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<i>Letters to the Editor</i> .....	133
<b>Editorial:</b> Catholic Identity in Catholic Health-Care Institutions: Are We Doing Enough? <i>John M. Travaline, M.D.</i> .....	136
<b>Doctrinal Reflection:</b> Chastity Elevates and Builds Up <i>Francis Cardinal Arinze</i> .....	139
<b>Articles</b>	
Perinatal Hospice: Compassionate and Comprehensive Care for Families with Lethal Prenatal Diagnosis <i>Byron D. Calhoun, M.D.</i> .....	147
Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation <i>John B. Shea, M.D. F.R.C.P.(C.)</i> .....	157
Nurses and Care of Patients at the End of Life: On the ANA Revised Position Statement <i>Carolyn A. Laabs, Ph.D.</i> .....	168
Pastoral Care: The Chicago Study <i>Patrick Guinan, M.D., Thomas Zabiega, M.D., and Christine Zainer, M.D.</i> .....	175
Can Immunology Corroborate the Two-in-One-Flesh Image in Genesis? <i>Donald DeMarco, Ph.D.</i> .....	181
<b>Symposium Proceedings</b>	
Baltimore Symposium <i>Most Rev. Edwin F. O'Brien, D.D.</i> .....	186
Your Conscience, Your Right: A History of Efforts to Violate Pro-Life Medical Conscience, and the Laws That Stand in the Way <i>M. Casey Mattox and Matthew S. Bowman</i> .....	187
Catholic Health Care and Current Ethical Dilemmas in Health-Care Delivery <i>John F. Brehany, Ph.D., S.T.L.</i> .....	198
Conscience, Contraception, and Catholic Health-Care Professionals <i>Janet E. Smith, Ph.D.</i> .....	204
<i>Book Reviews</i> .....	229

***Light in the Closet:  
Torah, Homosexuality, and the Power to Change*  
by Arthur Goldberg,**

Los Angeles: Red Heifer Press, 2008. 575 pp.

In his book *Light in the Closet*, Arthur Goldberg presents the teaching of Torah Judaism concerning homosexuality and the kinds of behavior it commands. A Torah scholar of Orthodox Jewish theology and a certified counselor who works with men and women struggling with sexual confusion, the author demonstrates his grasp not only of psychological theory but also of pastoral practice.

I shall consider first Goldberg's view of gay activists' efforts to destroy not only Torah morality but also the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on homosexual practices. He points to false teachings circulated by gay activists that persons with same-sex attractions (SSA) are born that way, will always remain that way, and cannot get rid of same-sex attractions: "Central to the propaganda behind such travesties is the pseudo-scientific postulate that a gay gene exists and that therefore homosexuality is biologically fated" (47). He recommends, as do I, a book by Neil and Briar Whitehead titled *My Genes Made Me Do It: A Scientific Look at Sexual Orientation* (Lafayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers, 1999). It strongly repudiates the premise of "biologically fated."

Goldberg describes well the homosexual activist agenda found in the Kirk and Madsen manifesto published in 1989 (*After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Loathing of Gays in the 90s* [New York: Plume]). Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen were masters of deceit strategy—making use of subliminal perception and clever terminology to change the attitude of the American public concerning homosexual persons from one of hostility to one of benevolence.

Goldberg also quotes Rabbi Samuel Dresner, a distinguished author, congregational rabbi, and professor of philosophy who well understood their strategy:

The Homosexual Activist Movement launched the most successful public relations campaign in the history of the nation and in little more than

a decade homosexuals have moved from pariahs to cultural heroes. During this period Americans have not only come to accept homosexuality as an inevitable phenomenon in our society, but also as a legitimate "lifestyle" deserving of affirmation as well as tolerance. (28)

These gay strategists anticipated that the legitimization of the homosexual lifestyle would ultimately be made "without society ever realizing that it had been purposely conditioned to arrive at a conclusion that it thinks is its own" (50–51).

