

THE Round Table

Winter
2006

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --Peter Maurin

HOMOSEXUAL

HETEROSEXUAL

LESBIAN

Living the

Beloved

QUEER

GAY

Community

BISEXUAL

TRANS GENDER

STRAIGHT

Why This Issue?

In 1994 the Toronto Catholic Worker published a series of essays in their publication, *The Mustard Seed* regarding homosexuality within the Catholic Worker movement. It was a bold move, considering how little (if any) attention had been paid to the topic by other Catholic Worker communities.

In 1994 the St. Louis Catholic Worker published a response by way of the Round Table. It was not a position statement, rather a "round table discussion" as it was titled. There was no consensus within the community or articles. The authors ranged from community members' perspectives (gay and straight), former workers, scholars, and a Jesuit priest. While there were no lines drawn in that edition; for the community to tackle such a topic seemed almost courageous.

In 1994, I was one of the authors presented. I identified myself as straight, an ally to the Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, and Transgender (GLBT) community. I wrote that it didn't matter which gender you were inclined to love, that following your heart in truth was the desire of God. Funny how things happen, isn't it? In 1999 I found out how true that was, as I found myself inclined to fall in love with Jenny Traux. We met at Karen House, and our identities and relationship evolved with the love, support, and challenge of this community. This process was much easier for us because we were already individually loved by our community.

Now, in 2006, this community has decided to revisit the issue of homosexuality. We decided it was time to specify where we stand as a Worker community. We have determined that different opinions on the topic are not what we want our last word on the issue to be. Science, personal relationships, and prayer have helped us realize that this is truly a justice issue.

This particular Round Table issue had already been planned and launched by the time the National Catholic Worker Gathering came around in October of this year. Jenny reports on the full Gathering on page 19. During the discussion on heterosexual privilege, it was gratifying to see folks from the movement discussing and moving forward on this topic.

With few exceptions I have felt nothing but support from my community in my beginning wonderment with Jenny through our wedding a year and a half ago. We never sat down as a group to reach consensus about homosexuality, but somewhere in the process of loving each other, we came to the place where we now present this Round Table. It happened naturally, personally. And isn't that how God's life breaks through; isn't that how the world changes? Isn't that how the new society is created in the shell of the old: by loving the person in front of you and letting that love transform you both.

In the spirit of that love, we present this issue. A new regular column to the Round Table makes its debut in this edition. We have two new houses of hospitality in our midst: Carl Kabat Catholic Worker and Teka Childress Catholic Worker House. Carl Kabat House has begun offering hospitality to immigrants. Teka Childress (TC) House, in its 2nd year of being rehabbed, will offer long-term hospitality to one or two families of women and children from Karen House. These two new houses will share their life with us via a Round Table column, alternating between the houses each issue.

It has taken us 12 years to come back to our original response to the *Mustard Seed* from Toronto, but it is with great pleasure that we do so. Please enjoy! +

— Annjie Schiefelbein

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A Scorching Sun, Two Brides, and the Community That Proclaims “Amen!”

by Mark Chmiel

June 2005. out on the Armbruster's farm in Washington County, Missouri, a few hundred of us gathered for a wedding. Not so unusual, after all: June is a beloved time for nuptials. We shouldn't have been surprised that, being outdoors instead of being inside some air-conditioned church building, it was going to be warm. As we got ready for Annjie Schifelbein and Jenny Truax's wedding at 3 p.m., I noticed sweatingly that the temperature had to be close to 95 degrees. Susan Alan later commented that, “outdoor weddings in the St. Louis area basin should not be held in the summer a serious downpour of good, cool rain is a lovely thing.” We enjoyed other lovely things that day beside rain.

Seven years previously, I had a bite to eat with Jenny Truax at Kaldi's where we talked about Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. The reason we were discussing this Russian novel is that Jenny had moved into Karen House. Jenny knew that this was an important novel for Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day. Jenny was—and remains—marvelously curious. What most struck me about Jenny at that time was her willingness to leave her comfort zone. Near the end of her university career and all those fascinating classes in Physical Therapy, Jenny left the ease and familiarity of SLU and decided to throw in her lot with the Catholic Workers and the guests who grace that house.

I also encountered Annjie Schifelbein around this time, as she had already been a member of the Karen House community for several years. She attempted to convert me to the gospel of Rumi just before she gave in to one of her intense bouts of conscientious wanderlust. Like Sister Ann Manganaro, Annjie was drawn to work in El Salvador and she left the relative security and creative chaos of Karen House for Central America in 1998 and 1999.

However, Annjie did not sit still even after she returned to the States: She nurtured a dream of using her nursing skills in an extended immersion abroad. So she decided to work for a couple of years with Jesuit Refugee Services in Angola, Africa.

She was willing to leave behind her treasured friendships, her beloved family, and her supportive community to walk with African refugees and so practice the works of mercy far from home.

A funny thing happened on the way to leaving the comfort zone: There, in the spring of 2000 in Africa, Annjie was encountering the suffering and dignity of the refugees from the hell on earth that is war. And there, at Karen House, I learned that Jenny was communicating—corresponding, emailing, Instant Messaging, and even phoning—with Annjie on a DAILY basis. Ah, it was clear: There was something beautiful, startling, and soul-expanding taking place between these two young women.

But their simpatico, solidarity, affection and no-holds-barred sharing via our splendid technologies still needed the daily-ness of real face-to-face contact. I wasn't surprised when Annjie came home several months early from Africa. As Annjie reentered American life, Jenny accompanied her, and, gradually, lo and behold, Jenny and Annjie tasted true love. Similar to the way Teka Childress and Mike Baldwin bound their lives together, Tony Hilkin and Julie Jakimczyk delighted in each other, and Courtney Barrett and Dan Horkheimer swooned for each other—Annjie and Jenny had found their home with each other.

But holding hands, singing of “Roy Orbison singing for the lonely,” and talking with pizzazz till all hours of the night, well, that's only part of the story. Jenny and Annjie's passion and tenderness for each other has a critical context, which is the work of Karen House. Unlike many in our culture whose love sadly becomes self-absorbed, Annjie and Jenny's love has gone beyond themselves as they accompany the women and children of Karen House, aided and abetted by the other community members and volunteers.

It seems appropriate to turn to Rumi to zero in on what led us to rural Missouri on June 25th, 2005. Here's one of Coleman Banks's translations of the great Muslim mystic:

Mark Chmiel is currently working on two writing projects, *Why Go to Palestine* and *Tell Me Everything*.

The most living moment comes when
those who love each other meet each

other's eyes and in what flows
between them then. To see your face

in a crowd of others, or alone on a
frightening street, I weep for that.

Our tears improve the earth. The
time you scolded me, your gratitude,

your laughing, always your qualities
increase the soul. Seeing you is a

wine that does not muddle or numb.
We sit inside the cypress shadow

where amazement and clear thought
twine their slow growth into us.

It was such amazement and clear thought, I think, that characterized the couple's plans for their wedding ritual. Annjie recently offered me her candid, down to earth perspective on her vision for that day: "I wanted what I suppose most people (at least sentimental people) want when they're getting married. Namely, I was focused on this person, this community, and this commitment. My hope for folks, including us, was that the focus could be the same as it is for most weddings—all the love, mush, and cheesiness that one can take. The kind of sentiment and emotion reserved especially for weddings. In turn, I hoped that the focus would not center on the fact that it was two women getting married. To quote Casie Curtis (a lesbian folk singer), 'I'm not being radical when I kiss you. I don't love you to make a point.' I just wanted to get married. At the same time I wanted people to hear the words of the songs; the readings; the vows. To understand where we stood, what we believed."

As I mingled with the folks that day, I often heard expressions of pleasure, amazement, and gratitude for how Jenny and Annjie invited us in to celebrate. Here are a few recollections from some of the folks who gathered to rejoice and commit to this lovely couple.

Becky Hassler: "My most favorite moment was when Annjie and Jenny came walking out on the path, holding hands,

smiling so radiantly, to the singing of 'Utopia.' I had tears in my eyes, and in my heart was thinking how truly a Utopian moment it was—community, family and dear friends all together on such a beautiful day, all of us there celebrating this wonderful love and commitment of these two amazing women. It still makes me cry. Utopia was real that June day."

Louise Leans: Mark and I had the privilege of looking at the people gathered from our vantage and it was a glorious sight, one that I still see in my mind and heart's eye. What surprised me most—the deep emotion within me in witnessing this marriage. I relived my own commitment as a woman religious, and I rejoiced in their commitment. Jenny and Annjie gave me an opportunity to be a minister and I learned a little more about why and how I am called to live that out.

