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Gays in the Church: Is there a place?



Will it Play in Philly?

I appreciated your short but very well-aimed comments on the role of the bishop in continually introducing the hard teachings of the Gospel into the Church as a whole ("Will it Play in Peoria") in the June WITNESS). It is certainly clear to me that Church members are not immune to being swept into the same prejudices and class biases that affect our neighbors; and that any sense of immunity we hold will simply make us more vulnerable, through the blindness of self-satisfaction and pride.

I want to take strong issue with one aspect of your article, however, for I think it demonstrates your own prejudices and class bias. The title of the article, "Will it Play in Peoria?" builds on the common stereotype of midwestern small town dwellers as morally conservative and conventional, as compared with those of us living in the east or west coasts, in Cambridge, New York or Philadelphia. The implication is that the more radical and biblical perspectives that bishops might introduce would most disturb these stereotyped and distant middle-class midwesterners. But I wonder. . . . You rightly single out the injustices of our economic system as the crucial issue of our time. My experience is that those most threatened by hard teaching in this area are those who benefit most from the present system: upper- and

upper-middle-class members of our Church, who are often quite active in Church affairs and who also contribute substantial sums of money for the continuance of our very conventional Church.

It may be convenient for Church officials to beg that they are afraid of "middle class reaction" — something rather distant and hard to define. My sense is that they are afraid of reaction much, much closer to home: the reaction of the affluent and well-educated members who in fact are often the mainstays of our local and national Church organizations. I doubt very much that the question asked by Church officials in relation to economic matters is often "Will it Play in Peoria?" The question is much more likely to be "Will it Play in Greenwich (where our presiding bishop lives), will it play in Cambridge, Newton and Wellesley; will it play in the upper east side of Manhattan; will it play in Philadelphia and San Francisco suburbs; will it play in Grosse Point, MacLean, and Lake Forest?"

James Moore
Cambridge, MA

Share Your Distaste

The Rev. James Moodey has a good point when he asks why the bishops should presume "to devise new and effective strategies for the Church in its urban mission." (May WITNESS, Letters to the Editor). I share his distaste for such a thought.

I believe most of the bishops share it also. It is not our desire to think and act unilaterally in this matter. We hope that from our petty efforts a much wider movement will emerge, something that will be at least an Episcopal Urban Coalition, involving a wide spectrum of concerned persons.

But the fact remains that at the moment there seems to be no

other Episcopal movement in these directions that is well enough organized to get the show on the road. The bishops did help to arrange a meeting with the Church and City conference last January and our hopes were high that we would at that time launch a united effort of clergy and laity that might be called The Episcopal Urban Coalition. But the Church and City folks would not have it so. Some members even resented the suggestion, as if the bishops were moving in on their turf. Which, of course, is understandable. We were. But we wanted to move on from that turf and have a united movement.

At any rate, the impression was strong that the Church and City conference was a diaphanous collection of committed and pleasant people who were not likely to be organized for action in the near future. So we moved ahead to do our little thing, but always with the firm expectation that doors will open for us in the future to help create and maintain a wider movement.

I have agreed to do what I can to pull some of this together — not even knowing what that means. I have resigned from a number of activities here at home and outside the diocese; I have had the affirmation and encouragement of the Standing Committee and the Diocesan Council to add this ministry to my schedule; and am now just beginning, in close touch with the UBC Steering Committee, to put together a "Policy Action Committee." This will be made up of three bishops, four clergy, four laypersons, and five non-Episcopalians who are experts in urban affairs. We shall try to arrange a meeting of this new group in September and look forward to what, if anything, happens next.

The Rt. Rev. Brooke Mosley
Philadelphia, Pa.

THE WITNESS

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Dropping Slingshots

by Brian McNaught

In the August edition of the *U. S. Catholic*, Fr. Henry Fehren asked his readers to "Consider the Sparrow". It was a fine article which compared the alienated of the Church to the sparrow, a bird which has traditionally been considered without much value and the acceptable target for blue jays, cats and children's slingshots.

When asked by the editor to respond to the article, I wrote that recently I found two dozen sparrows strewn throughout the back yard. A frantic call to the Audubon Society revealed that the blue jays had committed the atrocity. "They attack without provocation", I was told. I concluded my comments by stating I would have to call the Audubon Society again because I didn't know the difference between a blue jay and a cardinal. It was perhaps a "cheep" shot, but the pun was too inviting. Moreover, there is frequently little space and opportunity offered to damaged and hurting persons to express their frustrations and pain. When the time does come, it is "recognized authority" which rightly or wrongly becomes the target of primal screams.

In truth, it is ignorance which mandates that gay men and lesbians will endure alienation and the pain of a double life. It is ignorance which closes doors and hearts thereby forcing the homosexual community to seek a fringe community of support, all the while dodging blue jays, cats and children's slingshots.

In this edition of THE WITNESS, we will attempt to neutralize the weaponry of ignorance by listening to the voices of persons who, as heterosexuals, have dropped their slingshots and who, as homosexuals, share with us the agony of knowing their service to the Church is constantly threatened by "attack without provocation."

Fr. Fehren stated "The sparrow, since it was commonplace, drab in appearance, small in size and untalented in musical ability, was deemed the least of the birds." As a gay Christian who doesn't consider himself commonplace, drab in appearance, small in size and untalented, I hesitate to offer the sparrow as a perfect metaphor, yet where there is alienation there is a sense of commonality and community.

Since last October when THE WITNESS invited "Gays in the Church" to "Speak for Themselves" (Vol. 60, No. 10), ordinances protecting the rights of lesbians and gay men have been overturned by popular vote in three cities. Every major denomination continues to wrestle in pain with the question of moral tradition, justice and the calling to community. Most apparent is our need for more information and for more sensitivity in this area which so critically affects the lives of so many persons. We are thankful to guest editor Brian McNaught for again offering us that input. Mr. McNaught is a Boston based editor and award-winning freelance writer.

Robert L. DeWitt

Gay People and Parish Life

by John Hall Snow

When straight people write about gay people the question of the authenticity of their observations is raised immediately for both gays and straights. If they write as social scientists or psychiatrists, the issue is resolved for straights. It is clearly the realm of these disciplines to understand and explain all aspects of psycho-social deviance. For gay people, even where the social scientist or psychiatrist is writing from a sympathetic point of view, the question of authenticity is compounded. The very choice of homosexuality as an object of concern places it in the realm of deviance and presents what for the gay person is a state of being as a psycho-social problem.

My own reason for writing this article about gay people and parish life has nothing to do with psychiatry or the social sciences. It is personal and subjective and comes out of my gratitude to some homosexual friends who were very helpful to me during a painful period of my life during which I learned more than I wanted to know about being harassed for something which was not of my own choosing.

For the first two years of the Second World War, I was 4-F, rejected by the Armed Forces. The rejection itself came as a shock. I had thought of myself as a healthy person. I immediately set about trying to join the American Field Service, the Merchant

Marine — anything related to the war, a war I very much wanted to fight. But I had no luck with any of them, and in the meantime more and more young men were going into uniform until I began (as black people say) to take on high visibility. Suddenly I began to find myself in very unpleasant situations. I would be in a restaurant with a woman friend, and a sailor would stagger over to our table and say in a nasty voice, "Look, honey, why don't you leave this faggot and come with me. I'll show you a really good time." Or I could be walking down the street in the middle of the afternoon and be faced with three or four servicemen, drunk, who would encounter me with an array of insults ranging from "draft-dodger" to "fairy," to the most irrational of all, "4-F!" My reaction, at first, was to fight, but since a major reason for my rejection by the army was being underweight, the satisfaction I got from landing a few punches was hardly worth ending up totaled. I took to staying home at night, or to slinking away from encounters with service men, turning my rage inward. I finally landed a job as a laborer on the west coast in a navy yard, and soon after at the Pearl Harbor Navy yard in Honolulu.

