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PCA - AIDS TASK FORCE REPORT

When the church speaks prophetically to a current issue seeking to shine the light of God's Word upon it, it can have two foci. The church can speak to its members and/or it can speak to society at large. The AIDS crisis provides ample opportunity for both. The task given to us by General Assembly clearly delineates the former as our responsibility. We have been charged with the task of "bring(ing) recommendations to the next General Assembly; which recommendations will serve to give direction and provide educational guidelines for individuals and churches to use in dealing with the AIDS epidemic and pandemic."

When a doctor is confronted by certain symptoms of a disease, he is obliged to treat it in a two-fold manner. He will seek to provide medication to ease the immediate suffering brought on by the symptoms. He will not stop there, however. He will also seek to treat the underlying disorder that produced the symptoms, so that the symptoms will disappear. Analogously, the church's response must be two-fold. Presented with the AIDS epidemic, the church has certain immediate pastoral and diaconal responsibilities, but our analysis must go much deeper. We must seek to put our finger on the disorder in our society that has produced AIDS.

Hence, this report is structured in this two-fold approach. The first part will deal with the opportunity the AIDS crisis presents the church with to deal pastorally and diaconally, immediately. The second part seeks to uncover some of the underlying disorders to which the church must address itself over the long term.

Part I

Our increased likelihood of involvement with those PWAs (Persons with AIDS) is not hypothetical. Individuals and families within congregations of the PCA are already dealing with AIDS. Congregations both in larger metropolitan areas and in smaller communities throughout our continent are now facing the dilemmas of dealing with persons within the local church who have tested HIV positive. As the numbers of those in our churches and our communities affected by AIDS increase, it will be necessary for local congregations to have a well-thought-out plan of action in response.

As individuals come in faith and repentance to Jesus Christ and are incorporated into the life of the local church, we must realize the probability that some people have come out of various backgrounds we now speak of as "high risk" backgrounds include those individuals who are homosexual, bi-sexual, or IV drug users. Those persons, after conversion, may, at a later date, become HIV positive; possibly go on to develop ARC (AIDS Related Complex) and to develop full blown AIDS. In addition to these, there are others, within our congregations, who may develop AIDS through more indirect means (i.e. blood transfusion, intra-uterine infection, pre-marital sex, and adultery). When we include the family and loved ones of the PWAs, the need for ministry becomes more acute. As AIDS increases it is, by ripple effect, beginning to touch the lives of families and friends we know who are members of our congregations.

Now is the time, therefore, for local PCA churches and their leadership to begin thinking through how they will respond to the needs of all concerned when faced with their first case of AIDS. For many of us, just having to think through the AIDS issue

and the ministry involved is a new experience. Most of us have faced this issue only at a distance. Real interaction with the issue and the people involved had been minimal. Statistics, projections, and, now, experience tells us that this will change. In light of this and because AIDS is a highly emotional issue, due in part to the social, moral, and medical stigma attached, it is expedient for church leaders to begin developing a philosophy of ministry to all concerned before actually being faced with the task of ministry.

The pastoral implications of ministry to PWAs and their families are many. There is a great opportunity and responsibility for the church to minister the love of Christ in word and deed, not only to individuals and families within our congregations who are being touched in some way by AIDS; but to those unbelievers suffering physical, emotional, psychological, financial, and spiritual devastation. As one Reformed pastor recently said, "At last we would see the church really being the church if we are willing to respond to the AIDS crisis." That response, on the part of the church, involves the tasks of tending the sick and of reconciling the repentant through word and deed. This involves direct ministry to the suffering and dying.

One of the greatest challenges and opportunities of the church today is effective ministry to PWAs and their families. Although the needs of the PWAs are many, meeting a majority of these needs is entirely within the scope of the local church. The church, in fact, is the most effective vehicle for helping the PWA and is the only source that can minister to the whole person. Sources within the local church can go far in meeting many of these needs.

As AIDS continues to impact our society and PWAs begin to surface in our local churches, we have a biblical responsibility to care for our own who are HIV positive and also those outside the church (Gal. 6:10 "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.") To accomplish this, a crucial prerequisite is the AIDS education (medical and theological) of our presbyteries. Then we must educate our local sessions and congregations.

