertaken by a school of priests.²⁴

The revision doubled the length of the Torah and heightened the cultic traditions against which the prophets had long spoken. Indeed, the age of the prophets had all but ended. It was this rewritten, theologically conservative, rigidly legal version of Judah's sacred history that Ezra and Nehemiah carried back with them when they came to rebuild Jerusalem in the fifth century, B.C.E. It was rewriting of the law that later produced Sadducees and Pharisees. But it was also this rewriting that guaranteed Jewish survival as an identifiable people in history. In seven great stanzas, the priestly writers added as an introductory chapter to their sacred story what is now the first and most familiar creation story. The narrative was designed primarily to raise the Sabbath to prominence and to bind it in Jewish observance as a mark of identity. It was the priestly writers who added the cultic commentary to the familiar Elohist version of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, so that motivates and reasons were given for refraining from idolatry, obeying parents, and observing the Sabbath, and by which coveting was more thoroughly defined...²⁵ .. This priestly influence extended into the period of the Maccabees and even into the years of Jesus, when effective political and religious leadership in Jerusalem was merged into a single office and vested in the high priest.²⁶

²⁰ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 101.

²¹ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 100.

²² John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 102.

²³ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 102.

²⁴ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 103.

²⁵ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 104.

²⁶ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 105.

Without awareness of the original source and motivations of a text in the Torah, the Bible cannot be used with integrity, nor can it be quoted in debate to prove some point that in all probability the original authors would never have considered. The inconsistencies within the biblical tradition are especially clear in a comparison of the historical books of Samuel and Kings with the later, rewritten history of the same events by the Chronicler. The two versions cannot be reconciled.²⁷

When one turns from the Hebrews to the Christian Scriptures, the issue of scholarship do not change. There is a tendency among some well-meaning moderates to dismiss the excesses of the Hebrew Scripture but to cling steadfastly to the "New" Testament as the true, inerrant Word of God. That point of view also cannot be sustained. In the twenty-seven books of the New Testament inconsistency abound. There are also a number of identifiable sources, some of which are antecedents to the Gospel narratives. Mark may have been written as a whole, but few scholars believe the other three Gospels were. Matthew used Mark, a document known as Q or Quelle, and a special additional source known M, to compose his Gospel. Luke also used Mark and Q, but he used them in a way very different from the way Matthew used them. Luke also had his special private source that we call L, which may have been, indeed, probably was, a series of sources, some written and some oral. Luke may have been written in an original shorter version that we call proto-Luke, expanded some years later with the addition of the birth narrative and Mark. The accounts in John of the wedding in Cana of Galilee, the woman taken in adultery, and the Galilean resurrection narrative seem to some scholars to have come from other sources.²⁸

We are also conditioned by the present form of Holy Scripture to read Paul through the filter of the Gospels. We may realize intellectually that Paul lived, wrote, and died before any Gospel had been composed, but still be unaware of our own internal blending processes. In the Pauline corpus, for example, Paul never tells the story of his conversion. The Damascus road narrative was created by the author of Acts more than thirty years after Paul's death. That story quite obviously met some of the author's political needs in the early struggle of the Christian church.²⁹

Contemporary scholarship has now divided the Pauline corpus into authentic and pseudo-Pauline writings. Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, and Philemon are now considered genuinely Pauline. Ephesians, I and II Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews are no longer attributed to Paul. So when quoting the New Testament, does one assign the same weight to a passage from I Timothy, now known with certainty not to be Pauline, that one might assign to Romans? Is the authority of Scripture in the person of the author or in the community that assigns authority to its sacred story? Early Christians assumed the former. That is why they claimed apostolic authorship for post-apostolic works. Since we know these books not to be apostolic, their argument will not suffice today. When pseudo-Paul writes in II Timothy that "all scripture is inspired by God" (II Tim. 3:16), a text much beloved by fundamentalists, it does not occur to today's reader that when that verse was written the author was referring to the Hebrew Scriptures. At that moment in history no Christian writing had obtained the status of Scripture, and the New Testament itself had not yet come into being.³⁰

The writing of the books included in the Hebrew Bible range in time from 920 B.C.E. to 135 B.C.E. The time span for the Christian Bible begins with Paul's letters in 49 C.E. and concludes with II Peter sometime before 150 C.E. Can any verse from any book be quoted out of its context and with any integrity be applied to an issue being debated in the world some nineteen hundred years later? Yet, that is the way Christians have used the Bible, again and again. Even on subjects as basic to Christians theology as our understanding of who Jesus is or what happened on the first Easter, there is great confusion in the biblical texts themselves.³¹

²⁷ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 105.