For the next two years, first in the tolerant atmosphere of wartime California, and later, in the traditionally tolerant ambience of Honolulu, many of my friends were black, or gay, or both. In white, middle class, pre-war America, straight whites had little overt, conscious communication with

black people or gay people. With blacks, it was obvious. With gays, it was a matter of avoiding anyone who seemed gay or was rumored to be gay. Where a friend "confessed" to being gay, or was "exposed" as gay, one avoided that person from then on.

These rigid communications barriers broke down among younger civilians in war time, especially if they left home and moved to the major defense centers. Our sense of being rejected and held in contempt by the rest of the world tended to give us something in common around which friendships were often built. Certain black people and some gays had developed rather sophisticated and healthy defenses against social rejection, and with a kind of rueful cynicism they were willing to share their survival skills with us straight whites, reeling as we were from a rejection with which we had had no experience at all. The two most significant defenses were community-building and the cultivation of a cathartically hostile sense of humor. The defenses were learned in that order, since to laugh or joke requires the kind of self-esteem only a felt membership in a community can provide.

There is no room here to deal with the complexities of the kinds of community which were being built. Suffice it to say they were at their best consciously and carefully worked at to provide support, sensitivity and outright help. Where gays were concerned, the community I'm referring to here has nothing to do with the so-called gay sub-culture. Gays commit-

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ted to this kind of community building kept it, for the most part, quite separate from their sex lives and open to anyone (regardless of sexual orientation, race or class) who was hurting and looking for friends and not so damaged by their experience of rejection that they could no longer give at all or function socially in any way. Obviously, not all blacks or gays or straight whites alienated for whatever reason,

had learned, or could learn, to stay sane, or even alive, as members of a minority held in contempt. A kind of social triangle went on which, however un-Christian, was more Christian than anything I saw the Church doing as the Church. Many of the blacks and a few of the gays engaged in this community building were church-going Christians, but there was never any explicit witness to this fact.

And so, during this time, I came to know a number of gay people very well indeed as friends when I needed friends badly; as mentors in a situation for which I had no preparation. From these gay friends, as well as from black friends, I learned that a supportive and trustworthy community was necessary to make sense out of existence in an absurd situation, and I learned to perceive and appreciate the comic dimen-



sion of absurdity, and to be able to laugh at it, even at my own contributions to it.

Later, when I became a Christian, I found no conflict between what I had learned then and Christianity. But laughter, mockery and cynicism serve only to distance one from one's pain and give one some perspective and room for maneuver. The community built as a kind of secondary adjustment to the mainstream of society tends continually to fall apart, and its continuous rebuilding in new situations of absurdity tends to wear one down. If life is to make any continuing and sustaining sense, one must feel the support of a continuing and sustaining community.

After the war, black community building, helped by the Supreme Court, became politicized, and the Civil Rights Movement began to establish a legal and political structure to give blacks an assured place in the national life. No such thing happened for gays, probably because it was beyond anyone's imagination to politicize sexuality at that time. It was not until American society began to feel the effects of women's new control over their own procreativity through the diaphragm and the pill, that sexuality itself became a political and economic issue. When women were freed to decide whether or when or under what circumstances they would have children and the vulnerability which had made them existentially dependent on males was removed, the politics of sex became an explicit agenda in our national life. Homosexuality became a part of this political agenda, albeit tentative and embarrassing.

Birth control and safe legal abortion had suddenly made sexual intercourse, marriage and having children into three separate issues, a situation for which no one was prepared by precedent or experience. No one, that is, but homosexuals, some of whom have always had the choice of marrying for reasons of prudence and companionship, the choice, if they were not too

fastidious, of siring or conceiving children and parenting them, and, of course, the choice of a sex life utterly separated from marriage or family. But since all of this was covering over a dark secret, it was often as not experienced as a painful and maladaptive way of life lived in constant fear of exposure or blackmail. What the homosexual, the mature and healthy homosexual, knew for sure was the pain of many discontinuous sexual liaisons utterly unrelated to a long term faithful intimacy. But what the mature homosexual knew also was that where, for whatever reason, sex, intimacy and continuity were broken off from one another, a person facing this predicament must, to remain sane and whole, cultivate a network of trustworthy friendships and build an accepting and supportive community where the sexual ingredient is incidental and manageable. The gift of the healthy gay person is the capacity to carefully cultivate friendships, not only with other homosexuals, but with a wide range of individuals of both sexes and with families. Within my acquaintance, it was gay people with this gift who were most likely to eventually manage stable long term sexual relationships as well.

When I returned to college, my primary interest was in literature, theater, and the arts. Within these areas, again, gay people moved with a certain assurance and absence of secrecy, but again, a college community is a community in transit, like a wartime community. Within such a community, tolerance is an easy virtue. When I finished my education and went to work in elementary school teaching, gays seemed to vanish from the face of the earth. Among my colleagues, or in my church and community involvement, gays were nowhere to be seen. Even when I went to seminary in 1955, there was no evidence of gays apart from occasional rumors. To be gay, during those days, was to be incredibly vulnerable. One looks back with amazement and a rueful admiration on those

gay seminarians who survived the intensive group dynamic sessions of Clinical Training with their pressure towards self disclosure, and emerged sane and still in the closet. It must have seemed cruel and unusual punishment, particularly since one clear purpose of Clinical Training as it was perceived by many of us in practice, was to root homosexuals out of the clergy, or, in particular programs, to get them into therapy. I remember vividly in one program hearing a psychiatrist describe homosexuality as a character disorder which was by its very nature untreatable, and warning us to distrust any psychiatrist who claimed to treat homosexuals successfully. In another program we were informed by another psychiatrist that homosexuality was often a form of neurosis and thoroughly treatable. In both cases, homosexuality was presented to us as a disease, but in the second case an aggressive young psychiatrist was setting us up to send to him and his colleagues a rich harvest of prosperous gay men and women who desperately needed one continuing intimate relationship out of the closet, and were willing to pay for it endlessly. Clergy have proved very cooperative in this respect since, albeit naively cooperative.

Indeed, I believe, looking back on it, that it was the almost consciously cultivated naivete of the seminary experience in the matter of homosexuality which has caused gays in the Church so much grief. It was a common enough experience in bull sessions to hear every known banality presented, every vicious stereotype hilariously proclaimed, and to know for sure that two members of the group were gay, and that if you were to argue with the stereotypes and banalities of the straights, the gays would not support you with as much as a quiet nod. Many a seminarian in those days graduated from seminary without ever discovering that his closest and most trusted friend was gay.

Gay people have told me since that although it would have been impossible

to let it generally be known that one was gay then without being expelled from seminary on the spot, it was, perhaps, a paranoid miscalculation on the part of gays not to have informed close friends of their homosexuality. This often occurs in our more liberated decade, and although the straight person's first response is usually one of coolness and distancing, if the gay person persists in working at the relationship a new friendship often results along with considerable reassessment of values on the part of the straight friend. The result of more private self-disclosure, though it would have been risky, might have been a less naive parish clergy. As it was, most of us left seminary with the same irrational fear of homosexuality we had come with, but with these fears rationalized by a lot of inaccurate and conflicting psychoanalytic theory.

But one thing we all knew, and that was that any kind of homosexual scandal in the parish was professionally dangerous. A gay organist caught in the act, a vestryman arrested after indiscreetly propositioning a police officer in plain clothes, charges brought by the parents of teenagers against a youth leader, any of these events could turn out to be the trickiest of parish problems for a minister, or so we were led to believe. On those rare occasions when such scandals did occur our most frequent reaction was a rush to closure. We fired the organist, asked the vestryman to resign and made it clear that his presence was not acceptable in the parish. We quickly, any way we could, got rid of the youth leader. Anything having to do with homosexuality we dealt with fearfully. If the organist had injured several people in an automobile accident while drunk, or the vestryman had been arrested for embezzlement, or the youth leader was discovered teaching reincarnation, we would have dealt with any of these things pastorally.