Susan Alan: "I adored the feeling I got when I raised my hands along with everyone else present and actually blessed the marriage of two people. It seemed so much more real, making me a part of Jenny & Annjie and the community of their friends and family."

Mary and Jerry Wuller: "Since the ceremony was not directed by a (presumably male)

clergyperson according to an established ritual, the couple took the opportunity to write their own ceremony, with considerable input from and participation by various members of the community—well-planned, well-done, very positive in effect, very strong on mutual commitment to social justice. Deep love benefits from both community celebration and formal commitment. Same-sex marriages such as this seem a positive influence on society, to be encouraged and a nurturing social context provided."

Christy Finsel: "Jenny and Annjie planned a beautiful ceremony. What was most memorable was seeing their faces. Their faces were lit up with excitement and appreciation! They seemed very present to the moment and so sweet to each other. I'm impressed when I go to a wedding where the couple has been so intentional about choosing their readings, music, personalizing their vows, and including those that have helped in their formation as individuals and as a couple. Jenny and Annjie were intentional in all these

areas. I loved that they had a number of people involved in their ceremony. Friends played music and others stood up for them when they expressed their vows to each other. It felt good to be there."

Marty King: "I don't remember Annjie and Jenny's wed-





"Recognizing that truth is found in the love of the people gathered at this sacred union, and by the authority of that truth and God's love, we pronounce you, Jenny and Annjie, married!"

ding as an alternative ceremony, but a unique gathering that thoughtfully reflected their simple lifestyle, with the emphasis on style. We celebrated a love as fierce and determined as the sun that day. We honored their promises to each other, in turn, nestled in the strong mutual commitment to working for a better, all embracing world. We saw their love shimmering in the dripping, smiling faces, in the mix of so many dear ones gathered. We defied the heat to dance and clap and sing 'Amen' to Annjie and Jenny together."

Marilyn Lorenz: "I felt a sense of connection with all who have made or wished they could make such a public declaration...crossing 'the line' in loving resistance...a kind of civil disobedience with love."

Jenny Bird: "The moment that struck me the most was when Jenny and Annjie took their family pictures, as is traditional at most weddings. The pictures were packed to the edges with people: the Nebraska crew, Jenny's parents and step parents, the Karen House family, the family of Robin. I just thought wow, the freedom from the ways that people used to have to think of 'family,' freedom from having to conform to the strict models of heterosexual marriage...all this means is more freedom to love and open your life to more people!"

In one of the readings the brides selected for the wedding, Edwina Careley wrote:

"And we knew that in
Our sharing
God's voice with
Mighty breath
Was saying
Love each other and
Take each other's hand."

Before and since their wedding, Annjie and Jenny have taken the hand of the beloved, the angry one, the broken-hearted one, the ill one, the betrayed one, and the rambunctious one.

Day in, day out. Week after week.

Like Ann Manganaro said in 1993, "somehow each of us has to help God take flesh in the world right now..." For so many of us present at their wedding, Jenny and Annjie manifest that God taking flesh, by their love and commitment to Karen House, the neighborhood, Grace Hill, and the Catholic Action Network.

We remain delighted that they have found a home in each other. We are inspired that they will open the Tekla Childress House of Hospitality to a large and energetic family. And we take heart that, in countless ways, as Dorothy Day said, they continue to throw their pebbles in the pond; their ever-widening circles are reaching around Saint Louis, the USA, and beyond.

Postscript:

Let me put it to you this way.

An African-American woman was once overheard to say to a white man, "If you wanna get along with me you have to remember two things." "Okay, what are they?" "The first thing is, you must never forget I'm black." "And the second?" "You must forget I'm black. If you can do that, we'll get along just fine."

I may have started out thinking to "make a point" about this wedding, but I suppose the point is that women and men who love each other want what straight people want: a celebration, support of friends, and a dance-away-the-night fun time. It may be a crucial consequence of the liberation process when a wedding such as this is JUST a beautiful love story; as natural and normal as any wedding at College Church...



The Evolution of Attitudes of Psychology and Psychiatry to Homosexuality

by Ken Haller, MD

One of the most important things to keep in mind when talking about the relationship of psychiatry and psychology to homosexuality is that psychiatry and psychology as we know them did not exist until the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries. Likewise, the idea of sexuality as having normal and abnormal variations – indeed the idea of sexuality itself as a concern of mental health practitioners – is a fairly recent construct. Until the mid-nineteenth century, sexual attraction and activity between members of the same sex in the West was viewed, at best, as a stage of development that men would grow out of, or as a recreational activity separate from the duties and desires engendered in marriage (and it was virtually always men and their activities which were addressed, as the desires of women were felt to be not worth consideration); or, at worst, as a perversion punishable by imprisonment or death. Indeed, the word “homosexual” was not coined until 1869 by Karl-Maria Kertbeny, who anonymously wrote pamphlets arguing that the Prussian sodomy law of the time violated the “rights of man.” He was the first to advance the argument that private consensual sexual acts should not be subject to criminal law and also maintained that homosexuality was inborn and unchangeable, an argument which would later be called the “medical model” of homosexuality.

The German sex researcher Richard von Krafft-Ebing borrowed the terms homosexual and heterosexual (which Kertbeny had coined to describe men who are attracted to women) for his influential book, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886). This book displayed a change in attitude toward homosexuality by concluding that most homosexuals have a mental illness caused by degenerate heredity. The book was controversial at the time and had a considerable influence on psychiatry in the first part of the 20th century.

Undoubtedly, the most prominent psychoanalyst of that era was Sigmund Freud. In “Studies on Hysteria” (1893), an early joint publication with Josef Breuer, Freud argued for a linkage between the cause of an illness and the meaning of an illness by claiming that “hysterics suffer mainly from reminis-

cences.” As Freud went on to develop his psychoanalytic model of treatment, he came to regard hysterical symptoms as physical complaints that resulted from unconscious conflicts or psychological struggles of which the patient was completely unaware. According to Freud, a person suffering from hysterical blindness, for example, would be unable to see not because of a disruption of the physiology of the eye or the nerves that take visual impulses to the brain, but perhaps because of an unconscious desire to gain sexual pleasure from viewing erotic imagery which is in conflict with moral proscriptions against sexual pleasure.

Interestingly, homosexuality was an exception in Freud’s conflictual model of human behavior. According to psychoanalyst Jack Drescher, MD:

Freud believed that human beings were intrinsically bisexual and that homosexual feelings were normal. When sublimated, homoerotic feelings formed the basis of same-sex friendships and everyday camaraderie, leading Freud to conclude that a certain degree of homosexuality was necessary if one was to become a normal heterosexual. Furthermore, he did not think of homosexuality as a symptom of illness. Instead, as the homosexual instinct was presumed to be biologically intrinsic, those who actively expressed their homosexual impulses were simply expressing them in an unconflicted way. Because homosexuality did not result from conflict, it was not an illness, at least not in the psychoanalytic sense of the word.

As such, Freud did not see much hope or point in attempting to change sexual orientation. In his famous letter to an American mother (1935), he wrote:

Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be

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a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest of sexual development. Many highly respected individuals of ancient and modern times have been homosexuals, several of the greatest men among them (Plato, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, etc.) It is a great injustice to persecute homosexuality as a crime and a cruelty too... By asking me if I can help you, you mean, I suppose, if I can abolish homosexuality and make normal heterosexuality take its place. The answer is, in a general way, we cannot promise to achieve it.

Despite this developmental view of homosexuality in psychoanalytic circles in Europe, psychoanalysts in the U.S. persisted in pathologizing homosexuality, despite the lack of any rigorous study into homosexuality or into sexuality in general for that matter. It was in this atmosphere that Alfred Kinsey began his studies of sexuality in the 1940s. Kinsey was a biologist and professor of entomology and zoology at Indiana University in Bloomington when he began his research. In 1947 he founded the Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction, now called the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction. Kinsey asked questions which had never been asked before, at least not in an academic context. His publication of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) caused a firestorm of controversy in the United States. One of the most controversial aspects of the book was its non-judgmental view of homosexuality and its schema of a continuum of sexuality along a 6-point scale from 0 = entirely heterosexual; to 1 = largely heterosexual, but with incidental homosexual history; 2 = largely heterosexual, but with distinct homosexual history; 3 = equally heterosexual and homosexual, etc. through 6 = entirely homosexual. Kinsey maintained that people do not clearly fall into the categories of exclusive heterosexuality or exclusive homosexuality, but that most can be placed somewhere between, in a continuum of sexual orientations with homo- and heterosexuality at the extremes and bisexuality at the midpoint. His surveys showed nearly 46% of the male subjects had "reacted" sexually to persons of both sexes in the course of their adult lives, and 37% had had at least one homosexual experience. The study also reported that 10% of American males surveyed were "more or less exclusively homosexual for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55" (in the 5 to 6 range). This is the origin of the oft-reported statistic that 10% of the population is gay. While Kinsey's work (including his 1953 fol-

low-up study, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*) has been the subject of much criticism over the years, it was the first serious attempt to look at sexuality in the everyday lives of healthy adults.