²⁸ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 106.

²⁹ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 107.

³⁰ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 107.

³¹ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 108.

Paul, who did all of his writing between 49 and 62 C.E., simply proclaimed the presence of God in the person of Jesus. He did not explain it or justify it and he certainly did not do any systematic theologizing about it. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," he stated (II Cor.5:19). He believed that salvation had been achieved in Jesus. God had declared Jesus to be God's Son by the Holy Spirit at the moment of resurrection (Rom. 1:4). Doctrine of the incarnation or the Trinity would have been inconceivable to the Jewish Paul, both of them requiring a Greek ontology that he would have found quite foreign. Paul represented the first stage of christological thinking, the stage of proclamation.³²

[Confusion among Gospel writers about Jesus' divinity]

By the time the Gospel of Mark was written, however, (65-70 C.E.), people were beginning to ask how it was that God was in Christ. Mark provided the popular answer at this early stage of theological thinking. His answer was that God entered Jesus at baptism. Some twenty-five years later, Matthew and Luke were written. By this time it was no longer considered adequate to suggest that God adopted Jesus into a special relationship at his baptism. So, both Luke and Matthew added narratives to Mark's story (Matt. 1-2; Luke 1-2) that suggest that God and Jesus came into some identification with each other not at the time of baptism, when Jesus was already a grown man, but at the very moment of conception. He was "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary." Christological thinking had reached a new plateau. Eventually even this view came to be regarded as inadequate. By the time the Fourth Gospel was written, around the turn of the century, the moment of conception had been recognized as too finite and limited to be the point of divine/human identity in Jesus. John dismissed the virgin birth narratives, about which he had certainly heard, and substituted his hymn to the divine Lord: "In the beginning was the word [logos] .. and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14). The moment God and Jesus came into mutual identity was not at the resurrection, as Paul had thought, nor at the baptism, as Mark had believed. It was not even in the moment of conception, as Matthew and Luke had suggested. God was in Christ or Christ was in God from the beginning of time. John had completed the backward journey of the moment of divine/human merge in Christ.³³

Who is right? Perhaps they all were. Who is literally correct? Perhaps no one is, nor can anyone ever be when trying to capture God or the Christ in the vehicle of human words. How then can the Bible be the authoritative instrument by which our faith is validated? It cannot be unless and until a literalistic approach to the Bible is surrendered.³⁴

The same sort of incongruities are found when the Easter moment is explored chronologically through the pages of Scripture. Paul is still one who proclaims "God raised Jesus.".. Mark, the first Gospel to be written, gave a very scant Easter account, so scant that early Christians kept trying to embellish it with additional details.
.....³⁵

Who was right when details are in opposition, proponents of the two sides of the contradiction cannot both be right. If the church cannot agree in its own sacred book on the details of who Christ is or what happened on the first Easter, are we dealing with something that lends itself to a literal interpretation of anything? If those two central events cannot be literalized by Holy Scripture, can anything meet the test of literalization? If the Bible does not conform to the rules of literal truth, then can its words be used in any literal way to settle any dispute in Christendom? Is the proof-text method of applying the Bible ever appropriate? Indeed, quoting the Bible to prove a point in some dispute is both an inadequate and an inept response to any issue. In the Bible there are conflicting accounts of creation, conflicting versions of the Ten Commandments, conflicting understanding of who Jesus is and was, conflicting details what happened on the first Easter, conflicting views on the meaning of Pentecost, and even on when, or if, the end of the world will come.³⁶ Despite the fact that these conflicts and

³² John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 108.

³³ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 109.

³⁴ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 110.

³⁵ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 110.

