

PERSPECTIVES

The Mission of a Free Press

STAFF EDITORIAL

Since the publication of the articles in last week's issue of the Davidsonian, "Homosexuality against Christian tradition" and "Accepting GLBTQ's affirms Davidson ideals," there has been a firestorm of debate and discourse on our campus unlike anything that the school has experienced in recent years. Professors have dedicated entire classroom sessions to the discussion of the article; students have been found debating the topic in every corner of the campus, and hundreds of students, faculty, administration and community members packed the 900 Room on Monday evening for an honest, constructive and forthright conversation on the topic of homosexuality in relation to Davidson, Christianity and freedom of speech. Since last week, we have received a large amount of responses to both articles, all of which will be available either in print or on-line. We believe it is important to continue the discourse on what is undoubtedly a critical and culturally relevant issue. Unfortunately, we were unable to publish every response we received in the print edition due to space constraints, but all of the editorials that were submitted to us can be found at our website, www.thedavidsonian.com.

For clarification purposes, it should be said that neither of the opinions expressed in last week's articles represent the beliefs of Davidson College or the Davidsonian. The articles were run in the Perspectives section; as such, they are solely the opinions of two students with differing beliefs regarding the topic of homosexuality as it relates to Davidson College and the Presbyterian Church.

The editors of the Davidsonian firmly stand by our decision to print last week's articles, as we believe that our responsibility is not to censor the opinions of Davidson students, but to facilitate healthy discourse on a topic that affects countless members of our student body. Many have said that it was irresponsible of the Davidsonian to run the articles, as it reflects poorly on the college as a whole. We believe however, that our ability to have constructive discussions on sensitive issues in the first place speaks to the respect, open-mindedness and integrity of Davidson students. There are countless schools that would have attempted to sweep this issue under the rug and never speak of it. We are proud that Davidson College is not one of those schools.

The Davidsonian

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Chaplain's Office supports homosexuals

THE REV. ROB SPACH
College Chaplain and Guest Columnist

The Chaplain's Office was recently chided in the Davidsonian for our support of gay students based on the claim that the Bible condemns homosexuality and that such support is a betrayal of our Presbyterian heritage. I know and respect people of good conscience who thoughtfully disagree with one another on these issues. As the College Chaplain, here is my own take.

Seven passages in scripture make reference to same-gender sex. Since space prohibits offering an interpretation of all seven (though I am willing to discuss them with anyone interested in my perspective), I submit reflections on two which indicate that the matter is not as clear as many claim. Perhaps the most-often cited passage in this debate is the story of Sodom (Genesis 19). When visitors (angels, disguised as men) arrive in the city and are offered hospitality by a man named Lot, all of the men of the city surround Lot's house demanding that he send out these foreigners so that they can (forcibly) have sex with them. It is a story of intended gang rape, using sex as a weapon upon the vulnerable (in this case, strangers) to "show them their place." This violation happens in prison today when a new inmate arrives, and it is not gay men doing it.

The other passages in scripture that refer to Sodom's sin (Ezekiel 16:49-50, Isaiah 1:10-17, 3:9, 13-17, Jeremiah 23:14, Matthew 10:5-7, 12-15, Luke 10:1-3, 8-12) do not cite homosexuality. The exception may be Jude 7. The text in Greek, however, makes clear that the writer is not concerned with sex between men but between men and angels. A fair conclusion is that the Sodom story is not about homosexuality.

Jude 19 supports this reading of Genesis 19. Again, all the men of a town surround a house and demand that the visitor be sent out so that they can have sex with him. Instead (and this is awful in its own way!), the man sends out his concubine. If the men outside were gay, that might be the end of the story, but it is not. They gang rape her all night until she dies. Each of the other five scriptural references to same-gender sex, when read in light of the rest of scripture and of historical, literary and linguistic evidence – which is a traditionally-Presbyterian way of reading the Bible – likewise yields no clear condemnation of homosexuality.

The same can be said of other texts used in the debate, such as the creation narratives in Genesis, which command the first couple to be fruitful and multiply. That is the norm,

the usual order of things; most people are heterosexual and procreate. But of course both nature and culture are filled with instances that do not conform to a norm.

Some couples are barren; some people remain single all their lives by choice or circumstance; Catholic priests and nuns take a vow of celibacy. None of these fulfills the command to be fruitful and multiply, yet they are not condemned. Likewise, most people are right-handed; that does not make left-handedness wrong, though some cultures force people to use their right hand. Most children are born in single birth, but twins are not wrong, though in some cultures twins are immediately killed because they are perceived as a threat to society. Likewise, a compelling case can be made that while most people are heterosexual, homosexuality is not wrong even though some people would claim otherwise.