A 1957 paper by psychologist Evelyn Hooker, *The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual*, further tested the notion that homosexuality was a variation of sexual function rather than a mental illness. In her study, Hooker administered psychological tests to groups of homosexual and heterosexual people and asked experts, based on those tests alone, to select the homosexuals. The experts were surprised to find no statistically significant differences between the heterosexuals and homosexuals, and the experiment, which other researchers subsequently repeated, demonstrated that homosexuals are no more healthy or unhealthy than the general population on psychometric tests of mental health.

Previous psychological studies of homosexuals had generally used a study population of homosexuals who were in mental institutions for other reasons, hardly the best group to use for determining mental health. Still, the work of Hooker and others should not be interpreted to mean that gay and lesbian individuals are free from mental illness and psychological distress. Indeed, given the stresses created by sexual stigma and prejudice, it would be surprising if some did not have psychological problems. The data from some recent studies suggest that, although most sexual minority individuals are well ad-



**NEVER AGAIN
6 JULY 1943**



**NEVER
FORGET**

A GAY VIETNAM VETERAN

**WHEN I WAS IN THE MILITARY
THEY GAVE ME A MEDAL FOR KILLING TWO MEN
AND DISCHARGED ME FOR LOVING ONE**

Technical Sergeant Leonard Matlovich (1943-1988) was a Vietnam War veteran, and recipient of the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star. He fought the US military in 1975 for the right to serve as an openly gay man. He won his case in 1980 when a federal judge ordered the Air Force to reinstate him. Ultimately, he ended up championing many gay causes throughout his life. In 1986, he was diagnosed with AIDS and died June 22, 1988. (excerpt from Wikipedia.com)

justice, with heterosexuals may be at somewhat heightened risk for depression, anxiety, and related problems, compared to exclusive heterosexuals.

Despite Kinsey and Hooker's work, others continued to view homosexuality as a condition with a cause and, by implication, a possible cure. One of the more prominent was Irving Bieber who published *Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study* in 1962. Bieber contended that homosexuality was caused by a poor relationship with the parent of the same sex and an overly-close relationship with the parent of the opposite sex. He claimed that with therapy homosexuals could be cured.

Nevertheless, well-designed studies in the 60s consistently argued against the innate presence of mental illness in homosexuals, and psychiatrists and psychologists, confronted with overwhelming empirical evidence, began to alter their view of homosexuality in the 1970s. In 1973, the weight of empirical data led the Board of Directors of the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Their decision was ratified in 1974 by a vote of the membership. The American Psychological Association followed suit soon after.

In 1998 the American Psychiatric Association issued a po-

sition statement opposing "any psychiatric treatment, such as 'reparative' or conversion therapy, which is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based upon the a priori assumption that a patient should change his/her sexual homosexual orientation." In doing so, the APA joined many other professional organizations that either oppose or are critical of "reparative" therapies, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, The American Counseling Association, and the National Association of Social Workers.

In spite of these professional condemnations, lay organizations like Focus on the Family and Exodus International sponsor conferences and events that purport to "cure" people of "unwanted homosexual desires."

The overwhelming conclusion of evidence-based medical and psychological studies, though, is that being gay or lesbian is part of the continuum of healthy sexual orientation, and does not need to be cured. This view has been affirmed by every major medical, mental health, and social work professional organization.



STRAIGHT PRIVILEGE

On the subject of racism, author James Baldwin once said, "Being white means not having to think about it." The same could be said about being heterosexual. We may realize that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people face discrimination, but we often miss the flipside of the coin: that these disadvantages are, in fact, great advantages to heterosexuals. This is an exercise to bring out awareness of heterosexual privilege. It's not aimed at instilling guilt, rather at questioning prevalent assumptions that everyone has equal rights and opportunities.

On a daily basis, are these statements true for you?

- ☒ I can be pretty sure that my neighbors, colleagues at work, and people who attend my church will be comfortable with my sexual orientation.
- ☒ I can choose to not think politically about my sexual orientation.
- ☒ I am not accused of being abused, disordered, or psychologically confused because of my sexual orientation.
- ☒ I am never asked to speak for everyone who has my sexual orientation.
- ☒ It has never been suggested that therapy might cure people with my sexual orientation.
- ☒ If I want to adopt a child, my sexual orientation won't be held against me.
- ☒ At the movies, in my children's history books at school, and in the newspaper, I can find people with my sexual orientation widely represented in a positive fashion.
- ☒ "Love the sinner, hate the sin" has never been used to describe my intimate relationship.
- ☒ I do not have to fear revealing my sexual orientation to friends or family. It's assumed.
- ☒ I can easily find a religious community that will not exclude me because of my sexual orientation.
- ☒ I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help my sexual orientation will not work against me.
- ☒ I can walk in public with my significant other and not have people double-take or stare.
- ☒ I can be open about my sexual orientation without worrying about my job.

One Holy Family

by Joan Lafferty

About twenty years ago I answered a knock on my apartment door to find a woman dressed in a black dress with black shoes in the scorching heat of a St. Louis August day. She smiled maternally at me and asked if I would like to learn more about God's love for me. If I didn't already have a church, she would like to share some Scripture passages with me and talk about my life. Facing her on my own stoop, I uncharacteristically blurted out, "I am a homosexual Catholic. I just can't talk to you about this right now."

We stared at each other for several minutes and she finally said, "Well, I'll be praying for you." As she turned to leave, she added, "God loves you, too."

I wanted to call her back and have her tell me again until I believed it. She was kind, more kind than I had been to myself and much kinder than I had allowed others to be. By this time, I had been in my relationship with Jane for three years and I knew that it was not a phase, an inclination, or unnatural for me. But, I also knew the Church's teaching on homosexuality. Looking back on that somewhat random encounter, I realize that it has, in many ways, shaped my journey in the Church and in my own skin.

During that time, Jane and I hid our relationship from everyone who was not part of our small gay community. We had withdrawn from our parish community, fearing that parishioners would shun us if they knew us too well. When I spoke so bravely to the woman on my front stoop, I had expected rejection and disgust. Instead, she was the first person that I actually came out to and it had gone pretty well. Maybe I could begin to let people know, even people in my own Church.

Jane and I met in 1983 when we moved to St. Louis to live in a Catholic volunteer community in the Shaw Neighborhood. Jane was a social worker in a Catholic agency assisting the poor with food, clothing, heating, employment, etc. I was a teacher in a north St. Louis Catholic school. There were six of us in community that first year with similar jobs; all young and trying to live out our Catholic faith.

As years passed, Jane and I separately and collectively learned what it meant to be in a long-term relationship and to be included in a rich and loyal community of friends who would stand up for us through all adversity. We also discovered the pain that comes with first being invisible and then scorned by a Church that did not want to know us and could not accept us. As we became more comfortable with our life together, our very presence at Mass became a source of controversy. As we changed from being totally closeted, which we came to recognize as the lie it was, we were a persistent challenge to the other parishioners. We neither sought nor enjoyed the role of agitator and so, we left.

We prayed and discerned and talked, but, in the end, we left. And in the years that followed, we separated from the Church for which we worked and the Church that we loved. We railed against our beloved community, much like a disappointed teenager rails against the family she so desperately loves. As time passed, we began to ask ourselves if this was how God loves us and how God's people shows its love for us.

We began to ask ourselves if our leaving the Church was better: did it enrich our prayer life; had we built a stronger community; were we better people. Also, was the Church better off for our having left? Was the controversy we created outside of the Church's capacity for community?

And so, we tentatively began our journey back to the family of the Church that we missed, that bore our faith, and that we loved. As we did, we agreed to be honest from the start. We agreed to open our lives to our community. We agreed to accept the words that the woman had spoken to me on my front stoop. God loves us, too.

When we decided to invite a child to become part of our family, we had been together thirteen years and had come out to our families, friends, co-workers, and, most importantly, our parish. This is a process that is monumental to gay people, a process that involves a journey into real self discovery. It includes asking questions such as "Who am I in this world and in

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God's creation? Am I deserving of a place at the table? Can I be loved for who I am?"