Because of the fear connected with AIDS, the pastor and session must take the initiative in education and leading the people in this area. Not to prepare one's leadership and congregation paves the way for a purely emotional response, based on misinformation and fear when a case of AIDS is revealed in our churches. Such a response is void of the pastoral calling of church leadership to minister to both the PWA and the congregation as a whole. Planning and preparation of our churches to deal with the AIDS issues biblically prevents overreactions which may hinder ministry to PWAs and will forestall congregational difficulties.

In addition to ministering to our own churches, we have a biblical responsibility to follow our Lord's example and reach out beyond our church doors to the suffering world. Those involved with church growth have been telling us for years that people become much more receptive to the gospel as their world views are shaken, psychologically, medically, financially, and politically. AIDS is definitely shaking world views and tearing away the false foundation of those dealing with it. We, therefore, believe that there exists a great evangelistic opportunity in the midst of the age of AIDS, an opportunity that cannot be missed.

Our churches must bring the gospel to bear on the questions PWAs are beginning to ask; questions of an eternal nature, questions being asked for the first time by those at the crux of a life threatening disease. It is the Christian church, after all,

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which is the only resource capable of answering these questions concerning matters of the heart. The world cannot answer them, and we cannot allow secular society to attempt Kingdom work.

There is much “pastoral care” being provided by secular society which has little to do with the specific spiritual needs of the individual dealing with AIDS. In many circles today, one can hear the familiar refrain, “We don't talk about dying around here, we talk about living.” Such a superficial response by “care givers” in the midst of a disease most experts are saying is 100% fatal, is severely flawed. In these cases, failure to discuss, in the appropriate context, a person's relationship to God and eternity misses the point.

The church's pastoral ministry in the AIDS issue is two-fold. First, we must care for our own congregations both by ministry to those who have AIDS and educating the rest medically and biblically about the issues surrounding AIDS. Secondly, we must minister to those outside Christ who have AIDS and who need healing from the spiritual blindness in which they are living. We must strive to see that all who are dealing with AIDS experience comfort and healing in their mortal bodies in the midst of suffering.

AIDS may very well be one of the most “gut-wrenching” issues that we, as a church, face for the remainder of the twentieth century. We must never forget, however, that behind the issues, behind the media demagoguery, and behind the massive literature, are real people—people to whom only the church of Jesus Christ can minister in a truly biblical sense.

Part II

The church's responsibility cannot end by dealing only diaconally and pastorally with AIDS sufferers. This would be to treat only the symptom. The church must seek by the light of God's Word to understand what is at the root of the AIDS epidemic, to expose the disease that has produced AIDS.

The question has been asked, “Is AIDS a judgment of God on the homosexual?”* We must recognize that AIDS cannot be laid at the feet of the homosexual only, but that AIDS is God's judgment on a society. AIDS is a symptom of a diseased and godless society that has rejected God's Word. Therefore the question of culpability must be brought home to each person. For it is to the degree that we have not fulfilled our callings in obedience to God's Word that we have contributed to the situation in our culture that has produced the AIDS epidemic.

This message needs to be proclaimed to the unbelieving world to call them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. However, in keeping with our mandate as a committee the following analysis is directed first of all to the church. To the degree that we, in our callings, have failed, we need to repent and bring forth fruit in keeping with our repentance.

The following is a brief sketch of a society that has turned from God's norms for life. It cannot be detailed. It is our hope that the contours of the problem will become evident and that thereby it will help to point to more specific areas of disobedience that need to be dealt with. Further, it is our hope that God's people will be called again to

* Accompanying this paper as an appendix is a theological treatment of the question, “Is AIDS a judgment of God on the homosexual?” (See page 70.)

bring God's Word to bear on every area of life, so that in all our lives God might be glorified and in so doing we might be an irresistible light in a dark world.

Marriage is to be a lifelong and total union between a man and a woman that is to be governed by love and faithfulness. Sex is a gift given by God in creation to be enjoyed in the context of this relationship alone.

It has been the departure from this norm that has been the occasion of the AIDS epidemic. The institution of marriage is breaking down at an alarming rate. As the creational context for sex crumbles numerous sexual disorders and deviations have flooded in to fill the void that has been created. In our culture sex has become an idol as it has been wrenched from its God-given context.

