

It's Not a Sin to Be Queer!

by M.J. Christensen

The issue of homosexuality is probably the most controversial topic facing most Christian churches today. There are some Christians who are openly accepting of gays and lesbians. There are even more who work actively against the gay community. However, the majority of congregations fit somewhere between these two extremes. Many Christians don't know what to think about the subject. One of the problems is that this is a heated issue. After all, it is really not just a political issue that can be discussed with detachment and impartiality, but rather real people. It's much easier to openly discuss a topic that doesn't affect us as directly as this topic does. For most heterosexual Christians, this issue affects members of their families, whether they know it or not (Siker, xv).

Homosexuality is really not mentioned in the Bible very often. In fact, as compared to other matters of morals, ethics, or social structure, it takes a back seat. Overall, those Christians who most vocally oppose the gay community are regulated to three or four passages to quote from. The first of these is the story of the city of Sodom. Most of us know this as one of two cities, the other being Gomorrah, which were destroyed by God in the book of Genesis. The "men of Sodom" supposedly came pounding on Lot's door, with the intention of gang raping his visitors, who were actually angels. (Hays, 5) Many conservative Christian groups point to this as the reason that God destroyed the city of Sodom. They claim that God destroyed Sodom because the "men of Sodom" wanted to gang-rape the angels. They do not point to this as a condemnation of rape, but rather of

homosexuality. Christians have even turned to this story to coin a word for homosexual behavior (sodomy) and homosexuals (sodomites) (Genesis 19: 1-29). Many Christians also chose to ignore the fact that Lot offered his two virgin daughters to appease the mob. This story is much more likely to be a condemnation of this form of prostitution bordering on slavery than it is to be a condemnation of homosexuality.

The Biblical passage that is most often referred to in reference to homosexuals comes from the Old Testament book of Leviticus. The passage states “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22). According to Starchild, this passage does not really refer to homosexual behavior specifically, but actually has to do with some Pagan traditions which involved ritual prostitution. Apparently many of the prostitutes were men dressed as women, and this passage could possibly refer to the deception that these prostitutes perpetuated, and not actual homosexual behavior between consenting adults. “In ancient Canaanitic Pagan religion a practice called temple prostitution flourished... The ‘worshiper’ would visit the Temple to worship the Goddess and in this worship he would become the avatar of the God and then have sex with the Goddess in the temple... more often than not the Goddess was not a priestess but a priest! A male dressed as a woman and pretending to be a woman, the Goddess incarnate.”

Starchild believes that this historical fact sheds quite a bit of light on the passage from Leviticus. In fact, the verse right before the one quoted above forbids the dedication of children to the Pagan God Molech. “You shall not give any of your children to offer them (Hebrew to make them “pass through” [the fire]) to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 18:21) In this context, the prohibition in

Leviticus 18:22 could very well have to do with Pagan ritual prostitution much more than homosexuality.

The translation of the passage itself is also very debatable. The word *to'ebah*, which is translated in the English Standard Version of the Bible to mean “abomination”, is likely more accurately translated as “taboo”, something that is not socially acceptable, but which does not necessarily condemn someone to eternal damnation. (Starchild) Even among the current translations of the Bible, there are major differences on how this passage is translated. Some of the translations are below. All are the same verse of the same book of the Holy Bible, taken from BibleGateway.com.

- *Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.*
(Leviticus 18:22, New International Version.)
- *Don't have sex with a man as one does with a woman. That is abhorrent.*
(Leviticus 18:22, The Message)
- *Do not practice homosexuality; it is a detestable sin.*
(Leviticus 18:22, New Living Translation)
- *Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.*
(Leviticus 18:22, King James Version)
- *It is disgusting for a man to have sex with another man.*
(Leviticus 18:22, Contemporary English Version)
- *And with a male thou dost not lie as one lieth with a woman; abomination it [is].* (Leviticus 18:22, Young's Literal Translation)
- *Do not have sex with a man as you would have sex with a woman. I hate that.*
(Leviticus 18:22, New International Reader's Version.)

As you can see, there is a large variance in how this passage is translated, as there is in any Bible passage. If you make the assumption that this passage *does* directly condemn homosexual behavior, the question then becomes whether this passage has any place in modern Christianity. The best way to determine this is to consider the source. Leviticus lays out many social taboos for the early Jewish society. These include circumcision and kosher food preparation, as well as other practices that have been abandoned by most Christian traditions starting in the first century AD. The vast majority of the social guidelines outlined in Leviticus have little pertinence to twenty-first century society, Christian or otherwise. In fact, much of the guidelines were put in place to ensure the survival of the Jewish people rather than having anything to do with morality. For example, it is logical to conclude that prohibitions about eating pork probably arise from the fact that pork is a very dangerous meat if not refrigerated. Since refrigeration wasn't widely available four thousand years ago (which is approximately when Leviticus was originally written), eating pork was certainly unwise.