Our coming out process began with prayer; it transformed us from fear and self-loathing to loving acceptance and it ended with further prayer. For many, the coming out process can be crystallized in a few pique moments, some difficult, some beautiful, and all enduring. We had our pique moment in our parish.

Before we left for China to bring home our daughter, the parish gave us a blessing. As these parishioners, some of whom we barely knew, walked forward out of their pews to lay hands on us and sing us a blessing, Jane and I cried and released all of the ways that we had ever felt abandoned and rejected and scorned by the Church that had once loved and nurtured and educated us. We knew that once we brought our daughter home this parish would give to her all the love and hope and challenge that we had felt as children in a Catholic parish.

We have not been disappointed. Jane and I continue to marvel at the grace by which our parish embraces our family in the sacramental life of the community. As we prepared for Mei's baptism, we prayed that she would feel the acceptance of a community that loved her unconditionally. When she received her First Holy Communion, we prayed that she would recognize Jesus incarnate in herself and others. When she prepares for confirmation, we will continue to pray that she embody the Church's compassionate tradition of service to the poor. We will pray that she can rely on the Church's teachings to guide but not rule her life, and that she will be directed by an internal authority nurtured by the Holy Spirit.

Most people want to know if Mei's school friends know that she has two moms, how her classmates treat her, and if there has been any difficulty. We often tell other gay friends that, if you are not "out of the closet" before you have a child in your life, you will be. From the time that she could talk, Mei has been introducing us as her two moms to anyone who was near: waitresses, grocery store checkout clerks, other riders at Silver Dollar City, etc. She has never known anything about shame or secrets.

Mei had one incident at her Catholic school. As the second grade class was preparing for First Communion, another classmate told Mei that she could not be Catholic since her parents were gay. Mei responded that Jesus welcomes everyone to the table. She understands. Am I happy about her response? Yes. Would I rather that she did not have to give it? Yes, again. Still, Mei knows who she is, and, if you ever have the chance to meet her, you will know what a healthy, happy,



and giving person she is.

As Catholics, Jane and I share a love for and knowledge of our Church, its teachings, traditions, and history. We want to pass this on to our daughter. In the twenty-three years of our partnership, that love and knowledge has sustained us, both individually and as a couple. We want Mei to have this same type of sustenance. Sometimes the road has been difficult, as we have felt scorned and abandoned. Still, we have never doubted in that time that God knows and loves us, that our community knows and loves us, and that we know and love each other.

We continue to engage in loving opposition to the Church teaching that the homosexual life, fully lived by two adults who have made a life-long commitment to each other, is intrinsically evil and disordered. We know this to be an unfortunate misinterpretation of our God's sacred scripture and the Church's loving tradition. We look at Mei and witness the security that she experiences in her home and the love that she takes for granted in her relationships. We know that bringing her into our life was not the same as doing violence to her, as one recent Church document claimed. We allow our community to remind us that the hurtful words, written by those who have never met us, do not represent their feelings or beliefs; our community tells us every day, in every way, that they know us and love us and value us. They say what the stranger on my stoop said to us: that they will pray for us and that God loves us, too.



Homosexuality and the Bible

by Rev. Dr. Walter Wink

Sexual issues are tearing our churches apart today as never before. The issue of homosexuality threatens to fracture whole denominations, as the issue of slavery did a hundred and fifty years ago. We naturally turn to the Bible for guidance, and find ourselves mired in interpretative quicksand. Is the Bible able to speak to our confusion on this issue?

The debate over homosexuality is a remarkable opportunity, because it raises in an especially acute way how we interpret the Bible, not in this case only, but in numerous others as well. The real issue here, then, is not simply homosexuality, but how Scripture informs our lives today.

Some passages that have been advanced as pertinent to the issue of homosexuality are, in fact, irrelevant. One is the attempted gang rape in Sodom (Gen. 19:1-29). That was a case of ostensibly heterosexual males intent on humiliating strangers by treating them "like women," thus demasculinizing them. (This is also the case in a similar account in Judges 19-21.) Their brutal behavior has nothing to do with the problem of whether genuine love expressed between consenting adults of the same sex is legitimate or not. Likewise Deut. 23:17-18 must be pruned from the list, since it most likely refers to a heterosexual prostitute involved in Canaanite fertility rites that have infiltrated Jewish worship; the King James Version inaccurately labeled him a "sodomite."

Several other texts are ambiguous. It is not clear whether 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 refer to the "passive" and "active" partners in homosexual relationships, or to homosexual and heterosexual male prostitutes. In short, it is unclear whether the issue is homosexuality alone, or promiscuity and "sex-for-hire."

Putting these texts to the side, we are left with three references, all of which unequivocally condemn homosexual behavior.

Lev. 18:22 states the principle: "You [masculine] shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (NRSV). The second (Lev. 20:13) adds the penalty: "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them."

Such an act was regarded as an "abomination" for several reasons. The Hebrew pre-scientific understanding was that male semen contained the whole of nascent life. With no knowledge of eggs and ovulation, it was assumed that the woman provided only the incubating space. Hence the spilling of semen for any non-procreative purpose—in coitus interruptus (Gen. 38:1-11), male homosexual acts, or male masturbation—was considered tantamount to abortion or murder. (Female homosexual acts were consequently not so seriously regarded, and are not mentioned at all in the Old Testament (but see Rom. 1:26). One can appreciate how a tribe struggling to populate a country in which its people were outnumbered would value procreation highly, but such values are rendered questionable in a world facing uncontrolled overpopulation.

In addition, when a man acted like a woman sexually, male dignity was compromised. It was a degradation, not only in regard to himself, but for every other male. The patriarchalism of Hebrew culture shows its hand in the very formulation of the commandment, since no similar stricture was formulated to forbid homosexual acts between females. And the repugnance felt toward homosexuality was not just that it was deemed unnatural but also that it was considered un-Jewish, representing yet one more incursion of pagan civilization into Jewish life. On top of that is the more universal repugnance heterosexuals tend to feel for acts and orientations foreign to them. (Left-handedness has evoked something of the same response in many cultures.)

Dr. Walter Wink is the author of *The Powers That Be* and *Homosexuality and Christianity* among others. He is Professor Emeritus of Biblical Interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City.

FROM THE AMERICAN P

While political and religious debate has raged on, much progress has been made towards the medical and psychological understanding of human sexuality and gender expression.

What Is Sexual Orientation?

Sexual Orientation is an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectional attraction to another person. Sexual orientation exists along a continuum that ranges from exclusive homosexuality to exclusive heterosexuality and includes various forms of bisexuality. The homosexual orientation is found in about 10% of the population, a figure surprisingly constant across cultures, irrespective of different values or social standards.

What Causes a Person To Have a Particular Sexual Orientation? Is it a Choice?

[M]ost scientists today agree that sexual orientation is most likely the result of a complex interaction of environmental, cognitive and biological factors. There is also considerable recent evidence to suggest that biology, including genetic or inborn hormonal factors, play a significant role in a person's sexuality.

[H]uman beings cannot choose to be either gay or straight. Although we can choose whether to act on our feelings, psychologists do not consider sexual orientation to be a conscious choice that can be voluntarily changed.

Is Homosexuality a Mental Illness or Emotional Problem?

Homosexuality is not an illness. It does not require treatment and is not changeable. More than 35 years of objective, well-designed scientific research has shown that homosexuality, in and of itself, is not associated with mental disorders or emotional or social problems. Homosexuality was once thought to be a mental illness because mental health professionals had biased information. Today it is considered no different from being left-handed.

Can Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals Be Good Parents?

Yes. Studies comparing groups of children raised by homosexual parents and by heterosexual parents find no developmental differences between the two groups of children in four critical areas: their intelligence, psychological adjustment, social adjustment, and popularity with friends. It is also important to realize that a parent's sexual orientation does not dictate his or her children's.

Another myth about homosexuality is the mistaken belief that gay men have more of a tendency than heterosexual men to sexually molest children. There is no evidence to suggest that homosexuals are more likely than heterosexuals to molest children.

Why Is the "Coming Out" Process Difficult for Some Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual People?

Often lesbian, gay and bisexual and transgender people feel afraid, different, and alone when they first realize that their sexual orientation is different from the community norm, especially if they become aware of it as a child or adolescent. They may have to struggle against prejudice and misinformation about homosexuality, and may also fear being rejected by family, friends, co-workers, and religious institutions. Some gay people have to worry about losing their jobs or housing because of their sexual orientation. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are at a higher risk for physical assault and violence than are heterosexuals. Studies done in the mid 1990s showed that nearly one-fifth of all lesbians and more than one-fourth of all gay men who participated had been the victim of a hate crime based on their sexual orientation.

