

Jesus in North America (4)

Jesus and the Gay and Lesbian Movement

To write an article on homosexuality is a real challenge, fraught with risks. In our secular Western culture, gay "rights" are now widely promoted and even accepted to the extent of quasi-marital status being legally recognized in law for homosexual couples. If evangelical Christians explain their opposition, they are accused of being homophobic. Forget about getting a fair hearing for your views in the secular media. Their bias shown in reporting on Gay issues is quite extraordinary.

Gay Theology

Who is the Jesus in the "Christian" gay and lesbian movement? "Christian" homosexuals argue that the New Testament has no consistent and distinctive sexual ethics. They claim that the teaching of Scripture, not only regarding homosexuality, but sexuality in general is bound by cultural and historic norms that are no longer valid for our time. Consequently, they presume their homosexual lifestyle is compatible with Biblical morality. They declare that the "chief Christian virtue" of love is violated by those who disagree with their homosexual preference. They state, "so long as the parties involved in the 'union' are loving, just so long as they are committed, it's no big deal."

"All You Need Is Love" is a Beatles' song but it does not make for good theology or ethics. On May 15, 1996, the Episcopal Church's Court for Trial of Bishops dismissed the charges against Bishop Righter and proclaimed that no "core doctrine" of the church forbids ordaining people in committed same-sex relationship. One comment was that this decision "marked a small step toward an American church that is truly about love and not power, a church that does not reject the commandments of God in favor of the traditions of men, a church in which there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, *gay or straight*" [italics are mine.] In other words, Jesus is all about love.

In an essay, *Icons of Christ: Reflections on Gay and Lesbian Spirituality*, Sister Thelma-Anne McLeod, an Anglican who served on the task force that produced the 1998 Canadian Anglican hymn book, says that gay and lesbian Christians present Jesus as marginalised and outcast, an exile in the dominant culture, the suffering servant, despised and rejected, yet bringing healing through His very wounds. He is the stranger whose presence calls us to remember our own strangerhood. And in so doing, gays and lesbians "become for other Christians icons of Christ." Canon Gray Temple, a charismatic Episcopal priest, believes that lesbian and gay Christians not only lead exemplary lives, but receive the same gifts of the Spirit, including tongues, "as straight Christians" and remain "homoerotically oriented."

And so to keep up with the times, supporters of the gay agenda urge the Church to join in the growing acceptance of homosexuality and lesbianism in Western culture. They heightened their call for aggressive outreach efforts to singles and adults in

nontraditional families – together with the theological innovations to match these efforts. In 2003 in the Diocese of New Westminster, BC, Canada, Bishop Ingham introduced the practice of blessing homosexual partnerships, attracting immense criticism especially from African and Asian Anglicans, but also from conservatives in Britain and North America. In the same year the American Diocese of New Hampshire elected Gene Robinson as its new Bishop, a self-declared homosexual who formerly had a wife and family. This decision was loudly protested and led to further decline of its membership. But the new leader of the Episcopal Church in America, Bishop Katharine Scori, says she does not believe homosexuality is a sin and that homosexuals were created by God to love people of the same gender. She states that the Bible tells us about how to treat other human beings and "that's certainly the great message of Jesus – include the uninvited." But have the mainline churches benefited from caving into the gay agenda? In an article *As the Family Goes (First Things, May 2007)*, W. Bradford points out that after almost half a century of decline, those in the mainline churches – particularly those on the left, politically and theologically – still cannot see their dependence on strong families. "Blinded by their desire to be both "with it" and welcoming, they continue to lend vocal support to the family revolution that is draining their congregations." The percentage of Americans who identified themselves as members of mainline Protestant churches fell from 30 percent in 1972 to 18 percent in 2000; over the same period the percentage of Americans who identified as evangelical Protestants rose from 19 to 24 percent.

How do we approach the contentious homosexual issue in a Biblical way? Are conservative Christians still able to reach out to gays and lesbians? On the one hand, conservatives do not always listen lovingly to their pains and struggles; on the other hand, gays dismiss the conservatives instead of listening to what they believe.