We call upon Christians, insofar as they have departed from God's norms for marriage and sex, to repent and commit themselves to a renewed obedience. One of the most powerful weapons that the Christian has is the opportunity to be a bright, beaming light that attracts others to the blessing of a godly marriage.

Children will generally be the product of and the blessing of God on the sexual union in marriage. Thus a family is formed. God gives clear light in His Word on the responsibility and task of parents and children. Parents are responsible to nurture their children in the Lord by the divinely appointed means of example, instruction and discipline. Children in turn are to honour and obey their parents submitting to the forming and nurture given by the parents.

In our culture, parents and children have failed. Parents have failed to model the Biblical institution of marriage wherein healthy, meaningful, fulfilling and God-honouring sex can be found. Parents have failed to instruct their children with respect to God's norms for sex. Finally, permissiveness permeates parenting today and God's command for correction is not heeded. Children have conformed to the spirit of our age that rejects and has no respect for authority.

God calls His people to godly and Biblical family relationships. Parents must take hold of their role ordained by God and by example, instruction and discipline teach their children to be covenant keepers in not only their sexuality but in all their flesh and blood existence before the face of God. Children must be called to submit to their parents' loving nurture and learn to obey the Lord.

A godly family must bear eloquent and radiant testimony to God's good order for the family calling unbelievers by this mute witness to repentance. One can only guess how much the breakdown of marriage and family has contributed to the AIDS epidemic ravaging our nations.

The educational community must also bear the burden of blame for our AIDS epidemic. There is in our nation a monopoly of humanistic (public) education. The secular world view that underlies the education of our children has gone far to entrench a relativistic ethic in North America. God has been banished from the natural sciences by the concept of "natural law" and banished from the social sciences and humanities by the idea of "values".

Unfortunately, Christian schools that have sprung up in response to this monopoly have often adopted the secular and atomistic approaches to education. A Christian icing has thinly covered an otherwise humanistic cake.

Christians have acquiesced to this state of affairs allowing schools to be the primary agent of humanism/secularism that has engulfed our countries. We must call for diverse educational choices so our children may be taught to keep covenant with

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God in all of life. If we are to fight a spiritual battle, our “warriors-in-training” must be properly equipped to fight not declawed by the enemy.

Some blame must be laid at the feet of the media for a couple of reasons. First, by a pursuit of the almighty dollar wherein the profit motive has become the norm, the various media have been concerned with consumption rather than communication. While God’s Word calls the media to communicate honestly and respectfully on significant issues, these norms have been violated in attempt to attract another consumer.

Secondly, the media’s world view has been exclusively dominated by one world view (liberal humanism) and the product has resembled, not diverse opinions geared to express the diverse world views of its citizenry, but propaganda.

This has combined to have a devastating effect on our culture. Gradually the views of the citizens are being brought into line with the humanistic views of the powerful media. Without question this situation has contributed to the homosexual problem with its AIDS infection.

To the degree that Christians have masqueraded in the cheap costume of the world and adopted its approach to the media, either in its consumption or practice, we must repent and renew our commitment of glorifying God in this vitally important area of our lives.

When the institutional church points its finger at the homosexual, three fingers are pointing right back at her.

We, too often, have misunderstood the role of the institutional church in God’s kingdom. It is to be a worship center, a recruitment station and training ground to equip God’s people for kingdom service in every sector of their lives. We have, however, turned the church into a resort where weary soldiers withdraw from the battle rather than being trained to battle.

Further, we have not been faithful to declare the whole counsel of God. Ministers have too often worn the dualistic glasses of a sacred/secular division which has rendered the Word of God irrelevant, if not inoperative in the majority of life.

Thirdly, the church has unlovingly stigmatized homosexuals. A loving atmosphere that encourages communication that may lead to repentance is absent and is replaced all too often by a harsh, critical and judgmental self-righteousness.

Finally, the church has failed to be a vital community of prayer. Paul calls on the church to pray for all men (I Tim. 2:1ff.), but prayer has become too often a perfunctory and insipid exercise. And when it does exist vitally, it has all too often turned inward and selfish in its focus.