What does transgender mean? Why are some people transgender?

Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity (sense of themselves as male or female) or gender expression differs from that usually associated with their birth sex. Many transgender people live part-time or full-time as members of the other gender.

There is no one generally accepted explanation for why some people are transgender. Many experts believe that biological factors such as genetic influences and prenatal hormone levels, early experiences in a person's family of origin, and other social influences can all contribute to the development of transgender behaviors and identities.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Is being transgender a mental disorder?

A psychological condition is considered a mental disorder only if it causes distress or disability. Many transgender people do not experience their transgender feelings and traits to be distressing or disabling, which implies that being transgender does not constitute a mental disorder per se.

[S]ome transgender people do find their feelings to be distressing or disabling, especially if they experience their gender identity as incongruent with their birth sex. This distressing feeling of incongruity is called gender dysphoria. [P]eople who experience intense, persistent gender dysphoria can be given the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder. This diagnosis is highly controversial among some mental health professionals and transgender people.

Have transgender people always existed?

Transgender persons have been documented in many Western and non-Western cultures and societies from antiquity until the present day. However, the meaning of gender variance may vary from culture to culture.

What are some categories or types of transgender people?

Transsexuals are transgender people who wish to live full time as members of the gender. They usually seek medical interventions, such as hormones and surgery, to make their bodies as congruent as possible with their preferred gender. Cross-dressers, or transvestites, wear the clothing of the other sex to express cross-gender feelings or identities, for fun, for emotional comfort, or for sexual arousal. The great majority of cross-dressers are heterosexual males. Drag queens and drag kings are, respectively, biological males and females who present part-time as members of the other sex primarily to perform or entertain.

What should parents do if their child appears to be transgender or gender-atypical?

Parents of gender-atypical children may need to work with schools and other institutions to address their children's particular needs and to ensure their children's safety. It is often helpful to consult with a mental health professional familiar with gender issues in children to decide how to best address these concerns. In most cases it is not helpful to simply force the child to act in a more gender-typical way.

What does intersex mean?

A variety of conditions that lead to atypical development of physical sex characteristics are collectively referred to as *intersex conditions*. These conditions can involve abnormalities of the external genitals, internal reproductive organs, sex chromosomes, or sex-related hormones.

How do doctors and parents decide sex assignment in babies born with ambiguous genitals?

When a baby is born with ambiguous genitals, doctors perform examinations and laboratory tests to determine exactly what intersex condition the baby has. A variety of factors go into the sex assignment decision. Important goals in deciding sex assignment include preserving fertility where possible, ensuring good bowel and bladder function, preserving genital sensation, and maximizing the likelihood that the baby will be satisfied with his or her assigned sex later in life. Doctors share this information with babies' parents as part of the process of deciding the most appropriate sex to assign.

Are persons with intersex conditions likely to display behaviors or interests that are atypical for persons of their assigned sex? Do intersex conditions affect sexual orientation?

This appears to be true for some intersex conditions. For example, girls with congenital adrenal hyperplasia are somewhat more likely to be tomboys than girls without an intersex condition. Persons with many other intersex conditions appear to be no more likely to have gender-atypical behaviors or interests than anyone else.

Most persons born with intersex conditions are happy with their assigned sex. Rarely, persons with intersex conditions find that their assigned sex does not feel appropriate; these individuals sometimes decide to live as members of the other sex. Most people with intersex conditions grow up to be heterosexual, but persons with some specific intersex conditions seem to have an increased likelihood of growing up to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual adults.

Whatever the rationale for their formulation, however, the texts leave no room for maneuvering. Persons committing homosexual acts are to be executed. This is the unambiguous command of Scripture. The meaning is clear. Anyone who wishes to base his or her beliefs on the witness of the Old Testament must be completely consistent and demand the death penalty for everyone who performs homosexual acts. (That may seem extreme, but there actually are some Christians urging this very thing today.) It is unlikely that any American court will ever again condemn a homosexual to death, even though Scripture clearly commands it.

Old Testament texts have to be weighed against the New. Consequently, Paul's unambiguous condemnation of homosexual behavior in Rom. 1:26-27 must be the centerpiece of any discussion

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameful acts with men and received to their own persons the due penalty for their error.

No doubt Paul was unaware of the distinction between sexual orientation, over which one has apparently very little choice, and sexual behavior, over which one does. He seemed to assume that those whom he condemned were heterosexuals who were acting contrary to nature, "leaving," "giving up," or "exchanging" their regular sexual orientation for that which was foreign to them. Paul knew nothing of the modern psychosexual understanding of homosexuals as persons whose orientation is fixed early in life, or perhaps even genetically in some cases. For such persons, having heterosexual relations would be acting contrary to nature, "leaving," "giving up" or "exchanging" their natural sexual orientation for one that was unnatural to them.

In other words, Paul really thought that those whose behavior he condemned were "straight," and that they were behaving in ways that were unnatural to them. Paul believed that everyone was straight. He had no concept of homosexual orientation. The idea was not available in his world. There are people that are genuinely homosexual by nature (whether genetically or as a result of upbringing no one really knows, and it is irrelevant). For such a person it would be acting contrary to

Love Thy Neighbor

Thy Homeless Neighbor

Thy Muslim Neighbor

Thy Black Neighbor

Thy Gay Neighbor

Thy White Neighbor

Thy Jewish Neighbor

Thy Transgendered Neighbor

Thy Christian Neighbor

Thy Atheist Neighbor

Thy Racist Neighbor

Thy Addicted Neighbor

nature to have sexual relations with a person of the opposite sex.

Likewise, the relationships Paul describes are heavy with lust; they are not relationships between consenting adults who are committed to each other as faithfully and with as much integrity as any heterosexual couple. That was something Paul simply could not envision. Some people assume today that venereal disease and AIDS are divine punishment for homosexual behavior; we know it as a risk involved in promiscuity of every stripe, homosexual and heterosexual. In fact, the vast majority of people with AIDS the world around are heterosexuals. We can scarcely label AIDS a divine punishment, since non-promiscuous lesbians are at almost no risk.

And Paul believes that homosexual behavior is contrary to nature, whereas we have learned that it is manifested by a wide variety of species, especially (but not solely) under the pressure of overpopulation. It would appear then to be a quite natural mechanism for preserving species. We cannot, of course, decide human ethical conduct solely on the basis of animal behavior or the human sciences, but Paul here is arguing from nature, as he himself says, and new knowledge of what is "natural" is therefore relevant to the case.

Clearly we regard certain rules, especially in the Old Testament, as no longer binding. Other things we regard as binding, including legislation in the Old Testament that is not mentioned at all in the New. What is our principle of selection here?

For example, virtually all modern readers would agree with the Bible in rejecting incest, rape, adultery, and intercourse with animals. But we disagree with the Bible on most other sexual mores. The Bible condemned the following behaviors

which we generally allow: intercourse during menstruation, celibacy, exogamy (marriage with non-Jews), naming sexual organs, nudity (under certain conditions), masturbation (some Christians still condemn this), and birth control (some Christians still forbid this).

And the Bible regarded semen and menstrual blood as unclean, which most of us do not. Likewise, the Bible permitted behaviors that we today condemn: prostitution, polygamy, levirate marriage, sex with slaves, concubinage, treatment of women as property, and very early marriage (for the girl, age 11-13).

And while the Old Testament accepted divorce, Jesus forbade it. In short, of the sexual mores mentioned here, we only agree with the Bible on four of them, and disagree with it on sixteen!

Surely no one today would recommend reviving the levirate marriage. So why do we appeal to proof texts in Scripture in the case of homosexuality alone, when we feel perfectly free to disagree with Scripture regarding most other sexual practices? Obviously many of our choices in these matters are arbitrary. Mormon polygamy was outlawed in this country, despite the constitutional protection of freedom of religion, because it violated the sensibilities of the dominant Christian culture. Yet no explicit biblical prohibition against polygamy exists.

If we insist on placing ourselves under the old law, as Paul reminds us, we are obligated to keep every commandment of the law (Gal. 5:3). But if Christ is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4), if we have been discharged from the law to serve, not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit (Rom. 7:6), then all of these biblical sexual mores come under the authority of the Spirit. We cannot then take even what Paul himself says as a new Law. Christians reserve the right to pick and choose which sexual mores they will observe, though they seldom admit to doing just that. And this is as true of evangelicals and fundamentalists as it is of liberals and mainliners.

What most saddens me in this whole raucous debate in the churches is how sub-Christian most of it has been. It is characteristic of our time that the issues most difficult to assess, and

which have generated the greatest degree of animosity, are issues on which the Bible can be interpreted as supporting either side.