Church of Love and the Church of Hate

In *Stealing Jesus: How Fundamentalism Betrays Christianity*, Bruce Bawer, who calls himself "a writer, a poet, a baby boomer, a middle-class gay male American, says that the real Jesus "was incontrovertibly human." And he was not about "asserting power, judging or destroying; he was about love." Bawer says, "Love, not law; experience, not doctrine: This, at its heart, is what Christianity is about – or should be about, if it takes its Founder seriously." He calls the church who accepts gays without any question the **church of love**, and those who don't agree with his position, the **church of hate**. Bawer charges that simply stated, conservative Christianity focusses primarily on law, doctrine, and authority; liberal Christianity focusses on love, spiritual experience, and the priesthood of the believer. Jesus underscored the fact that no law is as important as the law of love. The apostle Paul laid the groundwork for the Church of Law. Bawer says that legalistic Christianity wants to "keep gays in the closet." It encourages a host of socially negative traits: "Selfishness, self-righteousness, ignorance, bigotry, intolerance, and antagonism to education and social concern." Quite a list! He claims that some of the "mean-spirited political bullies of our time" are men such as the columnist Cal Thomas. He calls Dr. Dobson of Focus on the Family "vicious." He says that for

Dobson, "it is a fixed and guiding idea that gay people (however decent and virtuous) are by definition creatures of the Devil, and members of 'traditional families' (however odious) are holy." And he even calls the message of "fundamentalism" [conservatives] outrageous – "it reflects faithfully the horrible monster that twentieth-century legalistic Christians have made out of their God and Savior and the hateful institution that they have made out of his church." I suggest that Bawer would have found a more sympathetic audience if he had not used such unhelpful rhetoric, endlessly condemning the "religious right." He does not acknowledge the wonder of orthodoxy and the pursuit of holiness. And he has no ear for Dietrich Bonhoeffer's call to radical holiness and discipleship.

Jesus and Love

Does Jesus accept gays without any question? Jesus endorsed God's design for creation. There is no "third sex." The entire creation story is based on the differences between the genders. Jesus says, "At the beginning of creation God made them male and female" (Mark 10:6-8). Revisionists claim that since Jesus didn't condemn homosexuality, we should not do so either. In truth, Jesus did not explicitly address the practice of same-gender-behaviour. But neither does Jesus mention the practices of His day relating to abortion, euthanasia, or the death penalty. But Jesus does mention Sodom at least six times. And He does uphold monogamous, permanent, heterosexual marriage as the norm to be practised (Matt. 5: 31f.; 19:1-12). Homosexuality, therefore, inherently violates the standard of marriage and the divine image.

What does it mean to be loving? Truly, "we love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19) and we must love one another if we truly love God (1 John 4:20). But the commandment to love one's neighbour gives no license to approve of every desire, either of one's own or of one's neighbour (Rom. 1:29). To be loving is to be *lawful*: to obey God's commandments (1 John 5:3). The love of God requires the cessation of homosexual practices. A homosexual person can change. As is the case for anyone else, forgiveness and deliverance await the homosexual who confesses sin, repents, and puts faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord. We must not hinder by our own attitude anyone from coming to Him. We don't achieve anything by name-calling or showing hatred. Not many – if any – have left the gay lifestyle because they have heard a message condemning homosexuality. But many have left because of the message of hope, grace, and patience. The transformation accomplished in Christians prohibits hating any sinner, including the homosexual. The love of God should compel Christians to present faithful instruction and admonition from God's Word who are engaged in the sin of homosexuality. This is an exhibition of God's love. By our love the whole world will know that we are Christians.

Although it is difficult, orthodox Christians must take a firm but loving stand on the issue of homosexuality. They may not avoid the clear declarations of both Scripture and the confessions that same sex behaviour violates the will of God, and that unrepentant practice of such behaviour can separate those who indulge in it from the Kingdom of

God. And the Gospel instructs Christians to walk the talk. We must live out the Christian life personally and as families. We are obligated to help each other live the fullness of the new life in Christ by proclaiming the good news of the gospel, by humility and confession of sin, and where necessary, by rebuke and discipline (Rom. 5:10f.).

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Johan D. Tangelder