In all these areas the church needs to repent and again take up her task in God’s kingdom. The church must again see itself as a training ground for spiritual soldiers. She must proclaim God’s Word in all its vital and life-giving relevance and power for all of life. She must break down the barriers that hinder the homosexual from seeing the church as a place of help. Finally, the church must be restored to a vital, communal prayer life that takes God’s whole creation within its parameter.

The medical profession has failed in its responsibility by adopting a solely materialistic view of its task. The profession has become a handy tool of humanists who seek to defy God in their lifestyle while remaining protected in their bodies from the consequences of that lifestyle.

To the extent that a proper response to the AIDS epidemic and those infected with the AIDS virus requires medical knowledge, the medical profession should

recognize its calling in containing the disease, pursuing a cure and treating those who are ill with AIDS.

God has bound us together in political communities made up of citizens in all their social and cultural life and governing, political authorities to maintain justice in that terrain. Both the political authorities and citizens have failed in their calling and thus contributed to the AIDS virus.

Politicians have, too often, been sounding boards for public opinion, rather than principled men who minister justice. Further, in our countries we have a history of civil rights that is based on individualism rather than God's calling. Both of these failures of governing authorities have led to a breakdown in our culture of a publicly just community. AIDS is one of the bad fruits of that development.

Too many citizens have acquiesced in this state of affairs. Either this has come from a lack of critical awareness of our political development or a lack of concern to see government function in the way God has called them to. On the other hand, other citizens have put too much confidence in the governmental authorities to solve the problems of our nations. The attitude of citizens to governmental authority has been the same as that attitude C. S. Lewis once pointed out that most Christians had toward demons. Either one ignored them or was fascinated by them.

Unfortunately, Christian citizens have fallen in these same categories as the abortion problem has made plain. Christian politician and citizens must be called by God to reflect together on what governmental authority is as granted by God. Politicians must again be called to be ministers of justice. And in our situation now, with the threats brought by AIDS, government must be called to fulfill its responsibility to curb the AIDS epidemic through the formulating, enforcing and adjudicating of just laws.

In this regard, we would be remiss if we did not make reference to the issue of safe sex. Since this is so highly publicized and is the effort of a Christian politician of high standing within our own ranks, it cannot be avoided. There is, however, disagreement in the committee on the nature of the political community, the role of political authority and the nature of civil law and its relationship to God's law. These disagreements have resulted in different analyses of the safe sex issue.

On one side, two committee members see the political authority as an integrator of public justice. That is, the state is responsible to protect the freedoms and space needed by individuals and institutions in society to fulfill their calling before God. They must in a just way protect those rights of all citizens and communities within its domain. The state is not a new national church wherein its authorities after the manner of church government are to punish every breach of God's law. Rather, the state is responsible to protect, by legal codification and rights and freedoms of all citizens and communities domiciled within their domain.

In this view, a public health officer is responsible for the public health of the community. Therefore, for him to fulfill his responsibility as an officer of God's just and merciful rule, he must seek ways to protect the public health. As Moses, the political authority permitted divorce because of the hardness of the hearts of the people for the purpose of containing devastating social consequences, so the public health officer is responsible to contain the devastating health consequences of man's sin. This may in principle involve the pushing of safe sex measures.

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However, on the other hand the two other members of the committee could not see condoning in principle any notion of safe sex. The following two paragraphs express the rationale that Christians should not advocate safe sex outside of marriage.

One of the duties required in the seventh commandment is the preservation of chastity in the body, mind, and behavior of others. Also, the ninth commandment forbids holding our peace when iniquity calls for a reproof from ourselves, or a complaint to others. It is, therefore, sin to facilitate anyone in carrying out a contemplated sin. Christians should not sin by teaching technologies intended to secure someone from the consequences of contemplated sin. Rather, as we have opportunity, we are to admonish those tempted to sin and ourselves recall that God is not mocked by those who sow evil. There is no truly “safe sex” other than that of chaste individuals who marry and remain mutually faithful.

Christians accepting the office of a magistrate should be careful not to usurp the educational authority deposited by God with parents and the church. Rather, magistrates should recall their obligation in the office to maintain piety according to wholesome laws.