We need to take a few steps back and be honest with ourselves. I am deeply convinced of the rightness of what I have said in this essay. But I must acknowledge that it is not an air tight case. You can find weaknesses in it, just as I can in others'. The truth is, we are not given unequivocal guidance. Rather than tearing at each other's throats, therefore, we should humbly admit our limitations. How do I know I am correctly interpreting God's word for us today? How do you? Wouldn't it be wiser for Christians to lower the decibels by 95 percent and quietly present our beliefs, knowing full well that we might be wrong?

I know of a couple, both well known Christian authors in their own right, who have both spoken out on the issue of homosexuality. She supports gays, passionately; he opposes their behavior, strenuously. So far as I can tell, this couple still enjoy each other's company, eat at the same table, and, for all I know, sleep in the same bed.

We in the church need to get our priorities straight. We have not reached a consensus about who is right on the issue of homosexuality. But what is clear, utterly clear, is that we are commanded to love one another. Love not just our gay sisters and brothers who are often sitting beside us, unacknowledged, in church, but all of us who are involved in this debate. These are issues about which we should amiably agree to disagree. We don't have to tear whole denominations to shreds in order to air our differences on this point. If that couple I mentioned can continue to embrace across this divide, surely we can do so as well.



Dr. Wink's article is available as a brochure from the Fellowship of Reconciliation bookstore (www.forusa.org).

Confronting Heterosexual Privilege

by Christen E. Parker

We wrote in our wedding program:

We have chosen, like some couples, solidarity with our brothers and sisters in same-sex relationships who cannot marry in the eyes of the State and many churches. We marry today as they can – with family, friends, and God as witnesses to the love and life we promise to share. We will continue to advocate for the day when *all* couples can enter into legal union and/or the sacrament of marriage with the person they love and want to share life with.

We decided shortly after our engagement that we wouldn't obtain a marriage license or marry in the Catholic Church. While most heterosexual couples take these proceedings for granted, our relationships with deeply committed same-sex couples that cannot legally marry gave us pause to participate in such selectively available options. It was a quick, mutual decision to stand in solidarity.

Our families did not see our decision in the same logical light, and it was a source of considerable tension in the weeks and months leading to our wedding. Many made their best efforts (and some still do) to instill the importance of the conventional legal and religious sanctions to marriage such as healthcare coverage, mutual custody of children, tax benefits, etc. They begged us to be "practical" and "just go ahead and get a license." Some encouraged us to make a statement of support if we so wanted, but that surely our friends in same-sex unions would want us to take advantage of what they are denied. (We wondered if they'd really polled any same-sex couples before making such a bold assumption.) They questioned if it was a "real wedding" without the legal and religious trappings. Were we shying away from commitment? What would we tell our children? Would we really be married?

We replied, as calmly as possible, that just as we could not eat at a "whites only" diner, we could not marry in a "heterosexuals only" system. Would our African-American friends have wanted us to enjoy the meal they couldn't? We would rather stand outside together, thank you.

One of my Aunts and her wife (did you bat an eye?) helped us greatly before our wedding. They told us how heartened they and many of their friends were by our decision. They had exchanged rings without public ceremony. Their strength and support were the community we needed then. While many others in my family were praying for us to get over this "phase," these Aunts celebrated our values and our solidarity with them.

We felt grateful to experience even a shade of the struggles of our homosexual friends and family members. In having to set up power of attorney and living wills to be allowed to make medical decisions and such, we now had to think as many other couples do – of how to publicly enwine our lives without the package deal of legal marriage. The hardest part for me, though, was wondering if my larger family took our wedding "seriously," and my heart ached to imagine so many other couples facing that doubt.

Humility was on the heels of this gratitude as we knew that we were not being rejected for loving our partner, which is sadly what many other couples face. Like many same-sex couples, we choose to claim the titles of "husband" and "wife" but we know that, in our case, no one bats an eye at these, as they didn't when we were boyfriend, girlfriend, and then fiancés. We know we hardly know marital discrimination.

What will we tell our children? We hope to tell them about a time when people were told who they were allowed marry based on gender, just as we'll have to tell them about a time when people were told what they were worth based on skin color. We will ask them to look out for unequal privilege and always stand as one human family amid creation.



Christen Parker is currently teaching high school Spanish and Ecology.

Claiming Our Prophetic Voices

by Kara Speltz

Over the years, as we have struggled with the Catholic Church hierarchy regarding the rightful place of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Catholics within the Church, we have consistently been told that the teachings of the Church can't change. The suggestion seems to be that once the Church has created a dogma, it is unchangeable. But fortunately, that's clearly not true. Some of the areas where the Church has changed its teachings include usury, slavery, and of course, the infamous excommunication of Galileo for contradicting Church belief that the sun revolved around the earth.

One of the gifts, I believe, the Holy Spirit endows is a prophetic heart, but we all know what communities of faith do to their prophets. So it is always with a bit of fear and trepidation that we undertake following that prophetic heart.

One of my favorite books is called *Faithful Dissenters*. It chronicles the many prophetic voices within the Church who have pushed the Church to new understandings. In this book is the story of the Purcell Brothers who, in the 1850s and 1860s, pushed the Catholic Church to change its teachings on slavery. I was struck by the fact that I had never heard their names before reading this book, and yet they had a profound effect on the teachings of the Church. One of the Purcell's was a bishop in Cincinnati, and his brother was the editor of the diocesan paper. Together they took a very public stand against slavery. It was their vision of justice that led them to condemn slavery at a time when the Church had publicly declared that slavery was not "intrinsically evil." Do those words sound familiar? Same sex acts of intimacy are, according to the Church, "intrinsically evil," but in 1866, the Vatican was still declaring that "Slavery itself... is not at all contrary to natural and divine law..."

So let's examine the basis of the Church's teachings against sexual intimacy between members of the same sex. As we understand it, the hierarchy's teaching is based on what the Church

calls "natural law." The mainstay of this teaching on sexual ethics has been the insistence that the procreative capacity is essential to sex and may not be deliberately excluded. Underlying this, of course, is Augustine's belief that sex is sinful, but if a new life results from it, that alone changes the sinfulness. Studies, however, indicate that this belief is not supported by either Hebrew or Christian scriptures. Its origins are based primarily on the stoic philosophers St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas.

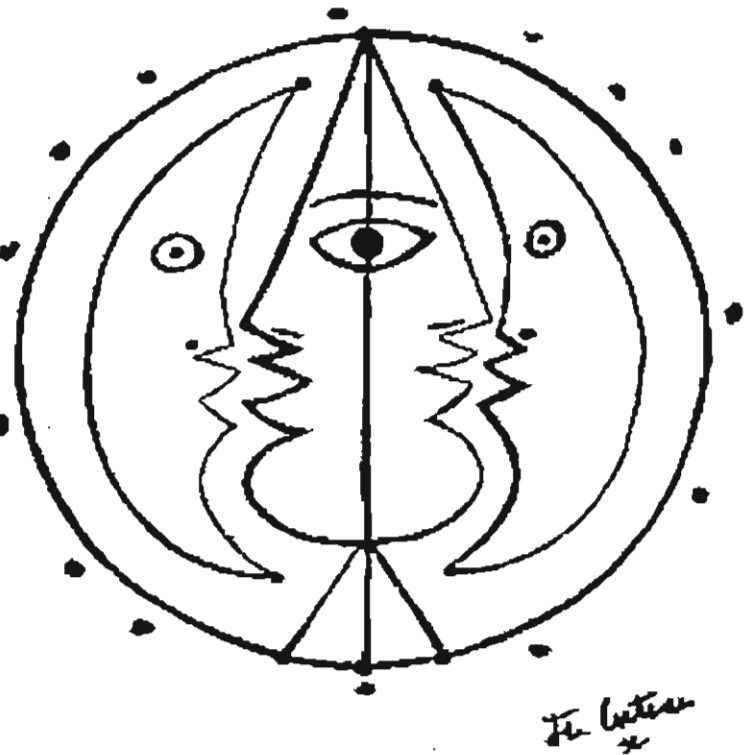
Thanks to Pope John XXIII and the Vatican Council, these teachings have, over the last forty years, been expanded to recognize the interpersonal dimension of human sexuality. A clear indication of that change has been the Church's blessing of non-procreative sex within the marriages of sterile and elderly couples. This change is also reflected in the number of priests who no longer consider the use of birth control by married couples to be cause to deny the sacraments to them. LGBT partnered Catholics are similar to heterosexual married couples who practice the use of birth control, guided by their own understanding of personal conscience. LGBTs are also like divorced and remarried Catholics except that while their Church may deny divorced Catholics a sacramental marriage, it does not spend thousands and thousands of dollars trying to deny them the civil right of marriage. The Church does not blame them for the destruction of the family, nor does it oppose their right to raise children. Many ask why LGBTs are fighting so hard for civil marriage. What the vast majority of heterosexuals do not understand is that in being granted the right to civil marriage they are granted over 1,400 legal rights currently denied to same gender couples.