³⁶ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 111.

alternatives are present in Scripture, there are still some who insist that the Bible is inerrant and that its texts can be quoted to define and support a wide variety of moral activities. Once literalism has been set aside as a basis for biblical interpretation, the more subtle issues of the biblical scholarship can be explored.³⁷

Who is the enemy?

What is the root of the rivalry between Israel and the Philistines? How did the Exodus fit into Egypt's history? What did the Jewish concept of the promised land mean to the Canaan's original inhabitants? What was the attitude of the Romans toward the conquered province of Judea, and what caused that attitude? When the author of I Timothy says, "I forbid women to speak in church," from where does the anger spring? Who is speaking where? One never prohibits what no one has ever thought of doing. The truth is probably that somewhere male authority was being challenged and the structures of control were cracking. The various strands and books of the Bible take one side of a two-sided or even possibly a many-sided dialogue.³⁸

Once the audience and the issues are discerned, the interpreter must explore the assumptions of the writer. Sometimes they are obvious, sometimes hidden. Even when obvious, we sometimes remain blind to them until society begins to ask new and provocative questions.³⁹ For example, when the story of the ascension was written by Luke, few people questioned the cosmological assumptions of the author. The earth was flat, the sky was a dome over the earth, and the abode of God was above the dome. So when Jesus returned to God after the events of Good Friday and Easter, he simply had to rise beyond the sky. But in a space age where the sky is not a dome but an infinite void, Luke's cosmological assumptions become obvious because they are now obsolete. The limitation on literalized Truth in the story becomes obvious. Matthew records Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount saying, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But, I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28). Reading this, one becomes aware that either the audience was all male or that the author assumes that men are by definition the lusters and women are the lusted-after. The male bias is apparent. When this generation reaches a point where it no longer shares the social and intellectual assumptions that inform and shape the biblical narrative, will we still continue to treat the Scripture authoritatively? That is a serious issue present before the church.⁴⁰

Sometimes even the most straightforward moral directives are not so simple after all. For example, most people believe that the Bible states without equivocation, particularly in the Ten Commandments, that murder is wrong, stealing is wrong, bearing false witness is wrong, adultery is wrong. What the Bible really says is that these things are wrong for a Jew to do a Jew, but a close reading of the text will reveal that when Jews dealt with their enemies, then lying, killing, stealing, and raping were all acceptable forms of tribal behavior. In war the common pattern was to kill the men, claim the booty, and kidnap the women for sexual sport and servitude. In the Exodus account of the confrontation⁴¹ between Moses and Pharaoh, Moses delighted in hearing false witness, promising the Pharaoh that the Hebrews would only go a day's journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to their God (Ex. 5:1ff.). Neither Moses nor Pharaoh really believed that story. When the escape from Egypt did occur, the Hebrews robbed the Egyptians blind- and they did it gleefully (Ex. 12:36). When they were on the other side of the Red Sea, they rejoiced to see the Egyptians dead on the shore (Ex. 14:30). You shall not bear false witness! You shall not steal! You shall not kill! Not applicable, the Hebrews would assert, except in intra-Jewish relationships.⁴²

The tribal limit on the moral law of Scripture was graphically expressed in a Deuteronomic text which reads, "You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to the alien who is within your town or you may sell it to a foreigner (Deut. 14:21). ... to keep women suppressed when women began to claim full

³⁷ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 112.

³⁸ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 113.

³⁹ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 113.

⁴⁰ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 114.

⁴¹ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 114.

⁴² John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 115.

membership and citizenship rights, will surely be quoted today to condemn changing sexual mores and the experimental patterns in family life that a being tested, and to justify the condemnation of homosexual persons when these historic victims of prejudice begin to assert their right to be themselves.⁴³

In a real sense, the debate in the church about issues of human sexuality is a debate over the authority of Scripture and over the role of both Scripture and the church in sustaining the ignorance that is the basis of prejudice.⁴⁴

CHAPTER 8: THE BIBLICAL ATTITUDE TOWARD WOMEN 117- 132

Anti-female bias not only won the day among the Hebrews but also passed uncritically into Christianity. Through Christianity that male bias has spread throughout the Western world. Whenever the bias was questioned at any time in history, the response came that God had willed it, for this is what the Bible taught. There is no doubt that the Bible taught an aggressive male superiority, but did God will that? Was that God's purpose? Does the sexist prejudice in the Bible reflect: the mind of God?⁴⁵