This report has been a sketch of our society, not a detailed analysis. Its purpose is to alert the Christian community to the fact that God calls men to obedience in every area and sector of life. Failing in our calling, whether it be as husbands or wives, parents or children, citizens or politicians, teachers or students, doctors or patients, business people or consumers, elders or church members, journalists or professionals, all disobedience brings God’s judgment not just on us individually, but often on others we live in community with. Our sin has communal dimensions.

Christians must be challenged again to work out what it means to glorify God in all dimensions of life, to develop a world view which enables us to bring all of life under the authority and lordship of Jesus Christ. We must repent when we have been conformed to an ungodly view of life. The church must be called to be light and not hide it under the bushel of a secular world view and lifestyle. The gospel must again break through in power to transform our individual and communal lives.

We praise God that He has sent the Lord Jesus Christ to make this a reality. We praise God that in spite of our disobedience He is still sovereign, He holds His world in love, He is building His eternal kingdom and that He will triumph. With this hope, by faith we commit ourselves again to a renewed obedience to be fellow-workers with God in His kingdom.

FOOTNOTE

A good example of this can be seen in the whole issue of sex education in the public school. When a state is going to provide one common school system all values must systematically extirpate. If the truth of God’s creation is removed then another all encompassing commonality must be found to integrate education.

This commonality is the common human rationality. Rationality is erected to the place of an idol and education serves this god rather than the Lord God. Basic convictions and beliefs not held in common must be eliminated from the learning process in public schools

In the area of sex education this commitment becomes evident. Since there are different views on the nature of marriage and ethics of sex the school must leave that

question “open.” There can be no discrimination or values. But they must teach something. Sex education becomes a lesson in the mechanics and techniques of sex.

The only foundation for fulfilling and meaningful sex cannot be taught. Techniques and mechanics are taught under the pretense of scientific, rational neutrality. Children are supposedly taught facts apart from values.

Under this guise of scientific neutrality, the City of New York sexual education program teaches students to “identify and evaluate the choices involved in sexual expression.” The choices range: abstinence, sexual fantasy, masturbation, hugging, kissing, petting, exploration, intercourse, nocturnal emission, homosexual preference, homosexual experience, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual!

This range is being taught to students in the largest city in the USA. This is not a neutral presentation of facts apart from values. This proclaims loud and clear a humanistic world view. Man is the measure of all things. Man chooses what “good sex” is.

APPENDIX: AIDS AS GOD'S JUDGMENT?

Can we speak of AIDS as God’s judgment on the homosexual? This will be discussed under five points.

First, all sickness and calamity that comes in history is God’s judgment on sin. Therefore, in a general way, we can immediately say that yes AIDS is God's judgment on sin. In the beginning in Eden there was no sickness, no sorrow, no pain. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, God pronounced judgment on them. Their lives would be lives of suffering. They would be filled with struggle and grief, sorrow and pain, sickness and affliction. This was God's righteous judgment on sinful man.

We must be very careful here not to smuggle into our thought an incipient deism. One often hears the distinction made between God’s judgment on sin and a consequence for sin. When the language of consequence is used we must be careful. There may be a helpful way of making that distinction (see under the third point of this appendix) but one must be careful that it is not a distinction with roots in the soil of deism.

We must not view calamity as a mechanical recoiling of creation on an offender. If one lifts a mousetrap and sticks his hand under it, and lets go, it snaps down on his hand causing pain. However, there was no intention involved. The mousetrap is not a conscious and free agent that makes a conscious choice to cause me pain. That is just the way the mousetrap is constructed to operate. Pull the spring back, let it go and it will by nature of its construction snap down.

We cannot view God's judgment in that kind of a way. One hears that heavy drinking brings the consequence of liver trouble or drunken driving tragedies. Or chain smoking brings the consequence of lung cancer and so forth.

But this is taking a deistic view of things. Deism advocates a God who created the world like a watch. He created it with all its parts and left it to run independently of any further personal involvement, or at least minimal personal involvement. After all the watch might need to be fixed or even improved. In any case, it runs unattended according to ironclad impersonal laws established in the construction of the created order on the energy it was originally equipped with. So if one violates the laws of creation, there is an impersonal backlash or recoiling on the offender.

