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**A Pastoral Resource Manual for Gay Ministry: Community,
Liberation, and Spirituality on a Catholic University Campus**

Francisco Vega- Bonilla

A PASTORAL RESOURCE MANUAL FOR GAY MINISTRY:
COMMUNITY, LIBERATION, AND SPIRITUALITY
ON A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

BY

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THESIS-PROJECT
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY and PHILOSOPHY
AT BARRY UNIVERSITY

MIAMI SHORES
2004

BARRY UNIVERSITY
MIAMI, FL 33161

**BARRY UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES**

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM

THESIS-PROJECT APPROVAL

May 2004

This thesis-project prepared under my direction by

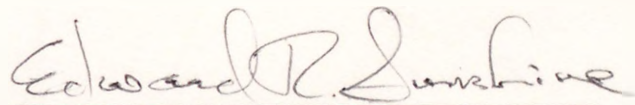
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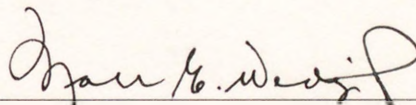
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has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

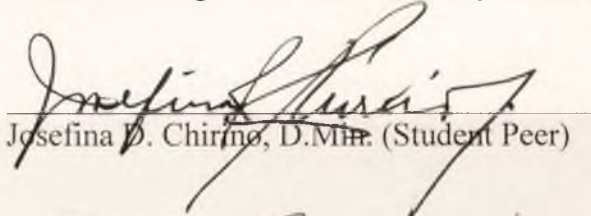
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To Manny, whose passion for the intellect fills me with life

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is my pleasant duty to express my deep gratitude to scholars wiser than I who devoted their time to criticizing my ideas and correcting my mistakes, among them: Dr. Edward Sunshine, my mentor, Dr. Mark Wedig, Dr. Alicia Marill, and Dr. Josefina Chirino, my readers. I owe great debt to my friend and colleague in ministry Dr. Elsie Miranda for giving birth to this ministerial project and for the many insightful conversations we have had. I am grateful to Barry University, the Peace Education Foundation, and the Adrian Dominican Sisters, most specially, Sr. Marie Carol Hurley, OP, for their role in my academic and human formation throughout the years. Finally, I will forever be indebted to Paquito, my father, Dora, my mother, Robert, my brother, and Manuel, my partner, whose love and life I share in. Their unconditional acceptance and loving support have inspired this project.

ABSTRACT

For four years, as a member of the Mission & Ministry Team of Barry University, I have worked to seek out and welcome back to our *Cor Jesu* Chapel those students, faculty, and staff who find themselves voiceless, isolated, and fractured on our campus because of their gay and lesbian experience. Our ministry was empowered and validated, in no small way, by the Statement of the Bishops' Committee on Marriage and Family, *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*.¹ This pastoral message gave us the permission to break out of fear and move forward with bold ministerial initiatives. It was precisely out of this pastoral outreach and response to the gay and lesbian community on campus that Integrity has evolved as a faith sharing support group. The painful experience of marginalization, stigmatization, and condemnation by Church and society forms the very ground out of which this thesis-project arises.

My hope is to articulate the contextual gay theology and methodology that Integrity brings to the wider table of theological and pastoral discourse within the Catholic university and Church. Concretely the thesis-project will provide a "Pastoral Resource Manual" (PRM) for the use of Integrity and the Mission & Ministry Department that responds to the basic needs and questions posed by our gay and lesbian students, faculty, and staff as they approach us for pastoral guidance and support.