The older biblical creation story, recorded in the second chapter of Genesis, reflected the period of the rise of male dominance. The newer creation story in the first chapter of Genesis was less misogynist, but it still portrayed an exclusively male God who fashioned the universe.⁴⁶

CHAPTER 9: THE BIBLE AND HOMOSEXUALITY

CHAPTER 10: THROUGH THE WORDS OF THE WORD

If we take the Bible seriously we will not be able to take it literally, or as a fundamentalist might wish to do. It does mean that the truth of the Bible is neither frozen in some ancient pattern nor closed to the insights of the future. It does mean that the task of the Christian expositor of Scripture is to seek the living Word! This Word .. story of creation is not to be identified with the account of seven literal days of creation [but to hear the Word that speaks of the goodness of creation. It is the Word proclaiming that life is good, that everything that is shares in the divine origin and must therefore be celebrated and affirmed.⁴⁷

Throughout history the dark shadows of dualism have constantly sought to cut away from the goodness of God's creation those things judged as evil or unworthy of the light of God's day or the skill of God's hand. Human fears erect barriers that we identify with God's will. Then our prejudice, instructed by those barriers, rejects the people or things that are outside our barriers or our understanding. But finally, the Word of God in creation breaks those barriers, demanding that the original goodness of creation continue to live. How can slavery or segregation be practiced when everything in God's creation is good? Yet if literalism is allowed then any number of specific texts are quotable to prove the rightness of slavery. The descendants of Ham were He condemned to servitude (Gen. 9:20ff.), the Bible said. The Torah allowed slavery for non-Jews (Lev. 25:44ff.). Paul accepted slavery and sought to make it a bit more benign. He urged the runaway slave Onesimus to return to his master Philemon (Phil.) and directed masters to treat slaves kindly (Col. 4:1). The author of Ephesians described the proper relationship between slave and master (Eph. 6:5ff.). A literally interpreted Bible will support slavery, but the living Word, spoken in creation, will proclaim human

⁴³ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 115.

⁴⁴ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 116.

⁴⁵ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 120.

⁴⁶ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 127

⁴⁷ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 156

freedom afresh in every age.⁴⁸

Every human movement toward freedom and inclusiveness, from the Magna Carta, to the Reformation, to the emancipation of slaves, to the condemnation of racism, to the awakening to the evils of sexism and homophobia, have all found support in that community of faith that believes in the Word spoken by God in creation. Life is good. It is to be cherished. Human beings are all of value and are meant to be loved. Holy people cannot be used or exploited by those who desire self-gratification at the expense of others. The God of creation will oppose that even if some of the literal texts of Scripture will not. In creation God has called all people to live in God's presence as bearers of God's image.⁴⁹

The Word of God in creation, which will neither be circumscribed by human practice nor compromised by Holy Scripture, is heard anew whenever the barriers of prejudice fall or when national idolatry is shredded. For Israel that occurred in their exile, when the people learned that God was not bound to the limits of Israel, at least not the God of creation. For just a moment in that exile the vision of inclusiveness was imagined:⁵⁰

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain.
And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. (Isa. 40:4, 5)

This lonely voice crying in the wilderness was the faithful echo of the Word of the Lord spoken first in creation. It breaks forth again and again to defy and shatter the barriers created by human beings to enable themselves to feel secure-even, though they destroy the universality of the God of creation. It takes the tragedy of the exile, or the disaster of a human epidemic like the bubonic plague in the fourteenth century or AIDS in the twentieth century, or a nuclear accident that threatens to poison our common environment, to lift the human being out of his or her security system and into the (recognition that the human family is indivisible, sharing a common destiny, a common danger, and a common hope given to us all in the goodness of creation.⁵¹