Many such prohibitions exist in much of the Old Testament, and one wonders how much place they have in modern society. Most Christian traditions ignore the vast majority of these prohibitions. The prohibition on homosexual acts belongs where the rest of them are... in the past. It is highly probable that this prohibition was put in place to encourage reproduction, which was vital to Jewish society at the time. We live in a world of 6.4 billion people, with a projected population of 9.2 billion by 2050. Procreation is not at all a priority in today's society. Even so, procreation no longer requires heterosexual sexual relations, and can be accomplished through artificial insemination and surrogate

mothers. The propagation of the species is certainly not a valid argument against homosexual relationships.

The New Testament, which actually has more relevance to modern Christianity, mentions homosexuality even less than the Old Testament. The one passage that is most referred to is Romans 1, which states:

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:24-27).

Though many opponents of homosexual relationships use this passage as a condemnation of homosexual behavior, they are severely misinterpreting the passage. There is actually no explicit condemnation of the Romans' actions in this passage, but rather it is a description of the decline of Roman society.

No matter the moral reasons for this decline, the passage uses homosexual acts as an effect of the sociological and moral decline of Roman society, not a cause. The passage describes the "exchange" of "natural intercourse for unnatural". The passage is actually not referring to the natural attraction of people toward members of the same sex, but rather the perversion of people away from their natural attractions.

Father Edward Correll of the Liberal Catholic Church said it best in his response to my email interview. He pointed to the fact that homosexuality can be found in approximately ten percent of the population, and also that “we have never discovered a human culture without a homosexual incidence.” He went on to state that “when we have a phenomenon in nature which is universal in time, universal in space, and which occurs with predictable regularity, do we not have a natural law?”

According to Father Correll, many Christian churches chose to condemn homosexuality because their “view of God is the Old Testament view: the wrathful, bloodthirsty Jehovah, a tribal, highly partisan god, who orders his followers to kill other people by the thousands and dispossess them of their lands and nation.” This is the God of Leviticus, the God who “has set out over 600 rules in the Mosaic law... and he has laid the penalty of death upon anyone who breaks many of those laws.”

Overall, the Bible does specifically condemn homosexual behavior, but it also lays down many laws which do not make sense in contemporary life. In an “Open Letter to Laura Schlessinger”, a listener who identifies himself only as “Phil” makes some very valid points regarding Biblical passages that have no place in society today. He takes the stance that “Dr. Laura” was correct when she said that homosexuality is an abomination according to Leviticus 18:22. He asks “When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord – Lev. 1:9. The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?” He also asks “I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?”

There are many Bible passages that obviously carry no relevance in contemporary society, and even contradict contemporary Ethics, and Leviticus is certainly full of them. Leviticus 15:19-24 goes into a long discussion of how a woman is unclean during her menses, and it is unclean to touch her. Leviticus 25:44 states that “As for your male and female slaves whom you may have: you may buy male and female slaves from among the nations that are around you.” The question becomes what would the Canadians and Mexicans think of this proposition. In Leviticus 11:10, we are told that “But anything in the seas or the rivers that has not fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and of the living creatures that are in the waters, is detestable to you.” Is it not therefore just as much of a sin to eat Lobster as for a man to have same-sex relations? Some other prohibitions found in Leviticus state that one “with a defect in his sight” (Leviticus 21:20) cannot approach the altar of God, that one cannot touch the skin of a dead pig (Leviticus 11:6-8), or “wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material.” (Leviticus 19:19). Obviously these prohibitions make no sense whatsoever in modern society.

Christians must realize that the Bible is anywhere from 1800 to 4,000 years old, depending on the passage. It has been translated countless times, hand copied (before the advent of the printing press) countless more times, and controlled by either the Roman Catholic Church or the English King for centuries. Whether or not you believe it was divinely inspired, the text itself was written by man, and it was written for the time in which these men lived. To take it at face value is naïve, and to condemn others because of scattered passages buried within laws abandoned by the Church centuries ago is reckless. Let us not forget other passages out of the same book, such as “Let him who is without sin

among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” (John 8:7), or “Judge not, that you be not judged.” (Matthew 7:1)

No matter what your personal feelings are on the subject of homosexual relationships, it is undeniable that this is a controversial and important issue in most churches today. There are certainly some churches who are accepting of their gay members. The largest of these would be the Unitarian Universalist Conference, the United Church of Christ, and the Episcopal Church. Other churches, such as the United Methodist Church and the Ecumenical Lutheran Church in America, have slightly less vocally accepting attitudes, but are certainly working toward full acceptance. Many smaller churches, such as the Metropolitan Community Church and the Liberal Catholic Church, have gone so far as to have openly gay clergy and be fully accepting of gay people.

