

declaration, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane" (Acts 10: 15). God was doing what appeared to be a new thing. Paul and Peter were calling on the church to acknowledge what God was doing, even though it scandalized the church and seemed to go against scripture and tradition.

In short, then, while Scripture does not provide direct testimony of God's blessing of same-sex relationships or of gay clergy, Scripture does provide clear and direct testimony of God's call to pay attention to the inclusion of the faithful whom the church has often failed to see as welcomed by God. Peter paid attention to Cornelius' faithful response to God's Spirit, even though he was a Gentile. Paul paid attention to the Galatians' faithful response to the Spirit, and made a point that their experience was to guide them in matters of faith and practice even against the testimony of time-honored interpretations of Scripture and tradition.

Scripture calls upon us in the church today to pay attention to the testimony of God's Spirit as we have experienced the profound faith of gay and lesbian Christians in our midst. As Peter told the Jerusalem assembly, "If God gave [Cornelius's household] the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" (Acts 11: 17). Surely we must see them first of all as brothers and sisters in Christ who are baptized in the same Spirit that all Christians share, brothers and sisters who do not cease to be gay or lesbian by virtue of their Christian faith.

So does the Bible provide positive evidence for the inclusion of gay and lesbian Christians in the church? Does the Bible give Christians reason to affirm same-sex relationships and the ordination of gay/lesbian Christians? In my view the answer is a resounding YES. We need to listen to the voices of our sisters and brothers in Christ whose sexual orientation in no way hampers their ability to form loving and committed relationships, just as it in no way hampers their capacity to serve God and the church in ordained ministry. To this Scripture, tradition, reason, and especially Christian experience bears witness as we seek to discern and to embody God's loving and healing Spirit in a broken world. Let us welcome all to the community of faith and the community of ministry in this Spirit.