God's word is also seen in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, Christians have called that life "the Word of God incarnate." The literal words that describe this life, which we call the Gospels, are full of contradictions. The origin of the meaning and power of Jesus are debated in Scripture itself. There are two birth narratives in the Bible, whose details cannot be reconciled. In one, Joseph had to go to Bethlehem because of a census or enrollment, and Jesus was born in a stable there (Luke 2). In the other, Joseph and Mary lived in Bethlehem in a house to which the Magi journeyed to find the newborn king (Matt. 2:9-10). In Luke, Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day and presented in the temple in Jerusalem on the fortieth day, both in a rather leisurely fashion (Luke 2:21-39), but Matthew, at that very same time, had the holy family fleeing into Egypt to escape Herod. Luke had the holy family return to Nazareth, for that was their hometown (Luke 2:39). Matthew invented a story that forced Jesus to move to Nazareth, for Matthew was sure that his home was in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:20-23). Indeed, the two Gospel writers do not agree even on the name of Joseph's father. It was Heli or Eli, said Luke (Luke 3:23). It was Jacob, said Matthew (Matt. 1: 16). What is the literal truth? The event that opened the eyes of the disciples, and through them the people of the world, to the divine presence in Jesus was the resurrection. That crucial event is also widely disputed in the literal texts of the Gospels, as we observed in chapter 7.⁵²

The specific words of the biblical narrative are so often confusing and contradictory that it is impossible to take them as literal truth, yet the Word of God in Jesus transcends the words and opens people to God's presence. The

⁴⁸ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 157.

⁴⁹ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 157.

⁵⁰ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 158.

⁵¹ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 158.

⁵² John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 159.

Word of God in Christ says that we are loved, valued, redeemed,⁵³ and counted as precious no matter how we might value ourselves or be valued by a prejudiced world. Since the God of creation is perceived to be the God who calls creation good, then the Christ who is God's Word must make that goodness real and apparent. That is what salvation is all about. We see God and God's Word in Jesus because God is the source of life, and Jesus revealed this God in his very aliveness.⁵⁴

We see God and God's word in Jesus because God is the source of love, and the love that was apparent in that Jesus embraced all sorts and conditions of humanity. He was open to beggars (Mark 10:46ff.), prostitutes (Mark 14:3ff.), thieves (Luke 23:32ff.), lepers (Luke 17: 11ff.), and the demon possessed (Mark 1: 32ff.). His compassion washed over every life he confronted, transforming a cowardly Peter into a hero (John 21:15ff.); freeing James and John, the scheming sons of Zebedee (Mark 10: 35ff.), one to be a martyr (Acts 12:2) and the other a beloved disciple (John 21:24) opening the eyes of the reluctant Andrew until he could see the value of every gift, even the gift of five barley loaves and two fishes that a young lad offered to feed a multitude (John 6:8ff.); and accepting Matthew and Zacchaeus despite their collaboration with the Roman government (Luke 19: 1ff.; Matt. 9:9). No one was apart from the love of this Jesus. The divisions that human beings create to determine worth were swept aside. A foreigner, an African from Cyrene, was compelled to carry Jesus' cross (Mark 15:21) and entered at once into the power of this man's love.⁵⁵

The Word of God in Jesus was not to be identified with the words people wrote about him but with the divine love that marked him and created life in those who confronted him. Edmond Browning, the Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church in the United States, observed in his inaugural address to the church, "The ethics of the kingdom have to be grounded in the compassion of the Christ." By the life of the Christ no one was rejected, because no one was rejectable.⁵⁶

We see God and God's Word in Jesus because God is the ground of all being and Jesus dared to be himself-all of himself. The most appealing part of the Gospel portrait of Jesus is not the supernatural framework of miracles and cures; it is, rather, the remarkable integrity of his being. Under every conceivable set of circumstances Jesus had the courage to be himself. He gave himself away in every encounter. He was present to the Samaritan woman by the well (John 4:7ff.), who by all measures was a person of no status. He was also present to the rich young ruler (Mark 10: 17ff.) who was endowed with much of this world's goods. Neither lack of status nor presence of status affected the being of Jesus. He was who he was.⁵⁷

One cannot give oneself away unless there is a self to give, a self that has been claimed, accepted, and courageously lived out. A self that is free to accept praise and to endure criticism, with no resulting change in essential being, is a self that is free. When I look at Jesus, who I believe is the Word of God, I see a free person who could accept the adulation of the Palm Sunday crowd without allowing the adulation to affect his being. I also see a free person hanging upon a cross, his life-force ebbing away, who could still accept the jeers of his tormentors without any trace of bitterness, defiance, or recrimination. His being was not changed by hostility and rejection any more than it was changed by praise. That is a portrait of freedom, the freedom of one who knows who he is and has the courage to be just that. We experience in him the incarnation of the ground of all being.⁵⁸

⁵³ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 159.