We live on a planet of more than 6 billion people. We live in a time in which science has come to recognize the natural order of homosexuality, within both the human and animal kingdoms.

Kara Speltz worked with Soulforce for a number of years, an interfaith group that applies the nonviolence teachings of Gandhi and King towards equality for LGBTs. She is a 69 year old grandmother of two.

I'm not willing to
simply be tolerated.
That wounds my love
of love and liberty.

-Jean Cocteau



But the Church continues to react to this new scientific understanding as it did to Galileo's recognition that the sun did not revolve around the earth. It took the Church some 400 years to apologize for that excommunication.

Cardinal Newman understood the role of the laity better than most. He stated that the laity's view "may serve at times as a needed 'witness to the truth' of a revealed doctrine." Though ignored time and again by the Magisterium, the people of God continue to bear "witness to truth." According to the book *Roman Catholicism in America* by Chester Gillis, 88% of Catholics in 1993 believed that contraception was a matter of personal moral judgment. It would appear from these figures that the hierarchy's teachings on "natural law" are not a dogma accepted by the laity. Cardinal Newman referred to the laity as "the believing Church." When the hierarchy refuses to listen to the "believing church," Cardinal Newman went on to say, the Church loses its authority to teach.

Certainly many bishops are aware of the role gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics have played within our Church throughout its history. Such revered people as Henri Nouwen, Fr. Mychal Judge, Dr. Tom Dooley, and Mary Moylan of the Caronsville 9 are just a few of the faithful lesbian and gay Catholics who have served their God and their Church with profound faith, dignity and commitment. What then keeps those in charge from acting as the prophetic voice that is so needed at a time like this? Better yet, what keeps us from professing that prophetic voice? Clearly it is fear. And while that fear is based on realities that have happened within the Church historically, we must always remember that fear and love cannot coincide.

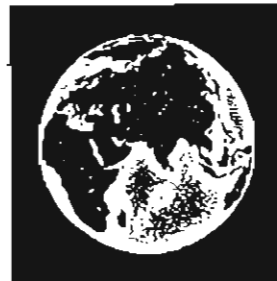
It is time now for the laity to claim its role of prophetic

witness within the Church. Changes come when people have the courage to stand up against a teaching and say it must change. Consider, if you will, where the Church might be without the prophetic witness of the Purcell brothers. Church teachings on this subject have changed to reflect a new vision and understanding of scripture and the inclusiveness of God's love. The Roman Catholic Church since that time has often been a leading voice against racism. It is long past time for the Church to recognize that sexual intimacy based on love binds people in a loving and loyal union that contributes to the wholesome functioning of society. It is long past time for the Church to recognize that it is clinging to a superstitious belief system. We as the Church, as the People of God, can help the Church reclaim its authority to teach. This will happen when the hierarchy listens to the people of God! However, this can not be done by remaining silent; this can only happen when we, as a people, take a public stand just as the Purcell brothers did.

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From "Abroad"

by Jenny Truax



From a small Iowa town, filled for a weekend with 300 Catholic Workers: The 2006 National Catholic Worker Gathering

Gazing around the large cafeteria-style room, I noticed a common element in the 300+ people assembled. A few piercings here and there, your typical smattering of indigenous clothing from Latin America, but on the whole, I was looking at a bunch of simple-looking folks. The only words or logos to be seen were of the social justice bent - "Close the SOA," "Peace is the Way," and my favorite, an excerpt from the famous Dostoyevsky quote on love, a green sweatshirt reading "Harsh and Dreadful".

The National Catholic Worker Gathering in Iowa this fall, was the first to happen in nine years. They seem to come about every five to ten years or so. This was my first. It was in the style of the yearly Midwest Catholic Worker gatherings - lots of down time for chatting, with concurrent Round Table discussions on a variety of topics. Highlights included a concert with Utah Phillips, the famous folk singer who ran the Joe Hill House of Hospitality with Armon Hennacy for seven years, a lecture with Kathy Kelly, a Catholic Worker talent show, and a performance of the play "Fool for Christ." Over the long weekend, the discussion topics included *Urban Farming*, *Ageing in the CW*, *Spiritual Diversity within Community*, *Family Issues in the CW*, *Anarchism*, *Economics*, a *Plowshares* panel, *Living Scripture*, *Class and Ability issues*, and *Rural Life*.

Simply being in the presence of this many Catholic Workers really struck me. I often feel stuck in the middle of things. Because of the CW values I hold, I'm often uncomfortable in the white middle-class setting (even when folks are "progressive"), and because of the privilege of my upbringing (in terms of education, race, and class), I'm also not quite at home in the surroundings of the poor. It was great to have a certain feeling of home in a room full of Catholic Workers.

The diversity of ministries also struck me. From a sheep farm to a house of hospitality for the families of incarcerated folks to free clinics, the works of mercy were out in full force. On the other hand, the dual works of offering shelter and providing food, seem to be the mainstay of the Catholic Worker.

Although I would have liked some, I didn't get a lot of definitive answers to my questions at this gathering. It was more like solace in the struggle. How can we avoid seeking power over our guests and each other in community, as the CW tenet of Anarchism calls us to do? How do we find a common spiritual practice in a community of spiritual diversity? As we get older in this Catholic Worker lifestyle, how can we continue to choose a life with the poor, a life of precarity?

Certainly one of the liveliest discussions I attended was "Heterosexual Privilege in the Catholic Worker." At least half of the folks were straight and seeking ways for their community to be more welcoming to non-straight folks. While some very painful stories were shared, the conversation was generally very positive - a lesbian CW described her process of coming out to the guests. The mother of a gay man talked about celebrating and affirming gestures of affection between her son and his partner. We talked about inclusive language, about Personalism, about being out to guests and volunteers. Overall, it felt like an edgy issue. It seems that Dorothy Day's spirit of inclusion and celebration of every human, especially minorities, has not been extended to the LGBT population by the Catholic Worker movement as a whole. This was illustrated by the presence of one dissenter, who, towards the end of the time, said (yelled) that homosexuality was incompatible with Christianity. We have in the Catholic Worker queer and straight people, Jews, Buddhists, atheists and Catholics. We have those who farm, those who resist, and those who focus on the works of mercy. Learning to live together and love each other across these boundaries, might be one of the more difficult journeys we face as individuals and as a movement. But it's a testament to the continuing relevance and authenticity of the Catholic Worker movement that it continues to grow and attract this diversity of people after 70+ years. Here's to 70 more!



Jenny Truax is thrilled to have downwardly mobilized into working full time around the Catholic Worker, and looks forward to planning Round Table Discussions and learning how to garden.

From Kabat House

by Carolyn Griffeth

Five years ago, my husband, Tery, son, Ghana, and I moved from the Catholic Worker in Chicago to St. Louis to participate in the work of Karen House and the Dorothy Day Co-housing community. With the help of the community we rehabbed a house in the neighborhood, which we lived in and shared with many others over the last five years. Our guests included a man from Mongolia and two Latino women with newborn babies. After adopting our second child, we were ready, for the first time in our married lives, to try living alone as a family. We thus decided to move across the street to a smaller home which we had also bought and rehabbed.

From our own experience and through talking with service providers to the immigrant and Spanish speaking community, we recognized the need for a place of refuge and support for immigrants and Spanish speaking individuals who are temporarily homeless. Therefore, we decided to use our former home to create a Catholic Worker community with this focus. We affectionately call our community Carl Kabat Catholic Worker house after our dear friend and former live-in at Karen House, who is now in prison for his witness against nuclear weapons. Having both been part of the Catholic Worker movement for over eight years, my husband and I very much believe in the Catholic Worker model of hospitality and community. The Catholic Worker is an anarchistic network of communities which live simply with the poor, sharing what we have, and spending our time building relationships and a better world, or just plain enjoying life—and *not* filling out paperwork. For this reason, we are not a non-profit organization—a decision which cost us a grant that would have been our primary source of funding. But why would we fill out a bunch of legal papers simply to live well and love well? As radical as it may be in this day, this is essentially all we are attempting. As a community we strive to nurture one another and create a shared life that is truly life-giving—

that empowers us to do the good we long to do or, as Peter Maurin is often quoted, "A society where it is easier to be good." What sets the Catholic Worker apart from most other experiments in community, even religious, is that we don't leave the poor behind in our search for "the good life." Rather, we believe the good life is struggling with the poor, for the good of all.