On the other side of the issue are such churches as the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Southern Baptist Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Most parishes within these communities range from mild preaching against living a sinful homosexual lifestyle to protesting Gay Pride marches and boycotting “gay-friendly” businesses and organizations from Disney to Ford. The Roman Catholic Church is certainly the largest of these organizations, and both Pope John Paul II and the newly appointed Pope Benedict XVI have been very vocal about the Church’s condemnation of homosexuals.

The Roman Catholic Church is certainly the largest Christian religion worldwide. No one can doubt the influence of Rome and the Pope on world affairs. And, unfortunately, the Church has made its stance on homosexuality quite clear. Roman Catholic Churches have lead signature drives to ban same-sex marriage (“Signature

Drive”), Pope Benedict XVI has issued a ban on gay clergy (“Ban on Gay Clergy”), and has called for an end to adoptions by gay parents (“Vatican Adoptions”). It is obvious that the Roman Catholic Church, for one, has no intentions of changing its tune, at least at the highest level. Despite being apart from Rome in many other aspects of their faith, there are many other Christian churches that seem to be behind the Pope on this subject.

There are also many smaller, usually Christian oriented “community groups” whose primary focus is to deny rights to gay people. The largest of these is Focus on the Family, based in Colorado Springs, Colorado. While they claim to be a family-enrichment group, their actual focus is to deny rights to any “family” which does not fit within their very strict definitions, ie: one man, one woman, 2.3 children, and a dog, preferably a Golden Retriever. One of their primary targets is gay people, and they spend millions every year lobbying against any law that would provide legal rights for homosexuals and for any law that would deny them. They are also anti-choice and against sex education curriculum. (Right Wing Watch)

The controversy over homosexuality in the Church does not just affect the gay people of the congregation. In Congregations in Conflict: The Battle Over Homosexuality, Keith Hartman describes several situations where the homosexual “issue” divided Christian congregations. Most poignant to me was the story of Reverend Jimmy Creech of Fairmont Methodist Church in Warsaw, North Carolina. Reverend Creech was a heterosexual minister who, after learning about a local debate about a non-discrimination statute began ministry and advocacy work with the Raleigh Religious Network for Gay and Lesbian Equality. When the congregation found out about his ministry, a definite divide formed between the older generation and the younger. The older generation felt that since

homosexuality was a sin, Reverend Creech should be dismissed from the Church. The younger generation consisted both of people who agreed with the Reverend's ministry and those who did not support his ministry itself but supported his right to choose how to fulfill his calling. In the end, though the younger generation was larger, the older generation had more money, and Reverend Creech was asked to leave. The generation gap and the division in the congregation did not leave with him, though. (Hartman 1-24)

Many gay people and their allies do not think that discrimination by the Church is something to worry about. They worry more about secular political issues, and leave the church to itself. While I certainly understand this sentiment, the problem is that the Church has a much larger influence on society in general, and gay people in particular, than most people realize. In particular, the Church's attitude, as well as the attitude of other anti-gay organizations affect GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender) young people. Let us not forget the case of Matthew Sheppard, the young man murdered in Laramie, Wyoming in 1998 because he was gay. One of his murderers, Russel Henderson, was an Eagle Scout. The other, Aaron McKinney, was a Mormon. Whether these anti-gay organizations played any part in these young men's attack on Matthew Sheppard can never be known for sure, but they certainly didn't do their part to teach love and acceptance.

Archbishop Bruce Simpson of the Benedictine Order of Saint John the Beloved stated the problem best when he said "there remains a significant population of GLBT kids who know that reality television does not reflect reality. Their parents take them to churches one or more times a week, where they're told gay people are sinners, sick, and damned but that they can be cured through the power of prayer. They live in communities where people may be harassed, fired, beaten, and even left bloodied on a fence to die for

the sin of being “queer.” They consider suicide; some succeed. The power of Nielsen ratings is nothing compared with the power of preachers and Sunday school teachers who tell our youth that God, the omnipotent creator of the universe, hates them as individual human beings and damns their eternal souls.”

Thus, whether we are active members of a Christian Church or not, it falls on GLBT people and their allies to end discrimination in the Church. Regardless of our personal beliefs, we can see that the very fact that organizations as big and influential as the Christian Churches are teaching an anti-gay view of the world hurts the GLBT community, starting with our children. We must therefore do everything within our power to end anti-gay discrimination in the Christian Churches.

One problem is that most of the ultra-conservative Bible-thumpers that are the spearhead of the anti-gay movement do not listen to reason. They hold a firm belief that their interpretation of the Bible is “Right”, and that any other interpretation or analysis is the work of the devil. When people refuse to listen to logic, reason, or even their own hearts, there is no way to change their thinking, or even for rational people to completely understand it.