⁵⁴ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 160.

⁵⁵ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 160.

⁵⁶ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 160.

⁵⁷ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 161.

⁵⁸ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 161.

CHAPTER 11: MARRIAGE AND CELIBACY: THE IDEAL AND AN OPTION**CHAPTER 12: BETROTHAL: AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME****CHAPTER 13: SHOULD THE CHURCH BLESS DIVORCE?****CHAPTER 14: BLESSING GAY AND LESBIAN COMMITMENTS****CHAPTER 15: POST-MARRIED SINGLES AND HOLY SEX****CHAPTER 16: WOMEN IN THE EPISCOPATE: SYMBOL OF A NEW DAY FOR THE CHURCH**

In defining sexual issues and values the most powerful institution in Western civilization has been the Christian church. And also perhaps the most sexist institution left in Western civilization is the church. The implication is that only the male is capable of reflecting and symbolizing the deity a stance that affirms patriarchy. Overwhelmingly, the ranks of the ordained are filled by men. Only recent years has the ordination of women been a legal possibility in most churches. Women are still categorically denied ordination in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions⁵⁹ and [in many Korean churches].

Since at the highest level of decision making the liturgical churches of the world are all male, sexual mores have been set from a position of overwhelming male bias. The patriarchal world view has been identified with the patriarchal God, as defined by the patriarchal hierarchy of the patriarchal church. So the language of the liturgies of the church is for the most part the language of male dominance, [for example in hymns and creeds]. So professor Pagels claimed that male dominance and theological orthodoxy were merged in the struggle to rout the heretical thinking of the democratizing Gnostics, who were open to women, and to consolidate ecclesiastical power in the hands of men only.⁶⁰

In the seminaries of all the mainline Protestant traditions, the gender balance of the student bodies has shifted in the last two decades from a negligible female presence to a female enrollment that averages 30 to 40 percent of the student body. Some seminaries now have female majorities. The United Methodists have already broken the episcopal sex barrier by electing some outstanding women of ability as bishops. A change is obviously on the way. [Spong, the former bishop of Episcopal Church] predicts that it will not be long before the all-male Episcopal House of Bishops will come to an end, and women will be in decision-making positions in that church, taking part in defining God, producing liturgies, reinterpreting creeds, developing new sexual images, and determining the boundaries of moral and immoral behavior, most especially in the area of sexual ethics.⁶¹

EPILOGUE

⁵⁹ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 219.

⁶⁰ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 220.

⁶¹ John Shelby Spong. *Living in Sin* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 223.

APPENDIX: REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON CHANGING PATTERNS OF SEXUALITY AND FAMILY LIFE

The bible is the record of the response to the word of God addressed to Israel and to the Church throughout centuries of changing social, historical and cultural conditions. The faithful responded within the realities of their particular situation, guided by the direction of previous revelation, but not captive to it. The text must always be understood in context; first in the historical context of the particular Biblical situation and then in our own particular social and historical context. The word of God addresses us through scripture. It is not freeze-dried in prepackaged moral prescriptions, but is actively calling for faithful response within the realities of our particular time. Any particular prescription in scripture, any teaching of the law, must be evaluated according to the overarching direction of the Bible's witness to God, culminating (최우를 장식하다. 완결하다) in the grace of Christ.⁶²

Sexuality is not simply a matter of behavior. Our sexuality goes to the heart of our identity as persons. Our self understanding, our experience of ourselves as male or female, our ways of experiencing and relating to others, are all reflective of our being as sexual persons. We do not have bodies, we are bodies, and the doctrine of the Incarnation reminds that God comes to us and we know God in the flesh. We come to know God through our experience of other embodied selves. Thus our sexual identity and behavior are means for our experience and knowledge of God.⁶³ 성추행에 인용했음

⁶² John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 234

⁶³ John Shelby Spong. Living in Sin (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 238.