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But the Bible gives a very different picture. “The Bible shows us a personalistic world, not impersonal law. What we call scientific law is an approximate human decision of just how faithfully and consistently God acts in ruling the world by speaking. There is no mathematical, physical or theoretical ‘cosmic machinery’ behind what we see and know, holding everything in place. Rather God rules and rules consistently.” (Vern Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology*)

God rules personally every aspect of creation according to His eternal plan. The idea of natural law as an impersonal law separated from God’s active and intimate involvement is deistic. Rather, the fact that we can speak of laws in the first place is that God rules the creation by His Word so consistently and regularly. God is faithful as He personally rules the creation by His word. Nature is not an autonomous substance with certain laws independent of God’s personal ruling word. No! The world acts in perfect accordance with the way God has in all eternity decreed it would and the way God in time providentially and personally sustains and rules it.

He covers the sky with clouds; He supplies the earth with rain and makes the grass grow on the hills. He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call.... He sends His command to the earth; His word runs swiftly. He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. He hurls down his hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast? He sends His word and melts them; He stirs up His breezes and the waters flow (Psalm 147:8,9,15-18).

We live in a scientific society. The idea of natural law has so permeated our culture, we are more prone to see the weatherman’s explanation of the snow, frost, hail and thaw than that of God’s! Our biology classes never even thought to say that God causes the grass to grow and that it is God that supplies the earth with rain and the animals with food.

All creation obeys the command of the sovereign Lord all the time. Whatever happens in creation, happens because God has spoken and creation has obeyed that Word. “Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you” (Psalm 119:91).

The Bible tells us also that God “creates calamity.”

I form the light and create darkness. I bring prosperity and create disaster; I the Lord do all these things (Isaiah 45:7)

Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come? (Lamentations 3:37, 38)

Therefore, when AIDS hits our culture, this is not an impersonal consequence or a backlash of nature against the offenders. This calamity is the personal and direct act of God. He has sent the plague. It is His messenger. The AIDS virus obeys His sovereign word. All calamity comes as God’s righteous judgment on sin.

The law given to Israel by God shows to us that God blesses obedience and curses disobedience. When blessing comes to obedience or curses fall on disobedience we must not think in terms of a “natural” or “mechanistic” consequence. It is God’s hands giving blessing or punishing with a curse.

Secondly, God deals with man in solidarity.

We have been nurtured in a society that accepts individualism as easily as it accepts the air we breathe. Individualism that has permeated and gripped western culture must be critiqued in light of God's Word.

Individualism abstracts the individual from his creational context and calling. The individual is prior to and more ultimate than any social grouping of which he is a part. Marriage is a contract between two individuals to meet one another's needs. The family is a loosely or closely associated group of individuals. The school is a group of individuals associated to learn. And one could continue. The point is that individualism sees the individual person as prior. The institutions are not God's creation with a created integrity of their own. They are merely collections of individuals gathered to meet certain individual needs.

It is like saying the individual is the building brick of society. The bricks have independent and prior existence. The house is then made by cementing these bricks together. However, the house has no integrity of its own. It is just a collection of bricks formed for a certain purpose. Individuals are like bricks having an independent and prior existence. The societal institutions are collections of those individuals.

However, God does not view individuals as abstracted and isolated from their callings. Each person is seen in the created context of their callings, i.e. as a husband, as a father, as an elder, as a citizen, etc. Further these institutions have a created integrity of their own.

When we pose the question, "Is AIDS God's judgment on the homosexual?" we have already put the question into an individualistic context. We have separated the homosexual from his society into which he is woven in his existence. We are isolating the homosexual and asking if God is punishing him alone.

In Scripture God deals with people in their social contexts. Achan disobeyed God and took some of the consecrated things from Israel's victory over Jericho. God's judgment falls on all of Israel. They are defeated at Ai. When Achan's sin is discovered, his entire family is stoned. There is an organic solidarity of men that constitutes God's creation. (We recognize this in our Reformed doctrines of infant baptism and the federal headship of Adam and Christ!)

Throughout the Old Testament we see that God punishes the whole nation of Israel. The covenant community as a whole suffers the disobedience of the nation. Amos 4:6-11 is a clear statement of this. God brings numerous calamities and tragedies upon the whole nation of Israel. Throughout, Amos refers to the collective covenant community as 'you.' The ungodly and small children also suffer God's judgment on a morally decadent culture.