Integrity's search for Christian spirituality and the pastoral imperatives articulated by *Always Our Children* inform this thesis-project or "Pastoral Resource Manual". The manual has various objectives. The PRM gives voice to the pastoral reality of our gay students, faculty, and staff on campus. It also expresses the particular theological reflection and biblical hermeneutics employed by the community. Furthermore, it narrates Integrity's struggle with the magisterial teaching on homosexuality. Most critically, the PRM describes the gay spirituality that emerges from the group's prayer and theological conversation. Finally, the project concretely presents resources for the ongoing development and ministerial growth of the Integrity community. This includes a detailed listing of national and local support organizations, pastoral and liturgical resources, and an extensive reading list in the area of gay theology and spirituality. The outcome is a pastoral guide or handbook for Church ministers, as called for in *Always Our Children*.

¹National Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Marriage and Family. *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*. 2nd edition, (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1998).

CHAPTER 1

THE EXPERIENCE OF INTEGRITY AS *LOCUS THEOLOGICUS*

Introduction

For four years, as a member of the Mission & Ministry Team of Barry University, I worked alongside my colleague, Elsie Miranda, to seek out and welcome back to *Cor Jesu* Chapel those students, faculty, and staff who found themselves voiceless, isolated, and fractured on our campus because of their gay and lesbian experience. Our ministry was empowered and validated, in no small way, by the Statement of the Bishops' Committee on Marriage and Family, *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*.¹ This pastoral message gave us the permission to break out of fear and move forward with bold ministerial initiatives. It was precisely out of this pastoral outreach and response to the gay and lesbian community on campus that Integrity was formed as a faith-sharing support group.

Integrity convened twice a month as an open community where students, faculty, and staff might find a "safe" and welcoming space. Flyers were posted throughout the campus inviting gay people to gather. The presence of these visible invitations immediately sent out the message that the Office of Campus Ministry and chapel were

¹National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) Committee on Marriage and Family, *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, 2nd edition, (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1998).

welcoming places. Gathering in solidarity, we became a faith-community through the sharing of our common painful experience of marginalization, stigmatization, and condemnation by Church and society. We also became community by celebrating who we are as gay people. Our “coming out” narratives synthesized both the pain and joy of our lives. This experience is the very ground out of which this thesis-project arises.

My hope is to articulate the contextual gay theology and methodology that Integrity brings to the wider table of theological and pastoral discourse within the Catholic university and Church. Concretely, the thesis-project will provide a “Pastoral Resource Manual” (PRM) for the use of Integrity and the Mission & Ministry Department that responds to the basic needs and questions posed by our gay and lesbian students, faculty, and staff as they approach us for pastoral guidance and support. What is Integrity about? How can it help me? Why does the Church and society condemn me? What does the Bible have to say about homosexuality? What are the Church teachings on the issue? Are there theologies that affirm gays and lesbians? Where can we find existing support-groups in the community? Do you have anything I can read that might help me? By responding to these issues, the PRM specifically will demonstrate how Integrity has effectively answered the call and invitation of *Always Our Children* to minister to the gay and lesbian community on campus and implement the document’s suggestions for pastoral ministers.

Primarily, I write to and for Integrity, gay and lesbian students, staff, and faculty of Barry University. I also write to the Mission & Ministry Office of the University as we continue to respond to this pastorally sensitive issue by restoring and making broken lives whole. I write to my Church, the People of God, and its pastoral agents, hoping that this

piece, as a response to *Always Our Children*, presents a concrete model for gay ministry and contributes to further a dialogue that is healing and reconciling. There are others that might also benefit from this project: those in the gay community who are alienated from Church, but still hold spirituality and their Catholic faith dear. My hope is that they can find encouragement in the knowledge and certainty that there are sectors of Church that affirm and uphold their dignity and way of loving as graced and redeemed. Finally, I also recognize that I am involved in an ongoing internal conversation, which struggles to achieve greater clarity and synthesis concerning this sensitive pastoral issue and its impact on my life.