Chapter three contains Goldberg's analysis of the steps involved in this strategy and its insidious rejection of Torah, Christian morality, and natural moral law. Goldberg shows how the gay-activist strategy portrayed the homosexual person as a victim of prejudice and violence. Their strategy showed films of brutalized gays and how they needed protection by society. They say: do not strut our gay pride publicly lest we undermine our victim image. Allow homosexual persons to portray themselves as victims of circumstances who did not choose their orientation any more than they chose their height or skin color. Kirk and Madsen want homosexual persons to cling to the "born that way" theory—even though the authors themselves recognize its invalidity (58). Goldberg points out how Kirk and Madsen revealingly admit that "sexual orientation, for most humans, seems to be the product of a complex interaction between innate predispositions and environmental factors during childhood and early adolescence" (59).

It is difficult to estimate the harm done to society, and particularly to the United States, by the gay activists' invasion of the public school system. People of all faiths resent a curriculum of sex education from pre-K through high school which propagandizes young children about homosexuality by extolling its goodness and naturalness. Goldberg also laments the corruption of school libraries by including materials

that celebrate the virtues of homosexuality under the rubric of diversity, safer schools, and tolerance while simultaneously excluding books that either contradict, challenge, or belie claims that homosexuality is innate, predetermined, and unchangeable. For example, GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network), a gay organization, gives grants to public schools to acquire gay-affirming books, while PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) developed a recommended reading list for children so they could learn the “joys of homosexual sex.”

As a Catholic moralist, I applaud Goldberg’s defense of the holiness of marriage (which he refers to as a “sanctified relationship”) and the need for young people to learn to control their sexual desires through the practice of purity of heart and chastity. Contrary to our pagan culture, he sees the habit of masturbation as a form of escape fantasy, often closely related to the sister habit of pornography (229–231).

### **Conflict Between Torah Morality and Today’s Culture**

Goldberg consistently shows how the Torah’s teaching on morality is in opposition to “today’s climate of sexual permissiveness” (101). The gay lifestyle is “inconsistent with a genuine aspiration to spiritual growth and enlightenment” (101). Both the Torah and the Talmud urge us to prayer and discipline.

In Orthodox Judaism, the written Torah, the first five books of the Bible, is distinguished from the oral Torah (also known as “The Talmud”). Orthodox Jews believe Talmudic interpretation was revealed by God to its prophets and teachers. In a similar vein, in the Roman Catholic Church, we distinguish the written words of Scripture from the oral tradition and look to both for sources of understanding the meaning of God’s commandments. However, in our view, both modes of transmission of Revelation are under the guidance of the Church with the pope as the Supreme Teacher. In both religions, teaching about homosexuality comes from both the written Scriptures and divine oral tradition.

A fascinating insight presented by Goldberg is the interpretation within the

Oral Law of the Hebrew word, “to eivah” as used in Leviticus 18:22 (literally translated as “abomination”). Its deeper interpretation as set forth in the Talmud, based upon the roots of the Hebrew word “to’eivah” is “straying, or being led astray.” This insight helps us to understand the Orthodox Jewish teaching on homosexuality: that is, understanding it as a behavior that can be transformed. Within both classical Judaism, as well as classical Christianity, if someone has been led astray, makes a mistake, or has made an error, they can do “teshuvah” (translated as “repentance” or “return” to God). Implicit within this understanding is a simple fact: one who goes astray retains the ability to find the way back and to engage in an internal, transformational process of self-reflection, value clarification, and study. Behavior changes are a by-product of such a process. Indeed, Goldberg shows that the other forms of Judaism—Reform, Reconstructionist, and even parts of the Conservative Movement—have attempted to negate this approach by developing a “New Age” theology, which redefines sexual morality in a way that legitimizes the theory and practice of homosexuality (107).