The message of the parish minister's phobic reaction to anything touching on homosexuality sent a clear message

to the parish — homosexuals are not welcome in the Church. Gay people got this message and straight people got this message. This was not the message we clergy intended to give, since most of us believed that homosexuality was a disease, perhaps even a treatable disease, and we were aware that Christ came not to heal the healthy. Our real fear was not so much of homosexuality as it was of the professional consequence of a homosexual scandal.

In the '50s and '60s, then, homosexuality never became a part of the parish agenda except through scandal, and consequently within a climate of fear and anger. Before the late '60s or early '70s the parish was simply never considered as a place where straight people might be regularly in contact with people professing to be gay, and clearly, until this happened, there was no way to get rid of the high level of anxiety which surrounded the issue of homosexuality. Very few straight people ever get over their fear and distrust of gays until they have come to know one explicitly gay person well and have come to trust that person as a responsible and trustworthy human being.

Gay people in the parish then were in a classical double bind. Until they could make themselves known as gay to their friends in the parish, there was no way to get rid of the climate of anxiety around the whole issue. Yet if they let it be known in the parish that they were gay, there was the real possibility that they could be so damaged professionally and socially that they might have to leave not only the parish, but the community as well.

Since the early '70s some indeterminate number of gay people have made it public knowledge in their parishes that they are gay. I haven't been a member of such a parish and have no way of monitoring the ongoing results of such revelations, but I have heard the initial parish reactions discussed by some people involved. The results were neither so bad as parish ministers and gay people anticipated, nor as good as

an idealist might want. There was a good deal of distancing from the gay person, a kind of embarrassment and fearfulness in his or her presence, a surprising amount of determined tolerance, a general willingness to listen to arguments for the acceptance of gay people, some curiosity about the gay life style, and, of course, a small, loud group of the loud and outraged, most often, not to the gay person, but to the parish minister or to other parishioners.

Actual public confrontation has, to my knowledge, happened only where a group of gay people in a parish emerged as a quasi-ideological group, and even here, the confrontation has largely been reduced to dialogue. In such parish situations the only thing that can be said for sure is that an issue traditionally avoided like the plague is now being discussed openly and rationally and there is some honest dialogue between openly gay people and straight people. How much real attitude change is taking place is impossible to tell, and the phenomenon is happening in so few parishes that its significance is hard to estimate for the whole Church. Generally, there is no reason to believe that the Church will be more accepting of homosexuality than the society in general, and the society seems to be going through an anti-gay backlash which is religiously led. Many people feel that the Episcopal Church will follow the lead of the Presbyterian Church and make homosexuality the place where it draws the sexual line in the matter of ordination. The best anyone can hope for is that the issue will not be raised at convention until more parishes have entered into open dialogue with their own gay members. This is bound to be a slow process, since it requires extraordinary courage, patience and determination on the part of gay people with no assurance yet that the results will not be, for them, disastrous. To the token gay in a parish, who must perforce begin by being treated politely, coolly, distantly and with curiosity as some exotic object, at best,

is an unpleasant situation.

To be a token gay in a parish, to be a witness, a martyr to the gay cause, is not why gay people want to be in a parish. Like the rest of us, they want to be in the parish because they hope that precisely there, growing around the hearing of the Gospel and the making of Eucharist they will discover a non-predatory, trustworthy, forgiving straightforward community which will help make sense out of their lives in a world which from day to day reveals itself to be ever more radically absurd. Like the rest of us, gays would like the parish, through its worship and its community, to support them and inspire them to help work some meaningful order into the social chaos within which we all must exist at this particular moment in history. Perhaps more intensely than the rest of us, gay people need such a community, and God knows (if few other persons are aware) that they have made a lively and spirited contribution to such a community over the years.

The double bind, then, is still there, or a new double bind takes its place when people declare themselves to be gay in a parish. The absurdity of having to publicly justify one's sexual orientation automatically destroys the sense of meaningful community which the gay person seeks in parish life, and it is hard for the gay person to understand why this burden should be placed on him or her.

The logic of it is not immediately apparent. Probably 80 per cent of today's heterosexual sexual practice was regarded 20 years ago as sick and 40 years ago as sinful. Sexually-active teenagers and college students, swinging singles, swinging couples, open marriages, multiple divorces — for none of these have heterosexuals been held morally accountable although each of these practices were regarded by the Church as aberrations from what the Church and Scripture taught when they first became, as social scientists say, statistically significant on the American scene. An incredible amount

of clergy and psychiatric energy went into trying to counsel these practices away until suddenly we found them fast approaching the norm, and the function of counseling to adapt heterosexuals to this norm. What happened, of course, was that when effective birth control managed by women and safe, legal abortion became easily available, sexual intercourse was separated from procreation and ceased to have any immediate or inevitable economic or social consequence. Logically, this should have put homosexuality in a new light. The classical moral objection to homosexuality, that it removed sexual intercourse from its natural purpose of procreation and was therefore an unnatural act, lost its edge. Where we have succeeded in removing procreation entirely to the laboratory in recent days, and sexual intercourse can be watched at the movies for entertainment, we are hard put to it to blame gay people for being unnatural.

In the past, before modern medicine, it was, humanly speaking, as true of human beings as it was of all other living creatures, that the most important thing they did was the procreation and raising of the next generation. Where this was the case and humans were very vulnerable creatures in a dangerous and only barely managed environment, sexuality was and had to be rigorously organized and controlled for purely survival purposes. When one remembers the historical circumstances within which Christian sexual morality held sway until the mid-20th Century, that morality was every bit as rational as it was Biblically revealed. The runaway progress of medical-biological technology during and after World War II ranging from D.D.T. and the antibiotics to the pill and open heart surgery threw the whole system of human procreativity into violent disequilibrium and with it, the morality of human sexuality. This is where we are today.

In a curious way, sexuality has become for Christians rather like that most irrational aspect of the human

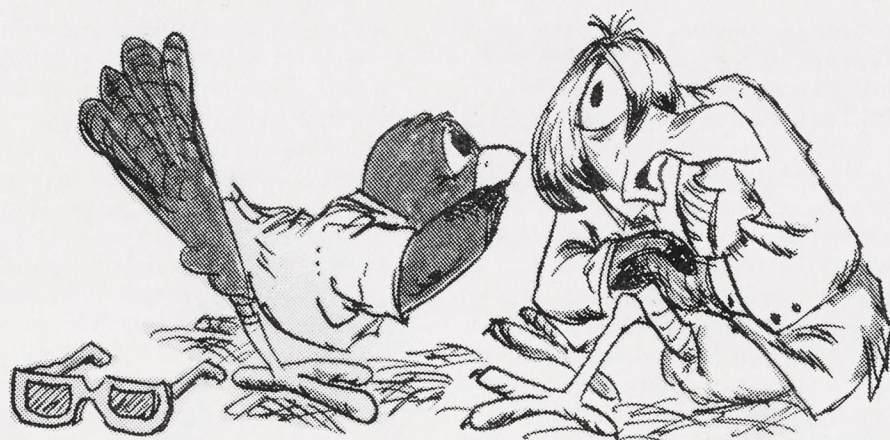
enterprise, war. It is totally impossible to justify war from anything said in the New Testament, yet Christians have engaged in war throughout most of the history of Christianity, trying to temper their disobedience by concepts of a just war, or by prescribing what can and can not be done in the process of waging a war, regarding prisoners, civilians, etc. As a result, war was not, until recently, the final degradation and brutalizing of human beings. As the most morally ambiguous of Christian activities, war was still a situation within which one discovered compassion, sacrifice, kindness, faithfulness and other human virtues.