Ministerial Tradition: Welcoming the Stranger

Since 1996 I have labored as a Catholic Campus Minister in a Dominican university, which seeks to critically unveil the Truth, *Veritas*, about God, the world, and humanity. As a pastoral agent, I hear the painful narratives of gay and lesbian students, faculty, and staff who seek to reflect on their lives as “other” in this spirit of truth and openness. Being a Miami-Cuban, “refugee” and exile, I am marked by my own “otherness” and my community’s experience of *diaspora* and uprootedness. This reality of being a stranger in a foreign land became most evident when I was called a “spic” for the first time and was told to return to the country where I came from. It was specifically within the context of the Hispanic parish, and particularly within a youth *comunidad de base*, that I found refuge, sanctuary, and affirmation of who I was as “other”. The welcome, love and acceptance of community were able to transform the pain inflicted by the sin of inhospitality, the very sin of Sodom. This profound experience has informed my understanding of ministry as the engagement in a liberative and transformative praxis for

and with the poor, outcast, and marginalized as agent and beneficiary. Being “other” has everything to do with my engagement in theological studies, ministries with youth, migrant farm workers, and the Haitian community.

Upon completing an M.A. in Theology, I was drawn to the ministry in the jails and prisons within the Archdiocese of Miami. There I discovered that the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender (GLBT) community and those living with HIV/AIDS were completely “other” and dually ostracized, violated, and dehumanized within the system, by administrators, staff, inmates, and even chaplains. It was during this time that a priest friend approached me about the need to facilitate the creation of a community for gays, in a home setting that would be non-threatening. The group called itself Spirit and gathered for the purpose of reclaiming spirituality, liturgy, and *ecclesia* in an environment that was safe and unconditionally affirming of the homosexual person.

Spirit convened for the first time in 1992, on the eve of Pentecost, for a liturgy in my home with the vision of establishing a community of faith that would give voice to the pain of alienation and exclusion from the Catholic Church. That night over thirty gay men and four women broke open a liberating Word through shared faith narratives steeped in profound pain due to the stigmatization, condemnation, and sense of exile and marginalization that they had experienced from and within the Church. In the breaking of bread, all were welcomed back to the communion table without recrimination. Many felt for the first time in many years that their exile was over and spiritual home had been restored. An *agape* meal followed which further solidified the group’s experience of communion and solidarity. A new family, a new “domestic church” emerged around the banquet table. Six years later Spirit continues to meet monthly in homes; it has evolved

into an ecumenical community that is firmly rooted in the Judeo/Christian spiritual tradition.

This Judeo/Christian tradition informed and fueled Spirit's emancipatory praxis, as members became involved in the struggle to achieve the passage of a human rights ordinance for Miami-Dade County that bars discrimination based on sexual orientation. My role in this community has been diverse: core member, facilitator, pastoral theologian, advocate, and active participant. The successful experience with Spirit motivated me to facilitate the establishment of Integrity as an outreach ministry to the gay and lesbian community of Barry University.

My pastoral motivation for beginning the work of Integrity stems from various counseling sessions and conversations with two undergraduate students who were in search of sanctuary or "safe space" and a supportive faith community. Their narratives revealed the suffering that was born out of a self-understanding that had internalized words deeply imbedded in the biblical and ecclesial tradition, such as abomination, deviant, disordered, and intrinsically evil. In the case of one student, the self-loathing had led to an attempted suicide, so common among gay youth. Another student faced the rejection of family and the need for a supportive gay community on campus. For both, healing came through the welcoming hospitality and acceptance of the Integrity community. These painful, yet transformative experiences informed and motivated us in our facilitation of a bi-monthly gathering open to all gay students, staff, faculty, and friends that attempted to affirm the human dignity and the infinite worth of all God's children. Because we ministered within the context of a Catholic university, it was no

small task to obtain approval for a gay group that would meet under the auspices of the Office of Mission & Ministry.

The publication of *Always Our Children* empowered us to break out of fear and to advocate for the creation of sanctuary and gay community on campus. This pastoral message affirms the dignity of the homosexual person created in God's image and invites parents to accept and love their children unconditionally. It also calls upon the Christian community to "offer its homosexual sisters and brothers understanding and pastoral care."² Most importantly, the document offers various pastoral recommendations to Church ministers.