Over the years, I learned more about Orthodox Judaism, and I realized that its concepts of morality are very similar to Roman Catholic moral theology. Goldberg believes that individuals are conflicted by the secular culture in which we live and highlights this conflict by quoting from Rabbi Nosson Scherman, general editor of Art Scroll/Mesorah Publications:

A Jewish individual’s religious teaching and Torah study tell him that G-D is the Creator not only of the birth of the universe, but every day and every moment, yet his news reports tell him constantly of more new frontiers conquered by science. His soul tells him: Heaven is a spiritual concept beyond his grasp, but he sees his fellow men walking in space.... He learns a morality of Eternity, but he lives in a society preaching the here and now. (105)

Goldberg asks: how does one handle these contradictions? He refers to the views of Rabbi Dr. Moshe Meiselman, former director of Academic Programs at Yeshiva Uni-

versity, who suggests that most contemporary Jews will respond “by choosing one of three main courses of action: 1) become a nominally observant secularist; 2) retreat into piety and no longer address outside issues; and 3) integrate the goals and values of the Torah into one’s personality and acquire them as his own” (106). Meiselman holds that choice number one “is nothing but shallow formalism” (106). It can be said that other religions, including Catholicism, likewise have shallow formalists.

“Nowhere are the contradictions between Jewish Teachings and today’s cultural climate more evident or more profoundly confusing to the individual than in the area of sexual morality and conduct” (107). Thus Goldberg sets forth several contradictions between Torah Teachings and the views of secularism. For example, Torah sees sex in general as an enormously powerful force of nature that needs to be harnessed in order to achieve its full potential for good.

Not unlike American society as a whole, only perhaps more intensely, Jewish society is torn—both inside and out—by a values conflict—or, more appropriately, a “culture war” in which the specific sexual restrictions of the Torah are challenged by a moral relativism in which the only sacred criterion is “mutual consent.” (108–9)

The egocentric hedonism of our culture, according to Goldberg, is “directly antithetical to the Torah promise of spiritual and physical well being that is inherent in the careful regulation of one’s relation with G-d, humanity, and nature” (109). Goldberg goes on to support the authority of God and to reject forbidden conduct and desires. “Even the most ordinary Jew has within him or her the strength and the power to turn away from temptation and wrongdoing and to do what is right—in other words, that everyone has the power to elevate him- or herself to a higher spiritual plane” (109).

### **Sexual Reassignment Surgery**

I am pleased with Goldberg’s assessment of sexual reassignment surgery, or sex-change operations (a topic rarely dis-

cussed in books of this nature). It involves the physical removal of the sex organs, or their alteration, including hormone injections, as well as procedures to change the secondary sexual characteristics of male and female. Many factors of gender identity and homosexuality lead individuals to seek physical surgery and hormonal treatment while failing to seek out psychological and spiritual guidance. The gay movement supports these procedures, but Torah theology forbids them both for men and women (see Dt 22:5, 23:2, and Lev 22:24). For example, Leviticus 22:24 uses the phrase “Neither shall you do this in your land.” Goldberg points out how the Talmud (Oral Law) in Shabbos 110b clarifies that the phrase “in your land” means one’s own body. The language of the Talmud explains the meaning thusly: “neither shall you do this [i.e. castration] to yourselves.”

Goldberg points out that Orthodox Jewish leaders condemn such procedures for violating Torah commandments and morality. He then debunks the rationalizations used by other Jewish movements in an attempt to justify such operations. Goldberg however goes even further. He raises the question of the effectiveness of the operations and whether they are beneficial to the person, and sets forth the medical risks of such procedures. A powerful indictment of sexual reassignment surgery which Goldberg cites is that of Dr. Paul McHugh, chief psychiatrist at Johns Hopkins Hospital in its department of Sexual Disorders from 1975 to 2001. McHugh directed staff psychiatrist Dr. Jon Meyer to study all those who had had such procedures performed at Johns Hopkins. Dr. McHugh summed up the study of Dr. Meyer: Although the patients were content with what they had done, yet in every other respect they were little changed in their psychological condition. They had “much the same problem with relationships, work, and emotions as before” (285). They had not been able to develop psychologically.