What may be required of Christians in the area of sexuality is what Kierkegaard called "the teleological suspension of the ethical" — to remove all sexual practices between consenting adults from the realm of the ethical or the moral simply as behavior, and to observe them closely and prayerfully for their results, for their human outcome in community.

For gay people in the parish, this would mean, or might mean, that neither their sexuality nor anyone else's would be isolated for moral opprobrium. The moral and ethical issue would be the quality of community relationships within the parish household, the serious commitment of each parishioner to a non-exploitative, supportive, cooperative trustworthy spirited life together as all work as a family in Christ's name to build a consensus about the nature of reality as the Gospel illuminates reality.

Having said this, it is necessary honestly to look at the parish as family, for it is precisely in this metaphor, the family metaphor, that so much anxiety resides. Many Christians, perhaps a majority of them still, are deeply committed to a life-long monogamous marriage, having as its central worldly purpose the raising of healthy children. They see that the world is conspiring against this happening. They see the wide range of addictive choices presented to their children and themselves

from television to drug addiction, from sex as a mechanism of exploitation to violence as a proof of manhood. As Christians, they are sickened by what they perceive to be the runaway decadence of the society within which they would work out their marriage and raise their children. What, reasonably and understandably, they would like the Church to be is an alternative community which would support and help them in what they see quite rightly as a serious human task always blessed by the Church. To the extent that the main line Churches have been neglect-



ing the needs of these people, they have been losing them to the more strictly literalist or fundamentalist Churches whose attitude towards anyone deviating from the middle class, nuclear family norm is simply "Get out!" One of the sad ironies of being gay is that possibly a higher percentage of gays than straights are the products of such families, share their values of faithfulness, have a nice regard for the proprieties, are conservative in politics, and see the parish as their only family, banned as they so often are from creating one of their own, and until quite recently, most often banned from their family of origin to the extent that that family perceived them as gay.

That gay people, like anyone else, need a healthy family atmosphere in which to realize their potential as human beings, and that they can make important contributions to creating

this atmosphere, are two things which most straight people don't know, or don't believe.

One reason straight people are so distrustful of the idea of a gay commitment to family life is the result of a mischievous notion of Gay Liberation ideology one sometimes hears which claims that gayness is a chosen lifestyle, a sexual preference. To the extent that straight people believe this, they ask themselves, "why would people in their right minds choose to be alienated from their parents and siblings? Why would people choose to be insulted,

degraded, persecuted, harassed and generally ridiculed and held in contempt by society at large? These people are either lying or crazy, and in either case I would leave a parish where their life style was held up as normal. What a role model for my children!"

When I was 4-F, any time I was where servicemen were there was a high possibility that one would ask, "Hey, Buddy, why aren't you in uniform?" At first I had a wide range of answers which varied according to my mood. I could lie, and say that I had my orders to leave for basic training in two weeks. Or, I could grovel. I could explain that I was 4-F and that I'd tried to get in all the services but they wouldn't take me and neither would the Merchant Marine, and . . . and . . . and. . . The serviceman would often interrupt, "Stop! You're breaking my heart, you lucky bastard."

But sometimes I would be feeling aggressive, and come back, "I'm dodging the draft, sucker!" On the surface this was, curiously enough, the most successful answer. The soldier or sailor would slap me on the back, amused by my chutzpah, and reply, "Keep it up, Jack. If I had it to do over again, I'd join you." Afterwards, I felt good about myself. "If you got it, flaunt it!"

Yet, in the long run this answer was the worst. I lied, and the service man lied, and all possibility of dialogue or communication stopped. I had given the "dignity" of conscious choice to a painful situation over which I had no control and yet which in many ways served my interest. But I had to lie to do it.

After I had been in Honolulu a while, I asked a gay friend what to do. "Just give the facts. Don't interpret. Don't lie," he replied. "Just answer his questions briefly and honestly."

I tried it. "Why aren't you in the service, Buddy?"

"I'm 4-F."

"Why are you 4-F?"

"I'm 38 pounds underweight, and I have 20/400 vision."

I discovered that such an encounter could either develop into a conversation or simply end in a neutral way. I saw my friend a while later and thanked him for his advice.

"What do *you* say when they ask you?" I asked him.

"First, I say 4-F. If they ask me why, I say, 'I'm a homosexual'."

"What happens then?"

"They strike up a conversation or they go away."

"Isn't it painful to say that?"

"Isn't it painful for you to admit you're 4-F?"

"Yeah. It's still painful, even if it's not my fault."

"Remember that. It's not your fault. You didn't make the world."

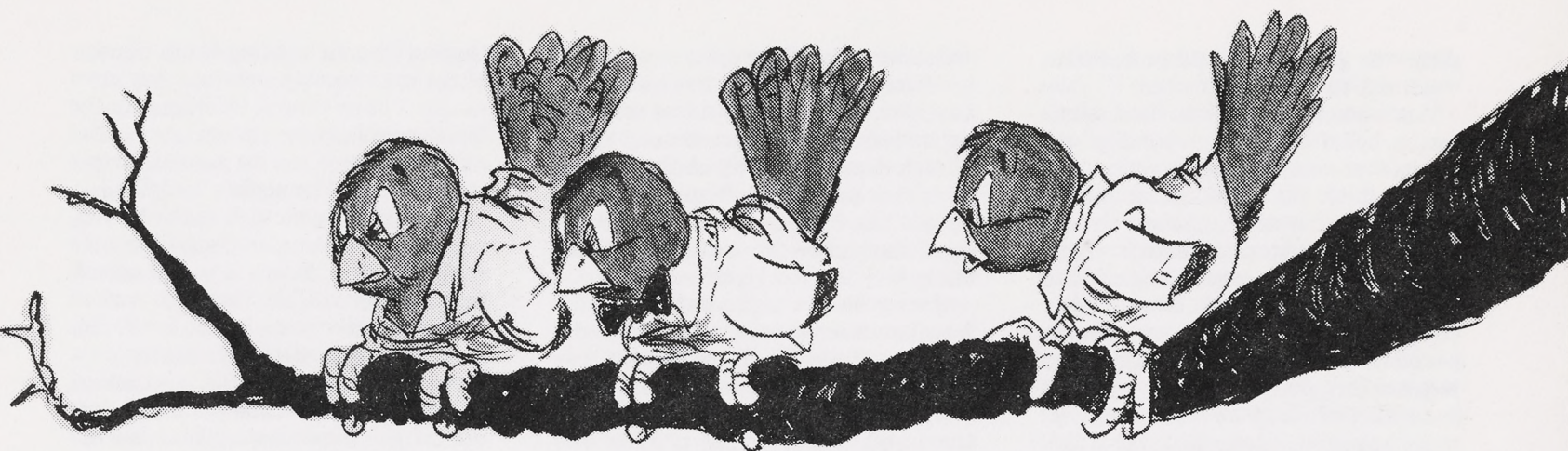
"Who made the world?"

"God made the world. It's his fault. I suggest you take the issue up with him."

“A Welcome to (Not) All Persons”

by Gregor W. Pinney





Every Sunday morning, one of the largest churches in Minnesota proclaims "A Welcome To All Persons." It is a sincere slogan, but it has become an impossible one because it ultimately threatens the church members' deepest ideas of Christianity.

The slogan is printed on the weekly bulletin of the Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church in Minneapolis. But the same slogan and the same conflicting values could exist in any church in any denomination. Hennepin Church is an imposing institution, with its congregation of more than three thousand members and its massive Gothic building whose slender spire towers over the treetops on Minneapolis' Lowry Hill.