There really is no reasoning with people on the lunatic fringe of the anti-gay movement. Nevertheless, there are many ways that rational, compassionate people can work to end antigay discrimination by churches. The first, and most important, is education. Many of the members of discriminating churches do not know how to feel on the subject. They may think they believe that homosexuality is evil, but that is only because that is the only thing that has been told to them. The Bible may not mention homosexual behavior often, but many preachers do. If engaged in a logical, thinking

discussion of the subject, most people can see that homosexuality is not the sin that they have been taught it is.

Father Correll said “That joy, creativity and compassion could be the products of a homosexual love removes homosexuality from the category of sin as absolutely as those psychological studies have removed it from the category of illness.” Father Correll is obviously a very spiritual and open-minded man, and has learned this from his own observations. He has many gay friends, and has seen these traits (joy, creativity and compassion) in their actions and relationships. I have heard many anti-gay Christians comment that they did not know any gay people. It is much easier to discriminate against people that you have never met. If you don’t know any homosexuals personally, we become a very easy scapegoat for all of the evils of society. But I wonder where these people are living that they don’t know any homosexuals. After all, approximately ten percent of the population is gay, so unless you only know nine people, the chances of not knowing any homosexuals are very slim.

As is the case for many issues within the gay rights movement, the problem is that we are not visible to much of society. Even most of us who are “out of the closet” can blend into the crowd without much trouble. There are a select few gay individuals who tend to stand out more than the rest of us, but for the most part, we don’t look any different than our straight counterparts. While we might be “out” to some people, there is a natural tenancy to step back into the closet when the situation calls for it. Many gays leave their churches because of the discrimination that they feel, so there might not be a large segment of homosexuals in some congregations. If the congregation is vocally anti-gay, those who do remain are likely to hide their orientation for fear of reprisal.

One solution, of course, is for homosexuals to try to make themselves more known in their communities. This is not easy when we know that we are going to face discrimination. Many gay activists like to compare the gay rights movement to the civil rights movement of the 1960's. While many aspects of the fight for gay rights are similar, one real distinction between the two is the issue of visibility. A leopard cannot hide his spots, nor can a black person hide his or her skin color. Most gays can hide their sexual orientations. This makes the fight all the more difficult.

On one side, anti-gay activists correlate homosexuality with mental disorder, perversion, or sin, and want us either to change to a heterosexual orientation or simply fall off the face of the earth. This position is made easier for them to take because there is no physical difference between a gay man and a straight man or a lesbian and a straight woman. On the outside, we are pretty much the same. Since the nature of sexual orientation is more of a mystery than the nature of race, it is much easier to claim that it is simply a "sin" and leave it at that.

On the other side are the homosexuals. We are caught many times between a rock and a hard place. While we know that the best way to further gay rights is to be as visible as possible, we also know that we can easily crawl back into our shell when faced with an uncomfortable situation. The challenge then becomes to determine when is the best time to come out to a group of people, such as our church or our family. Obviously, we cannot allow those around us to continue to believe that they don't know any gay people. However, we must take into account that some places or situations might be literally dangerous to come out in. The cases of gay bashings nationwide are not on the decrease, and some ignorant people will take any opportunity to express their hate. If gays take the

right opportunities to make ourselves known, we will ultimately teach those around us that we are here, we are queer, and that we're still loving, compassionate people. "Ultimately, experience can overcome all kinds of contrary teaching, no matter how authoritative.(Correll)"

The third group of people is the one that has the most promise, and the most work to do. These are the heterosexual Christians without a strong moral objection to homosexuality. Many of these people *do* know gay people in their lives, and are torn between love for their gay friends and family members and the teachings of their church. It is these people who must educate themselves about the true nature of homosexuality, and the teachings of their church. It is these people, ultimately, who will change the face of Christianity in the future. Once they realize that homosexuality is not the sin they have been taught, they can open up lines of communication in their Churches, or perhaps move to congregations that are more open and accepting.

The churches themselves need to change their teachings, but this will only come when enough of their congregations have changed their views. Father Correll believes that "the Churches need to find ways to emphasize the beauty and the healthfulness of sexuality itself. Christians have to learn to love and rejoice in their sexuality as a magnificent gift from the REAL God." In the end, it is not just a fear of homosexuality that is causing strife in so many Christian Churches, but the fear of sexuality in any form.

In the end, love, compassion, and reason will win out over fear, hate and scapegoating, but it is going to take a long time. Only through education can minds be changed, and the best education is experience. Gay people need to make themselves better known in their communities so that no one can claim that they "don't know any gay

people”, and churches need to change their focus toward love and acceptance and away from hell and damnation.

I would like to close with a thought from Father Correll: “But the essential thing is to learn not to fear hell... because hell does not exist. Any sin we commit is finite. It begins and ends. It does not have within it the force to produce an eternal effect. That cannot happen. No sin, being finite, could ever produce an eternal hell. And if God somehow contrived to bring about an eternal hell to punish non-eternal offenses, there would be no justice whatsoever in that. NONE! Now, is God a God of justice? Or not?”