Romans 1:18-31 says the same thing. God's wrath falls on the Roman culture as they have suppressed the truth of God and exchanged it for a lie.

God deals with families and nations in his judgment as well as individuals. This is because he has bound them together in communal solidarity. The community has created status and integrity before God and therefore God deals in blessing and judgment with the community. Everyone suffers to some degree.

Third, those in society are responsible in varying degrees.

It is not a matter of guilty or innocent. It is not as if some in society are guilty and some are innocent. Society is far too cohesive and interdependent for that. When the societal thread unravels in sinful failure, an idol replaces God as the centre of that culture.

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In the AIDS epidemic, many have failed. In the body of the report the main thesis was that it is the combination of failure in many callings that have contributed to the AIDS epidemic.

Rather than speak of innocent or guilty, it would seem more appropriate to speak of a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum, a direct link can be clearly discerned between disobedience and God's judgment. At the other end of the spectrum, no discernable link is evident. (Perhaps this is the way that consequence is often used -- to describe a situation where a discernable link between man's sin and God's judgment is evident).

For example, when God rebukes all Israel and promises judgment on the whole nation, often the covenant mediators such as kings, leaders, judges, prophets and priests are blamed. Micah 3:8-12 is one such example. These office bearers are more blameworthy because if they had fulfilled their calling, disobedience in the covenant community would not be so rampant. God's judgment falls on all of Israel but the leaders bear more responsibility. They have made a "bigger contribution" to the problem. There is therefore more of a direct link between them and God's judgment than the newborn born in the poor family.

This principle has to be applied with care, discretion and wisdom to the AIDS epidemic. It is God's judgment on our nations. We have noted some clearly discernible ties between a failure in calling and God's judgment in the body of the report. This must also be applied to the homosexual.

Each person has a sexual calling before God. That may be celibacy or marriage. God has created the world in such a way that a truthful marriage relationship between one man and one woman is the only context for sexual relations. Disobedience to this norm brings God's judgment.

The homosexual has departed from this Scriptural norm. His homosexual activity has contributed in very discernible ways to the AIDS epidemic. The regular ingestion of semen and urine, the multiplicity of partners, the fragile tissue of the rectal lining which bleeds, easily allowing viruses into the bloodstream all clearly manifest a direct link between AIDS and homosexual practice. AIDS is God's judgment. Therefore, a more direct link can be established between the homosexual and God's judgment.

Fourth, Scripture urges caution in drawing direct links between God's judgment and individual personal sin.

We will deal with three Biblical passages briefly. In the book of Job calamity strikes Job. The mistake of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar was that they sought to link the calamity Job was experiencing in a direct way to sin Job had committed. They sought a direct link between God's judgment and Job's sinful action that was just not there. The name "Job's comforter" as a derogatory term for one who aggravates one's misery while seeking to comfort is a warning to all who want to facilely draw a direct connection between God's judgment and man's actions.

John 9 is another helpful passage here. Jesus' disciples had been well trained in the current religious thinking of that time, that simplistically drew a direct link between God's judgment and man's sinful activity. They ask Jesus in verse 2, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" The very question evidences the only way the disciples could think. For there to be a tragedy of this proportion, someone must have sinned to bring down God's wrath. The only question was who was individually responsible, the parents or the man himself?

Jesus' answer should caution any who are quick to judge. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned" said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (v.3).

Perhaps Luke 13 is the most lucid example of all. Jesus had urged a crowd of many thousands of the necessity of timely repentance. In Luke 12:54-59, He chastises the people for being able to read signs of weather but not the signs of God's judgment. If they had they would seek to be reconciled to God through repentance as an offender to an adversary who had a strong case against him and was taking him to court.

Some in the crowd, zealously no doubt sought to show that they could read the signs of God's judgment. So they relate to Jesus the story where Pilate had attacked and killed certain Jews while they were sacrificing in the temple, thus as it were, mixing their blood with the sacrifices. Again the widely accepted notion that calamities were God's judgment on exceedingly wicked people was back of this report. A direct link between God's judgment and individual persons was drawn. They probably expected Jesus to praise them for their insight into these signs of God's judgment.

But they were to be disappointed. Jesus rejects this notion. Jesus does not say those Jews were not guilty. He only warns against the facile idea that the worst sinners suffer. He says, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you no!"