Lowry Hill, however, is known for more than Hennepin Church. It is known also as the home of the largest gay community in the Twin Cities area. Hundreds of gays live there. Maybe thousands. But very few of those gays ever come to Hennepin Church. It is as if a great chasm had opened in the ground at the edge of the church property and separated the church from its neighbors.

How could such a chasm exist at Hennepin, a cosmopolitan church that truly believes it welcomes all people? Hadn't Hennepin's liberal credentials

been established beyond question 20 years ago when it took in the entire congregation of a small, nearby black church? This riddle puzzled the Social Concerns Commission, a group of 10 or 15 people at Hennepin who like to think of themselves as the church's social conscience. So, the commission set out in the summer of 1972 to see how much of a chasm existed and how it could be bridged. I proposed the project and became chairman of a five-member task force.

We probably did not need a study to tell us what we were going to find out, but we did need some way of convincing the power structure of the church that we were serious. A painstaking study was just the thing. Besides, we were going through one of our periodic identity crises ("We keep having meetings, but are we accomplishing anything?"), and we needed something to justify our existence.

Our congregation probably had some secret gay members, but naturally we did not know who they were. And certainly there were no openly gay persons at Hennepin. So we had to go outside the church to find some gays to talk with us about religion.

The first place we looked was Gay House, a neighborhood social service agency. Trying to conceal our trepidations, we walked up to the front door one hot evening in July and asked if we could interview some of the men and women who happened to be sitting

around the living room. They agreed and indeed were eager to talk with us. Many seemed genuinely interested in religion. They had grown up in devout churchgoing families of Methodists, Catholics, Episcopalians. But now they felt rejected. None of them had been kicked out of any Church, but they felt unwanted nevertheless because Churches stood for the idea that homosexuality was a sin. They found that judgment too much to bear.

"There's a general tendency to equate the Church with God," said one young man who lived in an apartment near the church. "And in view of what the Church's past position has been with gays, a good share of gay people feel cut off from God."

Cut off from God. Had we Church people committed such a crime? I couldn't believe it — not at that point.

Justified or not, these people felt separated from organized religion. So, next we went to the establishment — our own staff of ministers and the leading laity of our church — to see how much resistance lay ahead if we tried to close the gap.

Not much, it seemed. None of the ministers or laypersons showed any open hostility of gays. None said keep them out. And to varying degrees, they all seemed willing to accept gays as individuals and Christians. But still, they were not eager to take any definite steps. We should not "single out" gays, they said. We should not invite

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them "as gays." It would be better to reach out to everyone instead.

And somewhere back in their minds was a belief that homosexuality was wrong, or maybe the practice was wrong, if not the condition, not necessarily a sin, but still, somehow wrong.

That did not stop us because we believed that, in the end, the desire to welcome would triumph. We failed to comprehend how deeply our church people believed in their authority to judge others. But those ideas were not in conflict yet, and we went ahead because no one was stopping us. Our task force drafted its final report in 1975, and the Social Concerns Commission adopted it unanimously.

Things began to fall apart quickly, however. We took our plan to the staff ministers, and over a meat pie luncheon one day at the church, we got a taste of how little progress we had made. According to our plan, the Social Concerns Committee would look for gays who wanted a church home but did not have one. We would try to find something at Hennepin to interest them.

"But why do we have to make a special appeal to the gays?" asked the associate pastor. "Nobody's keeping them out."

It was a beguiling argument which we had heard from the beginning. The fact that we still were hearing it nearly three years later meant that we had failed to prove that a problem really existed. We had failed to prove that it takes more than just an open door to

welcome alienated people.

There were other reasons for caution, too, as the business manager explained at the luncheon: "This church depends heavily on the support of a few prominent families. If they should be offended by this thing about gays, the church would be hurt financially."

Two members of the staff, nevertheless, volunteered to work with us, and we moved ahead. By early 1976, we had drafted a set of letters to gay organizations and counselors, figuring they might know of gay persons who were looking for a church home. But we hit a snag when the two ministers working with us declined to sign the letters because they specified that we were looking for gays. So *they* rewrote the letters, purging them of all mention of gays and making them look like nothing more than an ordinary membership campaign.

No one ever responded to the letters. The chasm is difficult to cross, and gays must be told directly that they are wanted. It is not enough to welcome "all persons" because gays know that "all persons" usually leaves them out.

We did not have much time to agonize over the letter episode, however, because another pot was brewing and soon would boil over and ruin our project before we could make any further progress. The other pot was the Metropolitan Community Church of the Twin Cities, a small congregation composed mostly of gays. The MCC had been meeting at an out-of-the-way

Quaker Church building for its Sunday afternoon worship services but now sought a more central location. So, the MCC people came to our ministerial staff and asked to rent a small chapel at the rear of Hennepin's building.

A harmless request, it seemed. Hennepin routinely rents its building to secular groups. Surely it would not refuse a group of Christians who wanted to gather in the name of the Lord! But it did. All the ministers, except one, came out against the MCC request.

"The United Methodist Church does not affirm homosexuality as an authentic lifestyle," said the senior pastor in a mimeographed statement. And the MCC's use of our building "would inevitably be construed as an affirmation of the appropriateness of homosexuality."

The Social Concerns Commission had watched all of this from the sidelines, but we decided to get involved at that point and take the MCC request to the top lay governing body, the Administrative Board. For nearly four years we had managed to confine the gay issue to subdued discussion, but now it had all come out into the open. A major debate preceded the board's decision on Sept. 14, 1976, during which it became clear we had touched nerves we had not known existed.

"The chapel is not just space; it's consecrated space," said one woman. "My daughters were baptized there; my husband was buried from that chapel, and I don't want it defiled by *these* people."

One man declared, "It's been made clear from the time of Sodom that it (homosexuality) is against the law of God."

But they were not willing to let God make His own judgments. They had decided what was right and wrong for themselves as well as others, and they felt the institution of the Church must back up those individual judgments.

"We do make judgments," said the senior pastor. "We've judged segregation wrong; we also judge homosexuality wrong." It cannot be proclaimed

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The art work in this edition was created by David Woodford, a St. John's seminarian in Boston.

as right in our church, he said, because "It's contrary to the disposition of the congregation."

The chairperson of the Administrative Board put homosexuality into the same bag of sins as adultery and concluded that, with either one, "If we sidestep judgment and refuse to give guidance, we're failing as a Church."

They made no distinctions between human actions that hurt other people — like stealing and discriminating and committing adultery — and actions that do not necessarily hurt others, like homosexuality. And they made no distinction between matters of choice — like theft, discrimination and adultery — and matters of no choice — like homosexuality. They did not actually say that gays have chosen to be gay, but they held gays accountable for their condition nevertheless.

"If they'd just shut up, they could go to any church," asserted one woman. "I'd rather not know what their sexuality is," said another.

Keep sex a secret, they said. But hasn't the Church itself raised the issue by saying that homosexual practice is wrong? And hasn't the Church itself promoted sex constantly, albeit the family-oriented hetero kind? It all seemed inconsistent.

Those were the voices of the majority. But the minority also spoke.

The chairperson of the Adult Studies Commission, and his fiancée wrote and produced a play that cut to the core. It portrayed Christ rebuking a Hennepin churchgoer for failing to recognize God's purposes in all of us, even in a young gay man. The individual, who played the young gay man, said later, during the debate, "So long as I feel they don't have any choice (about being gay) then I must extend my love to them. If it is no choice, then the last ten thousand years have been full of discrimination."