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Appendix 1: Father Edward Correll, Personal Interview

Below is a copy of the email I got from Father Edward Correll in response to my interview questions. It is included here for reference because it is so incredibly insightful, and also because I believe the “disclaimer” he gives in the beginning of the email is important to the context of this paper. I have not edited this email except to format the text to fit the text formatting of this paper.

Hi MJ!

I'm sorry it has taken this long to get your questions answered. I had fully intended to have this back to you before I went to DC with S4A, but 'twas not to be. Just too much to get done before I could leave. I hope my delay will not have compromised your ability to write an effective paper.

The trip was wonderful and worth all the various aggravations...like sore legs, not enough sleep etc. But I'll spare you a full report now in order to get your questions answered.

Please let me know if I can help you further.

Wishing you everything good!

Ed Correll +

DISCLAIMER:

I am a priest, a Catholic priest. In the Christian Church all priests are Catholic priests but...there are many Catholic Churches, perhaps as many as 50. Rome is the largest, but each of the 16 Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands

and a number of national Churches are Catholic as well because they all share the Catholic priesthood.

Roman propaganda and western lazy-mindedness typically lead millions of people to believe that all Catholics are under the charge of Rome. They are not. I am not. We all share a common priesthood, but we are completely independent of Rome's theology and politics. The Church in which I am a priest, the Liberal Catholic Church, is in tremendous variance from Rome in Her outlook.

We hold the point of view which is inherent in the philosophical source of the entire Western spiritual tradition, the Qabalah, "the Secret Wisdom of Israel." The Qabalistic teachings are almost 6000 years old, and form an oral tradition which the prophets of Israel moulded into an allegory built around a modified history of the Hebrews and set forth in what we know as the Torah, or the Pentateuch, the Five Books of Moses of the Old Testament.

The books of Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and the Psalms are also strongly Qabalistic books. In the New Testament, the Book of Revelation is entirely Qabalistic, and much of the wisdom of the New Testament is Qabalistic as well. It could hardly be otherwise inasmuch as, under the training of the Essenes, Jesus became the greatest Qabalist in history and demonstrated his mastery of its principles in his resurrection.

In the last thirty years the Qabalah has become very popular among various New Age groups; however, the Qabalah is far from new and those touting themselves loudly and publicly as "masters of Qabalah" are usually dealing only with its most superficial elements. The REAL Qabalah is hidden deep within the human heart. Although teachers can show the way, every individual seeker must find it for himself, within himself.

There is a rational content to the Qabalah, however, and although it forms the base out of which all three of the western religions have proceeded, the dogmas of those religions are at nearly complete and utter odds with their Qabalistic source. In the view of the Liberal Catholic Church, the tenets of the Qabalah form the true Christian orthodoxy, and what is thought of as Christian orthodoxy is really rank heresy.

We do not offer condemnations of our Christian confreres, however; we simply seek to impart the Truth we know.

Without trying to offer a philosophical rationale, I'll simply make the assertions which form the essentials of qabalistic philosophy:

"God" is impersonal, not personal, neither "He" nor "She."

The essential nature of "God" is Consciousness, Consciousness before there is a "subject" who can realize that "I am conscious" and before there is an object to be conscious of. "God" is the absolute value of Consciousness, to use a mathematical metaphor.

The essential activity of "God" is Creativity, and Its creative impulses proceed along the line of Its "imagination."

God is unmanifested in Its own primal sphere.

The created order, the universe, comes into being because "God" focuses Its creative imagination on some "point" of Its own Being. The universe is the outward expression of "God's" imagination.

Because "God" is not other than Consciousness Itself, and because the universe is constructed out of pure Consciousness, what we identify as "matter" is the Divine Consciousness made "solid." All activity in the universe is the Consciousness which is

"God" "on the move."

This universe of time and space is a universe of limitation. In one aspect of Itself, "God" creates the universe of limitation, then, in another aspect of Itself, it incarnates within the forms it has created so that It may individualize Itself into uncounted myriads of self-conscious entities...as whose individualities "God" specializes Its creativity.

This is who you and I are: the Individualizations of God. Each one of us, and not Jesus only, is an Incarnation of God.

During the long periods of "involution" we move out of the Great Unmanifest Consciousness of "God" as tiny vortices of conscious force which we call Divine Sparks for lack of a better name. Out of the Unmanifest and ever more deeply into the stuff of matter we move acquiring within ourselves the "potencies of the planes" (matter at various vibrational levels), until we enter the mineral kingdom; that is to say, until we begin to identify the mineral kingdom as providing those vehicles (bodies) through which the Divine Consciousnesses we are expressing themselves.