What is abundantly clear in the Hebrew prophets and the ministry of Jesus is that God has an abiding concern for people in society who are marginalized, oppressed, vulnerable, or excluded. Gay people, who have faced threats and torture, as well as the horror of being rounded up and killed during the Holocaust alongside Jews, Gypsies and people with disabilities, certainly fit into that category.

Did the Presbyterian founders of Davidson College consider homosexuality wrong? Yes, most likely they did. They also lived in a culture that justified slavery using the Bible. In the Reformed tradition, faithfulness does not mean simply maintaining views because those before us held them, but rather seeking to embody and articulate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that is honest and authentic for our current context. That is why the Presbyterian Church USA has a Book of Confessions written by particular faith communities at different times and circumstances in history. These confessions do not always agree with one another precisely because we must continue to be reformed by God's Spirit in light of current realities and understandings. That is why today we can say confidently that slavery is not part of God's will despite what our forebears claimed. Likewise, we can rightly ask what it means to be faithful today with regard to our attitudes towards people who are gay.

For these reasons, it has been my judgment that as an embodiment of the humane values espoused by the college and in faithfulness to God, scripture and the Reformed tradition, the Chaplain's Office at Davidson should stand in support of and solidarity with homosexuals.

The Rev. Rob Spach is the Davidson College Chaplain. Contact him at rospach@davidson.edu.

Statement of Purpose affirms tolerance

CHRIS MARSICANO
Guest Columnist

Shakespeare wrote in *The Merchant of Venice*, that anyone "can cite Scripture for his purpose." Never have I thought that lesson to be more important than after reading Michael Spangler's article last week.

Now, I know Michael quite well. I have enjoyed my conversations with him since we lived on the same freshman hall. I do, however, think Mr. Spangler "cites Scripture for his purpose" in this case. He obviously believes that Davidson College fails its homosexual students by celebrating their "rebellion against God." Therefore, he includes references to passages in the Bible that he believes substantiates this idea.

In a college that touts its openness to all creeds, how can we not love all?

With Scripture, I can substantiate other ideas. I can talk about how the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah focus mainly on the sins of refusing hospitality and sexual violence, not the phantom "sin" of homosexuality. Or, I can talk about the urgency of the letters of Paul who believed that no man, straight or gay, should marry unless the need for sexual passion overwhelms him. However, these ideas would only resonate with some and surely anger quite a few, simply because I "cite scripture for my purpose."

Instead, I will cite only another "purpose," the Davidson College Statement of Purpose. The Statement, revised most recently in 2005, notes that "at Davidson, faith and reason work together in mutual respect and benefit toward growth in learning, understanding, and wisdom." My faith tells me that acceptance and respect for those who are different makes our College a better place. Reason tells me that we cannot respect those differences without acknowledgement of the

hard times each of us face daily, especially the hard times faced by minority groups simply because they are not everyone else.' It seems that on National Coming Out Day, faith and reason worked together quite nicely.

The Statement of Purpose further notes that "God is the source of all truth," but that "the Christian tradition to which Davidson remains committed recognizes... a God known by no church or creed." While founded in 1837 by Congregational Presbyterians, the college believes that God cannot be tied down by any set of ideals. While Mr. Spangler's creed states that the events of National Coming Out Day rebelled against God and should be discouraged by the College, other creeds state that God smiled upon the celebration. What matters is the "truth." Most every denomination, church, and culture believes in the capacity of God to love all. In a college that touts its openness to all creeds, how can we not love all? How can we not celebrate the triumphs of some of our college family members over the hard times they have faced?

Lastly, and, most importantly, according to the statement, "the primary purpose of Davidson College is to assist students in developing humane instincts and disciplined and creative minds for lives of leadership and service." On National Coming Out Day, a group of Faculty, Staff, and Students provided leadership to the Gay community, and served the greater Davidson family by providing an outlet for questions, concerns, and stories of the gay experience.

Scripture was once used to prevent integration, interracial marriages, and even to substantiate slavery. In those instances, cooler heads prevailed. Those leaders were strong in their faith and resolute in reason shaped lives, time and time again. Let us not cite scripture. Let us develop humane instincts and disciplined and creative minds so that we may be the leaders that shape a positive future.

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