One gentleman, who held one of the highest lay positions in the church as chairman of the Council on Ministries, took the microphone and spoke "partly to clear my conscience" for his own

acquiescence to racial discrimination when he lived in the South. Referring to what he had heard in the debate at Hennepin, he said, "The intolerance, bigotry and unwillingness to learn about homosexuality rivaled anything I witnessed in the Deep South in the 1950s and 1960s. We welcome all persons, but we single out one group and say it's incompatible with Christianity. That judgment should be left to God."

One woman said, "I think we should ask what Jesus would have done. I think he would have allowed it (use of the chapel). By allowing it, we could have some interchange, some interaction."

Indeed, some of the opponents had argued that the two churches should not be separate. Why can't the MCC people simply come to our regular worship services? they asked.

They got their answer from a woman who nearly cried as she took the microphone late in the debate and asked incredulously, "We expect these people to come and be a part of us? How can they, with what we have been hearing tonight? These people are not asking to have an orgy in our church. They are asking to worship God. How can we deny them that?"

We could deny it, and we did — by a vote of 19 in favor and 65 against. That left us wondering where we stood with our Task Force project of reaching out to the gay community. Did we have the support of the church? We asked the Administrative Board and received our answer on Jan. 11, 1977.

This time the crowd was smaller, the tension lower. And our request was much tamer — merely support us for an evangelism project. No one could accuse us this time of fostering a separate church. But other arguments were available.

"I know several homosexuals," said one man. "They never bother me. I don't see any problem if they joined. But I see something different in going out and seeking them. Even though there's probably no harm in it, it may stir up dissension."

One longtime Hennepin member, said, "I don't see how we can tap them on the head and drag them in here. We don't do it for anyone else."

She was right, and that was a big part of the problem. We don't go out actively looking for new members. Our sense of evangelism has become so passive that any aggressive outreach would sound threatening, whether to gays or straights.

"It may be true that there needs to be more vigorous action," the senior pastor allowed. "But we don't want to affirm the homosexual lifestyle."

Our margin of defeat was not so bad this time — something like 17 to 35 — but it was defeat nevertheless. Our project was dead. The Social Concerns Committee met the next evening and officially put the project to rest.

But the gay issue will never rest. It still gnaws at our soul. One night last summer, a gang of vandals defaced the Quaker Church in Minneapolis where the Metropolitan Community Church meets each week. The words "queers" and "fags" were painted on the wall of the church. The incident moved the Methodist Bishop of Minnesota to issue a statement. While he acknowledged that the Methodist Church opposes homosexual practice, he decried the vandalism at the Quaker Church and warned Methodists "not to get caught up in this spirit which is so alien to the love of God."

What the bishop did not mention was that his own church had turned away the MCC when it wanted a new place to worship. Perhaps he did not consider that this act of rejection, like every act of rejection, might also be alien to the love of God.

Our church bulletin still proclaims every Sunday morning, "A Welcome to All Persons." And that is true, in a sense. Gay men and women are free to come if they wish. The door is not barred. But beyond that door lies judgment. It might as well be barred. A welcome with judgment is no welcome.

Clergy in the Closet Live Double Lives

by William Doubleday

*"No man, for any considerable period, can wear
one face to himself and another to the multitude
without finally getting bewildered as to which
may be the true."*

Nathaniel Hawthorne

The presence of a substantial number of homosexual persons among the clergy of the Episcopal Church and among the active laity has long constituted a little-publicized and rarely recognized fact of life. Although some people may have been aware at some level of the presence of a few homosexual persons among the Church's clergy, most people would be shocked — if not horrified — by educated estimates that suggest between 10 and 30 per cent of all of the clergy in the Episcopal Church are homosexual or bisexual in their orientation. Such a possibility escapes the suspicion of most people because all but a very few of those clergy are secretive or "closeted" about their sexuality. This fact has been well hidden except on the rare occasions when some sort of "scandal" resulted in a resignation, a suicide or a deposition.

The situation of "closeted" ordained homosexual persons has never been exactly enviable. The Church does not wish to deal honestly or openly with the sexual lives of its clergy. But, at the same time, psychological examinations, curious vestries, amorous parishioners and hostile bishops have caused considerable tension, anxiety and fear. If clergy

act upon their homosexual feelings or deal with their sexual or relational needs — as most do from time to time — they are invariably forced to lead something of a double life. Life, by its very nature, is of necessity divided rather than whole, in conflict rather than in congruence, based upon some significant and necessary elements of lying and deception rather than being based on a consistent undergirding of truth and openness. One might then wonder why homosexual persons tolerate the tensions involved in serving within an essentially hostile institutional Church.

It was our intention to offer input on that question by presenting three brief "testimonies" by prominent gay clergypersons whose service to the Church has been made more difficult by their need to live double lives. We are delighted to share two such testimonies, one by a well-known parish priest and the other by a highly-acclaimed liturgist. The third was to be written by a bishop but was made impossible by the fear of exposure under which they live.

As dioceses throughout the country attempt to educate themselves to the many facets of the homosexual dilemma, they quickly become aware of the difficulty inherent in hearing from the victims of homophobia. For too many, the risk of exposure is too great. For that reason, our testimonies are by persons who, in order to protect the integrity of their ministry, must remain anonymous. ■

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Not Solely a “Gay Priest”

“Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a Priest in the Church of God, . . . And be thou a faithful Dispenser of the Word of God, and of his holy Sacraments; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.” Thus culminated the hopes and dreams of several years, years full of humor and happiness, of tears and pain. With the great words of the Anglican liturgical tradition and with the imposition of episcopal hands, the Church had merely given assent to something I had known for some time: That I had been called to serve God in an unusual way, as one who is called to love.

Like all vocations, it had been tested at every turn. Only love could have conquered the obstacles which lay between me and priesthood. In addition to hurdling the standard set of stumbling blocks set up by life itself, I also had to make the perilous journey through the rockslide of sexuality. I call it a rockslide, for when one suddenly realizes that one is not what one assumed oneself to be, that all of one’s relationships might be affected by this revelation, and that one is suddenly persona non grata in the midst of a culture, the image of a rockslide begins to convey the feeling of the situation.

I suppose that the first battle, and the last, is one of honesty. As I reflect upon the few years since that first self-revelation which unmasked my true feelings for members of my own sex, I realize that the struggle then, as now, is one of honesty. Integrity was a word I had used long before Louie Crew made it a rallying-cry for gay Episcopalians. It was integrity which had forced me to delay my ordination after a fine seminary experience marked with solid academic achievement and much personal growth. I had known a good many

gay priests in the Episcopal Church. Each and every one had attained their places by subterfuge. I mean no indictment of these men. I only knew that I could not do what they had done. When I was ordained, I maintained, my bishops would know upon whom they had placed their hands. And they did.

My ministry has been guided by the principles of love and honesty. That my name does not appear with this sketch bespeaks my love for a family whose sensitivities would be assailed, for the Church whose members would be scandalized, and for myself, whose privacy would be assaulted. My sexuality is but a part of my life. I wish not to be identified solely as a “gay priest”. Thus, I refrain from assisting those who would so label me. Those who are in authority over me are aware of my homosexuality and they are aware that I make no pretense to being celibate — the usual condition placed upon ordination of homosexuals. Yet, neither are they aware of any particulars beyond that admission. They may infer what they will from what they see and hear of my life and ministry. But there are certain matters which I believe to be beyond the right of even those in such authority. My personal life, the persons I love and the manner in which I choose to express that love, is no more open for public display than are the bedrooms and quiet words shared by my married brothers and sisters.

When asked about my sexuality, my answers are always honest and forthright. If I choose to share this personal part of my life with another, it is done in love. Sometimes it is to simply let another know that I, too, am human and share the same burdens and joys common to us all. Sometimes it is shared simply to let the other know how very much I trust him

or her. It is unfortunate that such a simple admission could be so dangerous a weapon, but to place this truth in the hands of another is not unlike handing one's unsheathed sword to the enemy as a sign of one's peaceful intentions. (Please enter into the record that the sword has never been lifted against me by those to whom it has been entrusted.)