With these facts in mind, Dr. McHugh concluded that Johns Hopkins was fundamentally cooperating with a mental illness. “We psychiatrists, I thought, would do better to concentrate on trying to fix their minds and not their genitalia” (285). Ac-

cordingly, Dr. McHugh ordered the Johns Hopkins Sexual Reassignment Surgery Unit closed in 1979. Goldberg cites several other more recent studies of sex-change operations to the same effect: such procedures do nothing good for the patients and often lead to further disastrous conditions, such as suicide, mental illness, and death. (In previous research I conducted on pedophilia and related sexual issues, I noticed the similar bad effects of same-sex operations. See my discussion in John F. Harvey, *The Homosexual Person* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987], 215–227.)

Together with Goldberg, I agree that Johns Hopkins University was correct in discontinuing sex operations almost thirty years ago. I also agree with him that the first kind of change a person with same-sex attractions needs to consider is a transformation of his heart, head, body, and soul. This cleansing may be thought of as the virtue of chastity. In Courage literature, it is called interior chastity, or chastity of the heart. Goldberg reminds Jewish persons with same-sex attractions that God's commandment requires that they learn to follow the Torah by living a life of "sexual holiness" (175–179).

Contrary to some of the most recent statements of the American Psychological Association (APA) suggesting harm resulting from engaging in the process of sexual reorientation, in no way is a person harmed when he seeks to recover his natural heterosexual inclinations. Goldberg shows how the healing process involved not only strengthens and enhances the person struggling with issues, but it also provides him or her with affirmation and hope while compassionately setting forth a program for human change of heart. Goldberg makes many helpful suggestions in this book to persons with same-sex attractions. Particularly in chapters 11–13, he shows the parallels between the Jewish process of "teshuvah" (repentance) and the processes of overcoming same-sex attractions.

In his last chapter, Goldberg reiterates and discusses further the negative consequences of gay affirmative counseling that he laid out in chapter two of his book. These consequences result in the concealment of a true possibility of choice,

of healing, and of transformation by denying people knowledge of the existence of effective counseling for those with unwanted same-sex attractions. The two case histories presented in his second chapter provide concrete examples in which the lives of the individuals involved were destroyed. In his concluding chapter, he laments that many mental health professionals refuse to inform their clients "that alternative therapies were available that could effectively treat their SSA" (568). As a result, many strugglers continue to live in emotional pain, often lapsing into other addictive behaviors, such as drugs or alcohol abuse. They are placed in situations of unbearable ambivalence, conflict, suffering, and mortal danger (568).

In concluding this comprehensive, easily readable, and exceedingly well-documented text, Goldberg quotes a great Hebrew scholar, Rabbi Aharon Feldman, former dean of Ner Israel Rabbinical College of Jerusalem (and now dean of its American campus in Baltimore, MD):

The fact is that neither homosexual nor heterosexual activity has the capacity to grant happiness to humans, as even a cursory glance at our unhappy world will demonstrate. The only activity, which can give us happiness, is striving towards reaching the true goals of life. Life is ... [meant] to be used to carry out G-d's will by coming closer to Him and serving Him by keeping His commandments. (573)

Overall, Goldberg's book masterfully and uniquely integrates the Scriptural Wisdom of the Torah and the Talmud with the sound insights of contemporary psychotherapists knowledgeable about sexuality issues. It outlines clearly the damage to civil society created by the propaganda of sexual liberationists. Goldberg not only responds to their false messages permeating our society but also shows how such messages are destroying our basic freedoms (such as freedom to speak the truth and to choose treatment for unwanted sexual behaviors.) His compassion and concern for those who struggle with sexual issues are obvious. Goldberg vigorously defends the right of sexually confused individuals to seek healing. Moreover, he provides them

with solid rationales and spiritual and psychological processes designed to enhance their journey to sexual wholeness and holiness. Because the book's lucid exposition and exhaustive research so clearly contradict the prevalent "political correctness" of our times, *Light in the Closet* should

be required reading for every person who seriously desires an understanding of the connection between God's approach to appropriate sexual activity and the science of healing. It also belongs in the library of every institution that seeks to understand, teach, and promote this approach.

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