

Reaching Out to Gays

Most gay ministry leaders agree that churches have not related well to gays.

Last month I wrote the first part of a two-part column about the challenges Christians face in trying to maintain biblical positions on sexual morality and at the same time trying to reach out with God's redemptive love to the gay community. I promised in this column (part two) to point out several evangelical churches where there had been some success in this.

Sorry. I've failed.

It's not that such churches don't exist. It's just that even dynamic evangelical churches are often very reluctant to acknowledge publicly that they have a ministry aimed at reaching out to gays.

One reason is the hostility that exists in much of the gay community—which I described in my previous column—to any Christian group that says, flatly, homosexual practice is wrong. The other reason is that it has become clear to me the most effective ministry to gays by Christians is being done by former practicing gays who have left the lifestyle and have experienced the redemptive love of Christ in ways that enable them to behave differently.

One organization, Homosexuals Anonymous (HA), has for more than 20 years reached out to gays by offering an abstinence program of counseling and group support very similar to that of Alcoholics Anonymous. "John J.," a full-time HA counselor (in keeping with AA traditions, there is strict anonymity

maintained), agrees that although some homosexuals do experience a change in their sexual feelings, many don't. HA addresses the addictive behavior and truly unhealthy habits that many gay men engage in but want very much to quit. John, in fact, did change, and after a few years fell in love with a woman and got married.

John and most other gay ministry leaders agree that evangelical churches haven't done a very good job of relating to gays. "So many churches make homosexuality the ultimate sin," he says. "It is a sin, but it is no more sinful than all the other sins."

Bob Ragan, director of Regeneration, a ministry to gays in northern Virginia, believes that churches have sometimes been long on condemnation and short on Christ's redemptive love. "It makes the churches seem unsafe places [for gays]," he adds. Ragan says if a church wants to show gays that Christ's redemptive love embraces all sinners—while making it clear that sin is sin—then it ought to do so through former practicing gays who have a testimony.

In fact, despite the gay propaganda about sexual behavior being pre-determined by genes, there are large numbers of gays who have indeed successfully abandoned the gay lifestyle. Even though not all have made the transition to heterosexual married life, some have, and many who have remained single have maintained celibacy.

All the Christian parachurch gay ministries also make the following point: Although some gays do revert to the gay lifestyle (despite counseling, prayer and groups like HA), this no more invalidates what these ministries do than the failure of many alcoholics to quit drinking invalidates what

AA is doing. The irony is, though almost all counselors and psychologists in the secular community agree that most “behaviors” (things we do or don’t do) are in fact actual conscious choices, parts of the Christian community seem to think we are sexual automatons, entirely controlled by our genes and incapable of acting independently of our genetic “orientation.”

This is nonsense.

The fact that heterosexuals throughout history, in all cultures and religions, have been able in some circumstances to remain celibate ought to rebut any assumptions that men and women of homosexual orientation have to engage in homosexual practice. And just because something is difficult doesn’t mean it shouldn’t be tried, especially if that is what our faith calls for.

I have met with Christians in dozens of countries around the world. There is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of them regard celibacy outside marriage as the biblical standard for moral Christian behavior. The challenge for all of us now is to affirm that principle to gays while acknowledging that each of us, in some way or other, is also a sinner.

David Aikman is a former Time magazine senior correspondent who has reported from Jerusalem, Beijing, Moscow and dozens of nations. He welcomes your comments at davidaikman@.