Rather this disaster was a demonstration of God's wrath against a people, against the Galileans. One group was not more guilty than another. It was to be a warning to all men to repent or suffer God's judgment. Then Jesus brings up another example of a calamity. Eighteen people had died when the tower of Siloam fell on them. Were these eighteen people more guilty than all the other residents of Jerusalem? Again, Jesus says, "I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will perish." (v.5)

The parable of the fruitless fig tree that is annexed shows that God deals with a people. The fig tree is not each individual person that does not bear fruit but the nation of Israel. If they reject Christ, they would be cut down. The kingdom of God would be taken from them and given to a people who would produce this fruit (Matthew 21:43).

These passages make it abundantly clear that we must be careful in drawing a direct link between a calamity and a specific sinful and culpable act. As Herman Bavinck has put it, "We cannot point out in particular the relationship between the sins of men and the calamities of life. We are therefore not to infer from the fact that afflictions and calamities accrue to someone that his personal guilt had brought them on. The friends of Job argued so and were mistaken" (Herman Bavinck *Our Reasonable Faith*, p. 257).

Fifth, Scripture draws a link between God's judgment and homosexual behaviour. The foregoing passages warn us of facilely and automatically drawing a direct link between personal culpability and disaster. One ought to be hesitant to draw such a link -- and very careful.

In this case Scripture leads the way in describing a link between homosexuality and God's judgment. The passage, of course, is Romans 1:26,27. "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion."!

Note that because of the indecent acts (note that homosexuality is indecent acts not a condition) with other men, they "receive in themselves the due penalty of their

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perversion.” The penalty has been interpreted by some to be the degrading homosexual behaviour itself. This is a plausible exegesis and does not necessarily conflict with what follows. However, the language could very well lead us to another fact. The penalty could point to something other than the homosexual behaviour that God brings in judgment. The two subordinate clauses which follow the (_____) seem to show the result of homosexual activity not the activity itself. If this is the case, there was some other penalty that they received in themselves. Knowing the highly dangerousness and susceptibility of homosexual activity, and the prevalence of venereal diseases in the Roman empire, this may very well refer to those venereal diseases brought on by homosexual activity. This exegesis is plausible and well within both the linguistic and cultural range of the text. In any case, judgment of God (penalty) is linked directly to homosexual behaviour in a context that begins, “The wrath of God is revealed...”.

This indictment of the homosexual is not self righteous slur. The homosexual is a victim of a corrupt society as well as a responsible participant. The homosexual, like all other members of society, must be called to repentance where he has failed in his calling before God. God’s judgment on AIDS on a disobedient culture is a warning to the homosexual that God’s judgment will fall on him on the final day if he does not repent.

For further reference materials and a bibliography please refer to the preliminary report of the AIDS Task Force of the 16th General Assembly, 1988 (pages 465-505).

THE AIDS TASK FORCE MAKES THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That priority be given in educating our churches and biblically about AIDS beginning on the presbytery level and then the local sessions and congregations.

Adopted as amended

2. That MTW and MNA incorporate AIDS education into the orientation and training of those missionaries currently on the field, those in process of being sent, and those involved in church planning.

Adopted

3. That each local PCA church consider the advisability of drawing up and adopting a general AIDS policy for its congregation outlining what ministry people with AIDS may expect from the church, any restrictions to which they must submit, and how the church will view people with AIDS.

Adopted as amended

4. That the PCA carry on a ministry of prayer for people with AIDS, petitioning the Lord for a cure, for revival, and for repentance among those whose lifestyles help propagate the spread of AIDS.

Adopted

5. That local PCA churches provide positive biblical avenues of gospel ministry to reach those both within and outside the church who are struggling with life dominating sins.

Adopted

6. That the Committee on Christian Education develop and implement, through Great Commission Publications, a curriculum which has a biblical, Christian world-and-life-view with specific application to contemporary issues for local churches to use beginning on junior high level and upward.

Adopted

PCA DIGEST

7. That this ad interim study committee be dismissed with thanks.

Adopted as amended

Respectfully submitted,

RE Dr. Hilton Terrell
TE John Freeman
TE Michael Goheen
TE Earl Fair, Chairman