- 1) Be available with "pastoral help, spiritual guidance, and prayer."
- 2) Welcome marginated "homosexuals into the faith community without stereotyping and condemning."
- 3) "Learn more about homosexuality and Church teaching so that the preaching, teaching, and counseling are more informed and effective."
- 4) "Use the words homosexual, gay, and lesbian in honest and accurate ways when speaking publicly."
- 5) "Maintain a list of agencies, community groups, and counselors" as referral resources.
- 6) "Help to establish support groups for parents and family members."
- 7) "Learn about HIV/AIDS so you will be more informed and compassionate in your ministries" and celebrate liturgies commemorating World AIDS Day.

²NCCB, *Always Our Children*, 9.

Clearly *Always our Children* provides the mandate and framework for the establishment of the Integrity community on campus.³

Integrity focuses on the gay experience in light of a gay liberation theology that breaks open the oppressive reality of the closet. Utilizing the tool of a gay biblical hermeneutics, we unmask and critique what Phyllis Tribble identifies (in her feminist critique) as the “texts of terror.” These texts stereotype, condemn, and oppress gays. Likewise we also retrieve liberating texts of compassion, hope, and solidarity from the Scriptures and the Christian tradition.⁴ This heals and empowers the Integrity community in a liberating praxis, which prophetically denounces the personal, institutional, and systemic evils of homophobia and heterosexism operative in society and in Church teaching.

My role in Integrity is co-minister, convener, theological resource person, and participant-observer. This role is intimately connected with how the Integrity community does its faith sharing and theology. The ministry facilitates and convenes a community of reflection and prayer that nourishes and sustains the Christian spiritual life. It is my conviction that without a Christian ecclesial spirituality, the emancipatory process described above is devoid of depth, meaning, and ethical integrity.

Integrity’s search for Christian spirituality and the pastoral imperatives articulated by *Always Our Children* inform this thesis-project or “Pastoral Resource Manual”(PRM). The manual has various objectives. The PRM gives voice to the pastoral reality of our gay

³Ibid., 11-12.

⁴Phyllis Tribble, “Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives,” *Overtures to Biblical Theology Series* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

students, faculty, and staff on campus. It also expresses the particular theological reflection and biblical hermeneutics employed by the community. Furthermore, it narrates Integrity's struggle with the magisterial teaching on homosexuality. Most critically, the PRM describes the gay spirituality that emerges from the group's prayer and theological conversation. Finally, the project concretely presents resources for the ongoing development and ministerial growth of the Integrity community. This includes a detailed listing of national and local support organizations, pastoral and liturgical resources, and an extensive reading list in the area of gay theology and spirituality. The outcome is a pastoral guide or handbook for Church ministers, as called for in *Always Our Children*.

I will now describe the content and pastoral concerns addressed by the different sections or chapters of the thesis-project. First in the "Pastoral Resource Manual," I provide the history, personal narratives, and pastoral reality of the Integrity community on campus as *locus theologicus* of God's revelation and grace. The pain caused by the members' experience of condemnation, stigmatization, and marginalization constitutes the data of theological discourse and conversation.

Second, I articulate a contextual gay theology of liberation that arises from and gives voice to the experience of our Integrity members. This contextual gay theology is a systematic theological reflection on the lived experience of the community and its members. It identifies the theologies and theological methods of the community. Those are the very theologies that have brought life, hope, and a restoration of dignity and wholeness.

Third, I describe the gay biblical hermeneutics used by Integrity in confronting the scriptural texts that classically have been utilized to condemn same sex acts: The narrative

of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19), the sin of “abomination” in the Hebrew Scriptures (Lev 18:22, 20:13), along with the “unnatural relations” of Paul (Rom 1:18-27), and the “list of vices” excluding sodomites from the kingdom of God in the Christian Testament (1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:9-10). These constitute the gay “texts of terror.”