Perhaps it is my belief in the supremacy of truth, my unusual slant on honesty, which best characterizes my ministry and best describes my impatience with hypocrisy. While I am aware that some will read this and think me hypocritical for speaking about honesty under an unsigned article, I trust that most will understand why I have chosen to do so. I am not winking at the public, nor am I winking at the

Church. I have faced, and continue to face, the eyes of all with an unflinching veracity which has won the admiration of many and the scorn of some. I have done so with assurance in Him who was Himself Truth incarnate. And that has been the model I have followed: Sometimes enigmatic, sometimes bold, but in all things concerned to love and committed to the revealing of that which is good and truthful. That I have failed on many occasions to fulfill this goal is an admission I make with all sincerity. That I have tried always to achieve that goal, however, makes the honest admission of that failure easier to bear. For I do not believe I have failed those who love me, nor shall I, God being my helper.

My ministry is an active one. It keeps me busy and happy and hopeful. I am a parish priest by training and, though I

Testimony by NOW Representative

(Editor's Note: The following testimony was given by Georgia Fuller before the Committee on the Homophile in the Episcopal Diocese of Washington.)

by Georgia Fuller

I am pleased to have the opportunity to talk with you this evening. While I am going to speak as an individual, I cannot completely separate myself from my role with the National Organization for Women. Indeed, that role is part of what brings me here. To many Christian homosexuals, my NOW position makes me safe — safe to contact by letter, by phone or in person — safe to listen spiritually to their pain, anger and anxiety. Because I worship within the Episcopal community, most of these contacts are Episcopalian. I want to talk with you specifically about these sisters and brothers and not

about the scores of gays I know and work with politically who are unchurched or practicing some form of separatist spirituality.

The tragedy of most gay Christians is that socially they are very straight. They want to be honest about who they are. They want to be with people, gay and non-gay, who can give them friendship, warmth and understanding. They want to publicly struggle with the risks entailed in any long-term commitment of love. They want jobs that use their gifts. They want nice, comfortable homes to share with their family and friends, maybe even with a dog or a cat and two rose bushes. Gay Episcopalians, in particular, want to image God in their daily living and have that affirmed by their Church. Instead, gay Christians are encouraged by others, including their Church, to lie about who they are. Their struggles for friendship and for long-term love are consigned to the dark and dangerous alleyways of paranoia, exploitation and self-hatred.

As Christians we must ask why. And as Christians we must be the first to stop asking homosexuals and begin asking heterosexuals. For it is the social laws and moral values of the heterosexual life style that keep our gay

brothers and sisters from leaving those dark alleys. Heterosexual laws and values, by restricting the freedom of gay sisters and brothers, force many of them to live in those alleyways *as if by choice*. They are funneled into acting out the stereotypes about gay behavior, which then become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Fortunately, many of our gay brothers and sisters have refused to acquiesce to the power of this self-fulfilling prophecy.

For years, gay Christians have continued to pound on the Church door. For years they have been trying to tell us, "We don't bite. We're not contagious. We are children of God, just as you are. We want to stand in God's light, side by side with you." As Christians with a heterosexual life style we have not always said "no," but we have never said "yes." Let us now ask why. Let us especially ask why in view of Anita Bryant and her gospel of hate. For us to remain passive and tentative at this moment in history is to allow Anita Bryant to redefine not only homosexuality but also Christianity, in terms of her own pathologies.

Still we hesitate. Why? The affirmation and consecration of heterosexual relationships does not include the affirmation and consecration of heterosex-

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have had specialized ministries, I shall always believe in the parish model — the family of the faithful — as the heart of the Church. I love those whom I serve and they love me. Simplistic? Not really. I would prefer to think of it as Christian — profoundly Christian. There is not a total harmony in my present situation, nor shall there ever be. But we are a family living in faith, in trust, and trying with all our might to love as we have been called. That we do not agree in all particulars gives our family an exciting dimension. That we reverence unity above uniformity makes of our life a living witness to this world. I can get excited when I speak of my ministry and I see joy and excitement in the faces of those among whom I live as they share their life together with others in this community.

I suppose I shall have some difficult decisions to make after the General Convention in 1979, especially if the Episcopal Church decides to emulate the Presbyterians' recent stance. Duplicity does not sit well with me. It may be the way of the world. It may very well be the wave of the future. But it was not the way of Christ, not as I perceive Him. My life and ministry have proven that one can live with integrity as a gay priest, fully expressing that sexuality, and preaching the gospel of Christ in thought, word, and deed. Regardless of any action by any General Convention, I shall rest upon that truth with the sure and certain knowledge that truth will outlast all else. And upon that truth I believe I shall be judged.

ual pornography, prostitution or rape. Yet the fear that is ever present, and sometimes even surfaced, is that by publicly opening our ministry to our gay sisters and brothers, we are somehow accepting sleazy bars and exploitive sexual relationships. Yet it is precisely those sleazy bars and that exploitation of the dark alleyways from which gay Christians have turned to their Church for liberation. At first the Church responded by calling them sinners. Fortunately for us the homosexual replied "I am who I am" and did not go away. Then the Church called them sick. Fortunately for us the homosexual replied "I am who I am" and did not go away. When the medical establishment declared that homosexuality was not a disease, the Church responded, "Let's study it."

Unfortunately, the Church is studying the wrong question. The problem is not the homosexual who wants an honest and open life. The problem is the heterosexual who denies that possibility.

Throughout history every group in power has arrogated to itself all desirable social traits while stereotyping the powerless with the opposite traits. This stereotyping then became the rational for separation and ultimately oppression. I say this as a professional whose doctoral minor is in cultural anthropology. Thus southern whites have called blacks promiscuous, sexually

predatory and unnatural or somehow less than human. Historically the same has been charged by the English against the Irish, by the rich against the poor, by men against women and by non-gays against gays.

This group then, should change its name, or at least its focus. It should become a Committee on Homophobia, for homophobia, not homophilia, is the problem. A Committee on Homophobia could enable those of us with a heterosexual life style to openly ask why we cannot affirm the gay dimension of sexuality. Is it because we cannot really affirm the goodness of our own sexuality? Must we, therefore, maintain an opposite, negative standard to define ourselves against? A Committee on Homophobia could enable those of us with a heterosexual life style to openly ask if we have projected the fears of our own sexuality on our gay brothers and sisters. Are we placing our fears of personal promiscuity and unnatural behavior on our sisters and brothers and then casting them out of society in an effort to cast out our own demons?

The key to any successful inquiry is an accurate definition of the problem. A Committee on the Homophile, by its very name, is focusing on the victim, not the cause. With such a focus, it can only collect stories of fear and pain, particularly of gay Christians. As such it remains an instrument of the status

quo, joining the status quo in perpetuating fear and generating pain. That will, of course give the Committee more stories to collect, which could keep it quite busy for many years. It could be busy enough to divert its attention from the possibilities of genuine reconciliation of our Christian family which has been separated by sexuality labels. It could be busy enough to divert its attention from real justice for the oppressed and healing for the oppressor.

I would urge you, in the name of my gay Episcopalian sisters and brothers, several of whom have said this week, "Georgia, testify if *you* want to but I can't go through that," to make a commitment. That commitment would be to investigate the homophobic causes of gay pain and oppression. Such a commitment would also benefit those of us who lead a heterosexual life style. It could enable us to liberate ourselves from the fear that separates us from deep meaningful love — love of God, love of *all* our neighbors and love of ourselves. Unfortunately, many of us have grown comfortable with that separation. We have wrapped that separating fear around us like a security blanket. To give it up will be a painful Leap of Faith. The call to do justice and reconcile with our gay brothers and sisters is, for non-gay Christians, a supreme call to Faith. Let us finally say "yes."