When we have exhausted the expressive potential of mineral forms, we move into the plant kingdom. When that venue is fully explored and mastered, we enter the kingdom of the lower animals. Finally we enter the human kingdom and a major shift takes place. Until the entry into the human kingdom, control of the activities of Life has been under the aegis of "God" or, from "outside" the organism. With the establishment of self-consciousness, control moves to the human "will" within each individualized self-consciousness. It will take many, many lifetimes of spiritual evolution (which directs the outer evolution biologists are aware of) for us to become aware of our own Godness, our own purpose as Gods in manifestation specializing the creativity of our Divine, unmanifested Parent, and

for us to develop the mental sophistication to direct the affairs of the physical universe with absolute precision. The physical universe is mental, however, made of Consciousness; the goal will be met, absolutely, by each one of us. How can God fail?

But for the present, God has willfully blinded Itself so that Its individualities can develop. If we could not sense ourselves as separate, there could be no individualization. Once individuality has become absolute because of the development of self-consciousness, those individualities (you and I) begin to elaborate their self-awareness to the point of SELF-AWARENESS and eventually, in evolutionary time, each one of us will know with Jesus, that "the Father and I are One" and we will wield all the Powers of Creation from within our individualized, self- and SELF-CONSCIOUS Godhood.

Because we ARE God in Reality, we are utterly eternal; because we have individualized, our Personhood will always be inviolate, and because we live in a universe of finiteness, but are "powered" by an Infinite Power, there is no conceivable end to our personal development as we share with the One Life in the administration of Its universe.

And, into the bargain, just because we are God, we are...necessarily...the entire universe, too; we are the the entire universe, which means that each one of us is everyone...and everything. The important point is that we shall be self-aware AS the Universe which is Identical with her Creator.

Check out the discoveries of quantum physics. Those scientists are absolutely going in the right direction...but the Qabalists beat them by 6000 years.

As long as we sense only the "limitation" of our lives, and are unaware of our factual Identity with All That Is, we are in a state of "sin." It is a necessary state, though, and

therefore it is not evil in the conventional sense. It does keep us feeling the threat of "death" (much misunderstood), and the sense of Life within us, desperately seeking a way not to be conformed to death (much misunderstood, remember...) strikes out in all kinds of ways which are hurtful.

These are what real "sins" are. Usually they manifest as illicit attempts by one person to coerce personal power from another. There is almost no end of ways that "sin" can manifest; I won't go into an endless permutation here; you can see a variety of scenarios on every newscast. We can discuss it another time if you want.

On this point, though, one bottom line, generic statement needs to be made: anything which helps someone amplify his own sense of Individuality, and his own sense of personal Wholeness is Good. Anything which demeans or diminishes someone's sense of Individuality and/or sense of Wholeness is evil in the conventional sense.

This evil, these sins, arise out of a necessary construct in the processes of evolution. That construct cannot be helped, but the sins which proceed from it are always to be challenged and never tolerated. However, even the worst criminal and most barbaric human is an Incarnation of God, so restraint and then rehabilitation are the proper options for dealing with them. An attitude of hate or judgmentalism, and a will to revenge, to "hurt them back," are as sinful as whatever deeds of coercion they themselves have been fostering.

Now, I have been at pains to describe these things to you simply because you need to see that in asking for the opinion of a Christian priest, you are not going to get what you probably thought you were. I am going to answer your questions out of the point of view I have just described.

I hope you can fit it to the purpose of your article.

If you have further questions, do let me know and let's discuss them.

(Now you know why I could not just dash off a response to you before I went to Washington LOL)

Q: As a cleric, what are your opinions on the subject of homosexuality, especially in relation to Christianity?

My opinions are not formed by my status as a priest. On the premise that "the mind must be free for the spirit to grow," my Church advocates "the widest possible play of philosophic and scientific thought." Even more importantly, in terms of your question at least, the Church insists that "in order to be meaningful and retain uncompromised the ability to serve in the world, religion must keep pace with the advances of science."

Consequently, I find myself persuaded by the psychological studies of the last forty-five years that homosexuality is neither an illness, itself, nor the symptom of another illness. Further, I have seen in many gay people I know a spirit of compassion, integrity and selflessness which informs their relationships in couples, and extends itself into all their personal relationships and their relationship with the world at large. These are all very godly things, impossible to express unless they were righteous on their own terms in the first place. That joy, creativity and compassion could be the products of a homosexual love removes homosexuality from the category of sin as absolutely as those psychological studies have removed it from the category of illness.

Another interesting thought: Remember that sexuality is not a behavior, it is a state of being. No one is a chef until he cooks. No one is a swimmer who does not swim. Yet, we are all sexual beings whether or not we ever act out our feelings. The utterly virginal or completely celibate person is as sexual as the most ardently promiscuous person.

Now, we know that homosexuality occurs nominally in about 10% of the population. We know that we have never discovered a human culture without a homosexual incidence...neither a contemporary culture nor any of the cultures of history whose artifacts and records we have studied thoroughly enough.