Kabat House has grown to include six community members and several supportive "extended community" members. Our live-in community members include Sarah Sunseri, who is teaching at Vincent Gray alternative school in East St. Louis, Mary Hargadon, a member of New Roots Urban Farm, Leilani Castleman, who is working nights as a medical technician but really should be a dance instructor, and Jorj Arteaga, who is an electrician by day and revolutionary by night. Since beginning hospitality in July we have had about 16 guests. Our guests have included women from Finland, Mongolia, and Guatemala, a Mexican family, a Cuban man, and several St. Louisans. We currently have two babies on the way: a boy due in December and girl due in February. Many who have come our way have been mentally ill. One schizophrenic man I suspect will be with us long term.

So far, I believe our experiment in community is going well. When I asked the Kabat House community what it is like to live there, Jorj replied, "It's all sunshine and rainbows and shit," and he was serious. What more could I ask? Aren't sunshine, rain, and shit the primary things that nurture life and growth? I believe I am growing, both in my capacity to love and in a hopeful vision for the world. I also believe that by surrounding my children with community, I am fostering their growth and investing in their future. It is counter-intuitive really; many would argue that my children would be better off with more privilege and more financial security. To this I can only attest

Carolyn Griffeth has been busy homeschooling Ghana and chasing toddler Finn around.

that loving, authentic relationships (i.e. community) are the greatest privilege of all, the only true security, and the thing, that perhaps more than any other, empowers anyone to do good. This, it seems to me, is what we all want for our children, that they know love, and seek to do good.

If you are interested in visiting Kabat house or becoming involved, drop by, call, or email us. We'd love to share our lives with you.

Also, Jorj is looking for odd electrical jobs if you are interested in such help.

We are dreaming of experimenting with biodiesel and are thus seeking a donated diesel van or truck.



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From Karen House



by Teka Childress

Some of the best times I've had over the years at Karen House have come when sharing simple things with the women at the house. Quite often our life is about taking care of the business of life, doing chores, or solving problems. But recently we all had the opportunity to share a different kind of experience. Several of us, community and guests, went out to a retreat center at Rockhaven.

No one was in charge. We had gotten together a few weeks previous and together had planned our day away, including the preparation of a big meal. The weather was beautiful, the spot idyllic and the company as good as could be had.

I was humbled when the mothers (quite excited by a day away from their kids) began to make crafts for their children. It was the first thing they did as soon as they arrived. They didn't go for a walk or find something tasty to eat or even sit and stare out the window. They sat down and immediately made gifts for their children. That night we sat around a camp-



fire and shared stories. The next morning we prayed a morning prayer together, took several hours of quieter time to go for walks, to relax and to think or pray about our lives. At the end of our day we blessed each other after hearing a reading from Henri Nouwen about a blessing ceremony used in a L'Arche community.

It was lovely to spend time together with no other purpose than to be ourselves and to enjoy the gifts of the day. I hope we can do that again. And we may, due to the kindness of the women at Rockhaven.



Teka Childress is giving away blankets and coats at a record-breaking pace through the Winter Outreach program she helped start last year. (See KarenHouseCW.org for more info.)

Round

Table

Talk

by Tony Hilkin

Personalism is perhaps my favorite and most challenging tenet of the Catholic Worker philosophy. It's my favorite because I have become a product of my relationships at Karen House. Julie, community, guests, former guests, and sandwich men all have molded me into a person I am proud of. It's



my most challenging because I have realized my brokenness among these amazing people and have been forever challenged by their love, compassion, commitment, and forgiveness.

Personalism is difficult to put into action and takes a lot of time to manifest. My strongest relationships are definitely my oldest, and my oldest are by far my most important. Fortunately, I have been here for the past seven years, because only in the past two years has personalism truly become clearer to me.

As I think of personalism Cocoa certainly stands out to me. If you do not know Cocoa, you can often hear him singing in the hallways of Karen House. He has an outward personality, one that consists of much humor and heavy banter. He brings this house plenty of joy and excitement, something we always need. Cocoa has been coming around Karen House for years either for sandwiches, sweets, or money. During much of this time he was using crack cocaine and things were usually precarious and often difficult with him. We loved him very much and he, the same with us, but we seldom had the opportunity to know the real Cocoa because of his addiction. Just over one year ago Cocoa became clean. Simultaneously, he began volunteering at Karen House. At first he was around only one day a week cleaning and taking out our trash. But within about a month, he began cooking and serving lunch for us four days a week. The same food line Cocoa received hot meals from for years, he is now facilitating four days a week. Cocoa, for us, has been a quintessential example of personalism. He is the person I look to on difficult days in search of hope.

I asked Cocoa (identified by his initials here, MD:) if he

wanted to share a few of his thoughts on Karen House and this community.

TH: How long have you been coming around Karen House?

MD: Ever since 1985.

TH: What first brought you to Karen House?

MD: Sandwiches.

TH: What made you keep coming back?

MD: Kinda homeless at the time.

TH: How long were you using crack cocaine?

MD: From 1988 to 2005. In 2003 I was clean for 18 months. I started back in 2005. I got back clean in October of 2005. Clean since then.

TH: What was your reason for getting clean?

MD: Tried of being sick and tired. I wanted my life back.

TH: Is it foolish to think that we helped in your recovery?

MD: No its not! Because if it weren't for you all being concerned about me I would have never gotten my life back together.

TH: Do you enjoy the responsibilities you have at Karen House?

MD: I love it! I enjoy coming down here doing the right thing for the right reason. Instead of being out there (on the streets) doing the wrong thing for the wrong reasons.

TH: Given that Karen House is volunteer only, what do you get out of helping here?

MD: Coming down to have fun and being around good people.

TH: Given our different backgrounds, do you feel it hard for you and I to be friends.

MD: No, I do not. I am not prejudice and have nothing against you. You are a very good friend of mine.

TH: Do you feel a sense of inequality between us?

MD: No. Because you are no better than me and I am no better than you.

TH: Would you consider the Karen House community friends or family?

MD: Family! You are all like my family, brother you know that.

TH: In the past year you have been one of our most consistent volunteers. Have you ever thought about joining our community?

MD: Yes, I thought about joining community because this is the place that will keep me from going back on the streets.

I truly respect Cocoa and the courageous choices he has made in the past year. He has been inspiring to us all. Thank you so much Cocoa!



Tony Hilkin and Cocoa are a dynamic duo at Karen House, serving wonderful hot meals to our neighbors several days a week.

Roundtable Discussions

Please join us **every second Friday of the month 7:00(sharp)-8:30pm** for a new series of RT Discussions. The format will include a presentation, large and small group discussion.

Friday, Jan. 12: "Dorothy Day: Don't Call Me A Saint" Phenomenal 60-minute film on her life, including interviews and personal writings

Friday, Feb. 9: Community Life and Karen House Ever wondered what community life is like at KH, and how it differs from other communities? Stories and insights on living in a CW community

Friday, March 9: Music in the CW
What role does music play in the Catholic Worker movement? Sing-along, original songs and story telling.

Friday, April 13: The Catholic Worker Vision of Anarchism What does anarchism mean in the Catholic Worker? What tools and ideas does this philosophy offer those concerned with social justice?

Friday, May 11: Voluntary Poverty
What does a life of voluntary poverty look like in today's materialistic culture? What steps can families, individuals and organizations take to model this value?

Got Skills?

We are planning to close Karen House for the month of June in order to do major repairs. It's been over 10 years since our last big renovation, and our guest's rooms need serious attention.

Do you have plumbing skills? Can you install ceiling fans? Do you know anyone who has carpentry skills that would be willing to help?

We hope to get some work done before June (especially plumbing,) and a LOT of work done in June. As always, we're so grateful for your help in providing dignified, loving hospitality to our guests.

Call us (621-4052) if you or someone you know might be able to help.

Current Karen House Needs

Someone with plumbing skills to address some immediate problems, Coffee, Blankets, Housetakers

Winter Outreach

When it is below 20 degrees, a group of St. Louisans organize to offer blankets, rides to shelters, and other necessities for folks sleeping in the cold. You can join the team, or help with donations!
Call Teka (621-4052) for more info!

Please check our website for more info!
www.KarenHouseCW.org

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work with the poor. People working on this issue include: Joe Angert, Teka Childress, Jorj Arteaga, Lauren Koenig, Ellen Rehg, Christen Parker, Mark Chmiel, and Jenny Truax. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

The Round Table

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