

InterVarsity Learns That You Cannot Straddle the Fence When It Comes to Homosexuality

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship is one of the leading campus ministries, and its publishing arm, InterVarsity Press, is one of the top Christian publishers. But this fine ministry is learning the hard way that, when it comes to homosexuality, you cannot straddle the fence.

In a moment, I'll explain exactly why I say that InterVarsity has tried to straddle the fence when it comes to homosexuality, but first, here's the relevant background.

Last week, InterVarsity announced "that it will begin dismissing employees who disagree with its theological stance on human sexuality starting on November 11."

As reported on *The Atlantic*, "Rather than force employees to sign a document outlining their position, the organization is asking employees to out themselves. Once the employees inform their supervisor of their personal views, the 'involuntary terminations' will be triggered."

From the standpoint of the historic, biblical faith, there is nothing in the least bit controversial about this, and InterVarsity is actually calling on its employees to act with integrity: If they do not agree with the ministry's moral and spiritual standards, standards they agreed to uphold when joining the ministry, they should immediately resign.

As for the specific issue of men having sexual and romantic relationships with other men and women having sexual and romantic relationships with other women, this is a non-

negotiable and it represents a line that must be drawn in the sand.

Not surprisingly, given today's confused and compromised spiritual climate, there has been a backlash from within InterVarsity.

As Jonathan Merritt reports on the Religion News Service, "40 authors in InterVarsity's publishing house stable including Shane Claiborne, David Dark, Christena Cleveland, Ian Morgan Cron, and Chris Heuertz are calling on IVCF head Tom Lin to immediately replace the policy with one that makes space for opposing views. The letter indicates that the signers 'do not all share the same theological or political views' but 'are united in our concern for the dignity and care of our fellow Christians whose jobs are threatened by your policy.'"

Also this week, "a public protest letter from "concerned ICVF alumni" was posted on and addressed to Tom Lin and IVCF's board of trustees. Similar to the authors' letter, this petition stated that signers 'hold a range of beliefs with regard to marriage and human sexuality.'"

The protest letter specifically states that, "we would be remiss not to address the particular pain, rejection and fear that this policy has caused lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex members of InterVarsity in the days since its publication. Being LGBTQI in InterVarsity has never been easy, even for those who agree with its traditional position, but this policy places additional burdens on our siblings in Christ who too often have been marginalized or outcast among Christian communities. Whatever our disagreements, InterVarsity can and must do better."

To be sure, we are called to exercise compassion towards brothers and sisters who struggle with same-sex attraction and gender identity confusion, walking together with them as they seek wholeness and pursue holiness. But those who claim that

you can follow Jesus and engage in homosexual practice must be lovingly corrected and, if they refuse to repent, put out of the fellowship, in particular if they are living this out themselves. That's what love requires.

And it is here that InterVarsity has brought some of these troubles on itself, and I say this with the utmost respect for this important ministry.

In 2009, InterVarsity published Andrew Marin's book *Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community*, a book which at one and the same time was incredible and terrible, a book that everyone needed to read and everyone needed to avoid.

To explain, Marin's recounting of the painful experiences of many LGBT people and their sense of being hated by God and rejected by the church is powerful and moving, something that every caring Christian should read. I remember one particular night when I had to put the book down, get alone in my room, and fall to my knees and weep. These stories were absolutely heartbreaking, moving me to tears of love for LGBT individuals.

On the other hand, the scriptural section of the book was absolutely abysmal, representing, in my mind, the worst treatment of Scripture I have ever seen in a book published by a major evangelical publisher.

The clear words of the Bible prohibiting homosexual practice were twisted beyond recognition by Andrew Marin—again, I have never seen that which is so clear be made into that which is so obscure—to the point that Prof. Robert Gagnon, the foremost authority on the Bible and homosexuality, wrote a lengthy review that absolutely savaged Marin's treatment of Scripture.

Marin's response to Gagnon, to which Gagon replied, further underscored the bankruptcy of his scriptural and moral

arguments.

Although other examples could be cited, this is the most glaring example of InterVarsity giving major exposure to an author who refuses to say that homosexual practice is sin (he has not responded to several invitations to join me on the air to clarify his position) and who intentionally dances around the issue when addressing what the Bible clearly says. Again, see Gagnon on this; there's no real dispute about Marin avoiding these issues.

And so, while InterVarsity did well to call for churches to reach out with sensitivity and compassion to the LGBT community and to recognize the struggles experienced by many true believers, they erred seriously by putting forth the mixed message of Marin and others, a message that surely was felt in InterVarsity's campus ministry as well.

Now, they are paying the price, as others who feel that Christians can differ when it comes to fundamentals of sexual morality are calling on InterVarsity to reverse its position, thereby committing spiritual suicide.

There is, then, only one way forward for InterVarsity in the days ahead.

They must hold the line without wavering, not backing down or apologizing for the policy they have announced, taking whatever flack or backlash comes their way. And they must be careful not to put out mixed messages in the future.

If they do, the blessing of God will be with them.

If they fold here, they will cease to be a relevant ministry in the years to come.

Let's pray for the leaders of InterVarsity to do what is right and for those who oppose them in the name of Jesus to see the error of their ways.