“... the Church is poorer because of it.”

I went off to seminary with words of my parish priest ringing in my ears, “Watch out for the high churchman and anyone who pays too much attention to liturgy; they’re all queer.” I had been a music major in college, for years had been interested in the liturgy of the church and was an unabashed “high churchman”, but until I arrived at seminary I never suspected that I was also homosexual. During Spring vacation of my first year, I “came out” and began a discovery of the gay underground of the Episcopal Church.

In the years since graduation I have been ordained as deacon and priest. I have served in a number of parishes and have tried to share my talents and insights as a liturgist, musician and artist. I have never flaunted my sexual identity before people in the Church. I have tried to be a faithful priest and pastor working with musicians, altar guilds, educators, lay readers, acolytes and arts and furnishings committees. I have had a great affection for the people with whom I have worked and lived and I have received much love and affection from them. I have enjoyed my ministry and I am most thankful that Christ has given me a share in his ministry.

But as a specialist in the liturgical arts I have also come to know and minister to a large homosexual and bisexual community that serves the musical, liturgical and artistic needs of the Church.

I remember a straight priest commenting at a reception for a national gathering of the American Guild of Organists, “This is the first time I’ve been in a gay bar.” The humor was well taken but the truth was painfully apparent for those who knew the people present. I don’t suggest that all male organists in the Episcopal Church are homosexual. They aren’t, but 70 percent of the good ones I have known are either homosexual or bisexual. I say this in print not to excite witch hunts or to cause suspicion. To the contrary, I dare say it in hope that

Church people will become more sensitive to those who serve Christ in his Church, and more concerned as to how the Church can minister to them and their needs.

What I have said of organists and choir directors can also be said of singers. If homosexuals make up 10 percent of the male population in general, I would estimate that they make up 20 percent to 30 percent of the men’s sections of our parish and cathedral choirs. In the best parish choir in the city where I now serve 70 percent of the men are homosexual or bisexual. The bass and tenor section is the finest in the diocese but lately a Warden’s wife has been complaining publicly that there are “too many of *them*” in the choir. Having sung with major urban parish and cathedral choirs across the country, I know only too well the pain which many musicians feel in being excluded from parish life because they are different. I have spent many hours listening to organists, choir directors and singers anguish over the repression, rejection and hatred they hear from pulpits and experience from the parishioners of the churches where they serve.

The observations I have made of gay lay people are perhaps even more true of clergy. I do not equate artistic gifts with homosexual proclivity. But a large percentage of the clergy are gay (Malcolm Boyd estimated that in some of the large urban dioceses over 50 percent of the priests are homosexual), and included among them are persons of great talent and skill in liturgy and the liturgical arts. Some keep a distance between themselves and their people for fear they will be found out and defrocked. Many take refuge in facades of bravado and machismo to be above suspect. Others have marriages of convenience. And because of suspicion, repression and mistrust, these people are prevented from offering their particular God-given gifts for the benefit of all. And the Church is poorer because of it.



The list of composers, artists, architects, liturgists, poets and craftspeople who have enriched the life of the Church throughout history is enormous. That since the Renaissance many of them were known to also be homosexual is considered by most heterosexuals to be insignificant. But for those who were homosexual, that part of their life was not an incidental flaw to be dismissed, but a very significant part of the fiber of their being and their identity . . . a deep and important aspect with which most of them fought, wrestled and agonized for the majority of their lives.

Take for instance W. H. Auden. During the revision of the Prayer Book in America in the last decade, those who decried the loss of Elizabethan English clamoured for contemporary poets like Auden to come to the rescue of our liturgical language. Auden did serve on the committee to revise the Psalter until the time of his death. A closer look at this genius reveals him to not only be one of the greatest poets of the English language in our century and a faithful Anglican, but also a well-known homosexual. He often referred to himself as "the doubting fish", a play on the ancient Christian symbol and the astrological sign under which he was born. Auden considered these items: Sexual identity, vocation and religion to be the three most vital elements of his nature.

Sigmund Freud taught that the sex drive was the most

powerful force in the life of the individual. C. G. Jung disagreed and wrote that the most important drive is the quest for meaning. I prefer Jung's insights for myself but I recognize my sex drive as a very significant force in my life. Like Auden, I have often thought religion, sex and the arts were the key factors in my identity. If I were to scribble my own epitaph, I debate in which order I would place them.

But it is religion which plays the key role in the quest for meaning. It is the binder which holds together the fragmented parts of our contemporary lives. And as long as gay clergy and musicians and liturgical artists, indeed anyone, must deny their sexuality in the Church they are only partly present as persons. Much of them is being denied and excluded in the quest for meaning. The denial of sexuality can create a kind of schizophrenia where a person lives one life around the church, another in gay circles and perhaps a third in the secularized arena of their profession. And we wonder why people seem unhappy and appear to be falling apart! The Church is often actively engaged in tearing them apart!

In a sacramental universe the Church cannot exist without the ministry of artists, musicians, dancers, poets, dramatists and all those whose gifts reveal so poignantly that we are created in the image of God. The Church cannot continue to require that these people be "church eunuchs" in order to share their gifts. There was a day when homosexuality was widely tolerated (but never mentioned) in the Episcopal Church partly out of deference to an English heritage (public schools, well-mannered, slightly effete vicars and choirs of gentlemen and boys) and a necessity understood by those of means that many of the people with certain skills and talents which the Church needed happened to be "that" way. But the subject of homosexuality was never discussed. If an incident occurred with the vicar or organist, they quietly disappeared in the middle of the night and little or nothing was ever said.

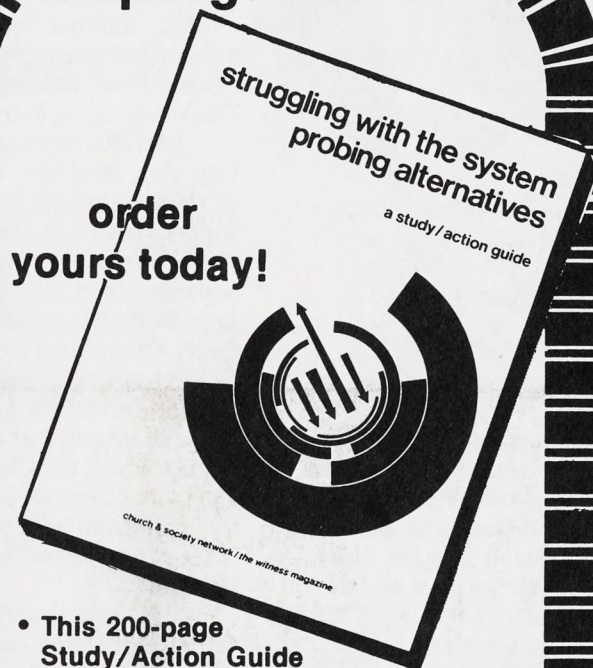
Well, the times are changing. Thank God. And in not a few places clergy, organists, singers, artists, poets and those working in the liturgical arts are wanting to live and work in situations that allow them more wholeness. And in their search for wholeness gay people are increasingly seeing the church as "the enemy" which they will not continue to support.

Some will continue to reconcile their professional work for the Church as a job which they do for pay and nothing more. But most, like myself, prefer to identify themselves with the on-going life of their parish and know that we are involved in an important pastoral ministry in Christ through the arts. Many have and will continue to work far in excess of the pay they receive. They will continue to invest immense personal time and energy. And these "ministers" need to be ministered to. They need the support of a loving and reconciling community which can help them grow in wholeness in all aspects of their lives, so that they too can know life in its fullness as Christ offers it. ■

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