Fourth, I retrieve some biblical images of hope that affirm same sex friendships or relationships. They are the narratives of the lovers in the Song of Songs, the refusal of Vashti (Esther 1:1-10), Jonathan and David (1 and 2 Samuel), Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17), Jesus as dangerous memory, the vision of Peter (Acts 10), and the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). These constitute the texts of hope.

Fifth, I narrate Integrity members’ conversation with the Church’s magisterial teaching on the question of homosexuality. This narrative is informed by the confrontation between the truth of being gay or lesbian and the Church’s teaching about the immorality of the homosexual act. The confrontation bears the imprint of struggle and challenge as Catholic gay men and women in Integrity attempt to affirm their human dignity and the dignity of their loving in light of a Church teaching that evaluates their condition as disordered and their actions as intrinsically evil.

Sixth, I examine the prayer texts or programs (i.e., rituals, scriptures, prayers, songs, educational sessions, etc.) used by the community for its reflection and demonstrate the essential role of ritual in a gay spirituality of liberation. These texts present a Christian spirituality of gay liberation as the bridge that empowers the gay community to critique the internalized homophobia and heterosexism within the Church. Yet this Christian spirituality also radically challenges the gay community to listen attentively to the Church’s legitimate critique of certain aspects of gay culture. In the

existing dialogue and tension between culture and Gospel, evangelization and inculturation, the gay culture like any other culture must be open to receive the light of the Gospel that penetrates like a double-edged sword. The Gospel values of love, truth, community, and justice have much to offer a gay culture that struggles with materialism, individualism, and hedonism. Therefore, this spirituality must encourage the kind of reciprocal dialogue and conversation that seeks reconciliation between gay Catholics and their Church.

This spirituality of paradoxes is informed by the gay experience of communion, solidarity, unconditional acceptance, friendship, and abiding sense of family found specifically within the gay community, yet it also arises from the experience of pain and “otherness.” Thus, as John Boswell proposes, it seeks to unveil and retrieve redemptive biblical narratives and lost histories that convey new images of God, new heroes and heroines, new paradigms and models of same sex love and commitment.⁵ Finally, it provides us with new liturgies and rituals that can inspire, heal, challenge, and give meaning to many gays and lesbians in their struggle for integration and acceptance in Church and society. The transformation or *metanoia* that emerges from Integrity’s common prayer and faith sharing is the culmination or renewed praxis in this model of praxis-theory-praxis. In other words, Integrity’s experience, its way of doing theology, and its biblical hermeneutics find synthesis in the particular way the community prays and

⁵John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

reflects. The fruit of this prayer and reflection has the potential to bring about an engagement in a gay emancipatory praxis.

In the Appendix, I provide information on pastoral resources for the use of Integrity and Mission & Ministry that can assist in the gay ministry with our students, faculty, and staff. This includes information about national and local organizations that minister to gays and lesbians, such as Dignity, New Ways Ministry, In Always Our Children Task Force, Parents and Families of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), Soulforce, Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), and Project YES. The Selected Bibliography provides a reading list that includes gay pastoral, liturgical, and spiritual resources which are critical for serving gay students.

Thus the PRM responds to the invitation of *Always Our Children* and places the thesis-project at the service of the Integrity community and Mission & Ministry. Hopefully, the desired result is a more organized, focused, and pastorally sensitive response to the gay and lesbian community on campus.

This thesis-project has affected my ministry in many ways. I am continuously challenged to lay aside my agenda and biases as I listen to the voices and real needs of our gay community with greater clarity and focus. The theological and spiritual reflection process within Integrity also contributes to a greater organization, direction, and planning of my ministry. Personally, I am engaged in a process of *metanoia* as a minister as I encounter the painful and hopefilled narratives of our community. Ultimately, I am the beneficiary of a kind of ministry in reverse since I receive more than I have given. I also experience theological and personal integration and authenticity as a minister. Furthermore, I am continuously forced to see and critique the biases of society and

Church in all their multi-layered manifestations. Thus, I am constantly led to deepen my pastoral sensitivities and sense of compassion regarding this issue.