So, when we have a phenomenon in nature which is universal in time, universal in space, and which occurs with predictable regularity, do we not have a natural law?

Q: Why do you think so many Christian churches condemn homosexuals or homosexuality?

The chief reason is that their view of God is the Old Testament view: the wrathful, bloodthirsty Jehovah, a tribal, highly partisan god, who orders his followers to kill other people by the thousands and dispossess them of their lands and nation. The same god has set out over 600 rules in the Mosaic law (beginning with the Ten Commandments), and he has laid the penalty of death upon anyone who breaks many of those laws.

When the sense of absolute power attendant upon that god's formidable wrath is communicated through the Old Testament stories, it is a brave man who will willfully defy it. These attitudes are now part of the collective unconscious of the western peoples, and they motivate us as individuals and therefore as societies.

Further, the misreading of the myth of Creation in Genesis has most people identifying "sex" as the "Original Sin." That's not what the story says, actually; the story depicts disobedience as the original sin. Still, since that sin brought Adam and Eve to sexual awareness, it is sex that gets the blame. Passages such as those in Leviticus describing women as unclean during periods of menstruation only add to the problem.

In these passages, by the way, God is quoted as if "He" were delivering an oration to others. The sense of God's personalness is very great, and we must remind ourselves that it isn't really so. As a matter of principle, this does not invalidate the rules, but it does mean that the authority behind them is not the terrifying spectre of mayhem and maliciousness called Jehovah. THEN the validity of the rules is another matter.

As a matter of fact, the rules regarding the status of women in menstruation, the treatment of their clothes, the furniture they use and their relationships to others, are not followed today even by the most fundamentalist Christians. It is surely rank hypocrisy to be so cavalierly disobedient of the letter of this law, but demand absolute adherence to the law for homosexuals. The two laws have the same moral force, and neither is one of the Ten Commandments.

Whence comes such hypocrisy? Remember, as we said before, that sexuality is a state of being. Disobedience may be a sin, but it is not a state of being. We have the choice to obey or not to obey, but we don't have the choice not to be sexual...and we are always aware of our sexuality no matter what we are doing. That awareness may be subliminal; Lord knows that people who espouse this point of view do what they can to avoid being aware of their sexuality. It is possible to repress one's sexuality, but one cannot fail to be influenced by it anyway unless he is almost irremediably psychotic.

The point, though, is that we are all always aware of that which, we are told, got us thrown out of the Garden, and it is impossible not to be aware of it. The sense of sin, then, is psychologically palpable to those who are victimized by this point of view.

The result, though, is that even heterosexuality is considered evil, a necessary evil for obvious reasons, but an evil nonetheless. Note, though, that the alleged evil arises not from the procreative function of sex, but from the fact that sex is fun. It feels good.

If heterosexuals cannot accept their own feelings, it is perfectly understandable that they certainly cannot accept a variant sexuality, either. Their way of justifying their indulgence of their own guilty sexuality is to persecute the greater sin of those who do things differently.

With so many homosexuals becoming more and more vocal, with mainstream films having become so much more frank (As late as 1952, it was illegal to use the word "virgin" in film dialogue.), with human sexuality one of the main topics headlined on the covers of major newsstand magazines, with sex used as a motivator in about 70% of print and media advertising, with AIDS being a prominent and necessary subject under discussion, with children becoming sexually knowledgeable earlier and earlier, with "condom" and "abortion" being words in virtually everyone's vocabulary, those for whom sex, itself, is a sin in the generic sense, have no place to hide. Everything conspires to beat the guilt-ridden with their own unremitting sinfulness. They can't stop being sinful even by not indulging themselves.

They can let their god know they are on his side, however, by persecuting everyone else.

One last thing. The New Testament commission to "go into all the world teaching men whatsoever I have told you" is frequently misunderstood to mean that those who "know the truth" and do NOT tell it will be condemned to hell with all the rest of the sinners...who are going to hell BECAUSE the Christians did not convert them.

Many also believe that God won't wait till Judgement Day, that he will punish the world without waiting. Hurricanes seem to be God's weapon of choice. He hurls them at Disney World because they observe Gay Pride Day. However, hurricanes kill more than gays, and the Christians on the right don't want to get God riled. Hence the persecution.

I do want to acknowledge that there are more and more traditional Christians who are making their peace with homosexuals. Even if they still believe homosexuality is evil, their estimate of God is gradually maturing. They no longer feel threatened in their own sexuality, they are beginning to internalize the scientific findings on the subject, and so are willing to let others choose their own way as well.

I probably don't need to say this, but I do want to leave no doubt whatsoever. Neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality is sinful. Either can be used for sinful purposes as in the exploitation of others or in forcing a violent encounter on another, but the sin is in the exploitation and the violence, not in sexuality itself.

Q: What insights can you provide as to changing attitudes toward gays in Christian churches?

If gays will let themselves be known in congregations which are sympathetic, the rest of the people will gain concrete experience of them and learn thereby that "human is human"

and "love is love" without reference to its direction. Ultimately, experience can overcome all kinds of contrary teaching, no matter how authoritative.

The Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship are probably the most open Churches easily available. The first two are traditional Churches.

No one who is gay needs to allow or accept any kind of approach from someone else which is hostile, demeaning, punitive or discriminatory, but it will be a help if one can remember that those people are motivated by fear...fear of themselves, not fear of gays.

Q: Are there hidden social, financial, or other costs to the adversarial relationship between gays and most churches that most of us do not realize?

Insightful question!

Yes, that is possible. If a pastor and the governing board of a parish church decide to welcome open homosexuals, they do still risk making enemies of many of the congregation and losing the income their offerings represent. This could be quite a serious matter pragmatically.

Q: What do you think will be necessary to change the current adversarial relationship between most churches and homosexuals?

The Churches need to find ways to emphasize the beauty and the healthfulness of sexuality itself. Christians have to learn to love and rejoice in their sexuality as a

magnificent gift from the REAL God. It is not just a practical function for the purpose of renewing the population. It is an active force from good to better to best for those whose gratitude is deep.

Church classes on the dynamics of romantic relationships are one way of doing this, but the usual format must change. Participants must concern themselves with what they have discovered to be the true joys of relationship, and THEN decide whether or not the traditional rules are relevant. Usually in such classes the rules come first, and relationships are made to fit within them.

Remember that Jesus' statement that "the Sabbath was made for Man, not Man for the Sabbath" means that the Law exists to serve Humankind, human beings are not to be arbitrary slaves to legalisms. Human beings are infinite in their variety and potential; after all the Fullness of God is incarnate in each of us. The "law" is static and unchanging. It has its purpose, but its purpose is not absolute.

Q: What insights can you share on this subject that most lay people do not know or understand?

God did not write the Bible. The Bible was written by good and inspired people, but their inspiration was not verbal and their inspiration was not absolute; consequently their words must not be taken as absolute.

Likewise, they wrote for particular people at a particular time and place and we are no longer at that time and place. More and more, then, the scriptures serve us better as we look for meanings in a larger spiritual context, not in word-for-word haggling.

Hardest of all because of the long history of this, learn that no one is going to hell. There is no hell to go to. It doesn't exist. Any text in the Bible which indicates that there is a hell is false. Again, God did not write the Bible. Textual errors on the one hand, and philosophical errors on the other, are the responsibility of the original writer. It's our responsibility, however, to separate the wheat from the chaff, to use another Biblical metaphor. The Christ who actually defines Himself AS Truth, knows there are risks; we won't get it right every time, but in devoted search for that Truth which He already Is, we are supported by the very processes of our evolution as well as by that One who calls us to Himself.

We may need to use "the law" to start our journey, but finding that Truth is our only real purpose, not worshipping the dead letter.

But the essential thing is to learn not to fear hell...because hell does not exist. Any sin we commit is finite. It begins and ends. It does not have within it the force to produce an eternal effect. That cannot happen. No sin, being finite, could ever produce an eternal hell. And if God somehow contrived to bring about an eternal hell to punish non-eternal offenses, there would be no justice whatsoever in that. NONE! Now, is God a God of justice? Or not?

We must not gabble our lives away in parroting "rules" from the Bible when those rules actually keep us from living our lives as richly as possible. The commandment we have is that we love God with all our minds. We simply cannot do that unless we use our minds. If we keep Love as our motive, we can follow our minds safely wherever they lead us...and they will lead us into that place where, as Jesus promised, we "can have Life and have it more abundantly."

There is much of Truth, Beauty and Goodness in the Bible, but the fact that an idea, any idea, is in the Bible is not what makes it true, beautiful and good. That is mere superstition, and not worthy of any lover of Truth. However, here is one true, beautiful and good idea we can take with us: "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you." And is the Kingdom of Heaven where God lives? Then, where does God live?

God lives within us on the basis of this statement from Jesus. How, then, is anyone going to go to hell? Will God endure hell because we misbehaved? According to Jesus, if God ceased to live within us, we would cease to be. The notion of a literal hell for Divine revenge is a farce unless God plans to send Himself to hell...and that's a farce from another angle.

Q: If there is a question I didn't ask, assume I asked it. If there is anything you would like to add on the subject, please do so below.

As an interesting aside, the Qabalah also teaches reincarnation. In our evolution to develop mastery of all the forces of creation, we all inhabit male bodies and female bodies. I think it's possible that an individual who has had a string of lifetimes as one gender, then returns as the other, may develop as homosexual. There is nothing sinister in this, of course. It would be one of the ordinary results of the way evolution works, and just one more of an endless variety of experiences from which each one of us may learn.

And again, love is not compromised and its worth is not unmade by gender considerations.