The Ministerial Thesis-Project

The intention of this thesis-project is to articulate and locate Integrity's narrative of a gay liberation in the larger context of Church and society. In a concrete way, it demonstrates pastoral guidelines for implementing *Always Our Children*.

Various theological and ministerial questions and issues are raised because we are dealing with the liberation of theology through the gay context. What are the narratives of a gay spiritual experience? What would a gay theology look like? How can a heterosexist Scripture nurture the spiritual lives of gays? How can gays remain within a Church that is oftentimes perceived as a homophobic institution? What is a gay spirituality? Why the need for gay ritual and prayer?

Richard Cleaver's gay liberation theology, borrowing from Leonardo Boff, also describes this type of theology as "a systematic reflection on faith."⁶ It is precisely a gay liberation theology because it gives primacy to the voice and emancipatory struggle of gays and lesbians who, in the words of Gustavo Gutierrez, are engaged in "a critical reflection on praxis in the light of the word of God."⁷ The theology is liberating because it is attentive to those who constantly live in the reality that "nowhere has homosexual

⁶Leonardo Boff, *The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and Its Religious Expressions* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 10, quoted in Richard Cleaver, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 10.

⁷Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 6, quoted in Cleaver, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology*, 10.

activity been viewed with as much abhorrence as in the Judeo-Christian West.”⁸ Here Cleaver relies on the work of Juan Luis Segundo and finds that liberation also occurs as gays engage in a critical analysis, “ideology critique,” or “hermeneutic of suspicion”⁹ of their oppressive reality and branding as “a sinner by religion, judged a criminal by law, and diagnosed as sick [until 1973] by the medical profession.”¹⁰

As a Catholic ministering within these communities of faith, I live the tension that arises out of the critical questions posed by the gay community and Magisterium today: How can gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender persons love and remain within a Church that ultimately rejects and excludes them? Even more profound is the question posed by Gary David Comstock in *Gay Theology Without Apology*: “How can we ever survive or how can we live as full human beings without lesbians and gay men in the Church?”¹¹ If the Church is indeed the Body of Christ blessed with diversity of members, functions, and gifts, is she “not a dead, nonresurrected body without gays and lesbians?” Comstock argues that the experience of openly gay men and lesbian women “is vital and valuable for the Church to know, in its mission of transforming pain and suffering.”¹² This demands that we opt once again for the Exodus and Jesus event (i.e., Paschal Mystery) as the key for authentic liberation. Ultimately, if we were to ask what a “gay

⁸Anthony Kosnik, *Human Sexuality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 188.

⁹Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 8, quoted in Cleaver, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology*, 10-11.

¹⁰Robert Nugent and Jeannine Gramick, *Building Bridges. Gay and Lesbian Reality and the Catholic Church* (Mystic, CO: Twenty-Third Publications, 1995), 23.

¹¹Gary D. Comstock and Susan E. Henrik, eds., *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1997), 22.

¹²*Ibid.*, 19.

theology without apology” looks like in it’s most radical and “out” expression, we must turn to Comstock.

Yet, as a Catholic minister, I must also be willing to enter into a dialogical relationship with the Church that asks: How might we all be challenged by the proclamation of the Gospel of truth and justice and the Church’s interpretation of the deposit of faith that invites all people to walk in the ways of discipleship and live lives of moral integrity? I am often asked by members of the gay community: How is it possible for me to remain within the confines of a Church that has internalized homophobia and perpetuates a heterosexist model to the exclusion and continued stigmatization of gays and lesbians in society and Church? Given the tension that exists, it is critical that we maintain a prophetic critique that challenges and seeks greater clarity in the scriptural texts and Church teachings that condemn gays. By the same token we are also obliged to adopt a stance of attentive listening to what the Church proposes. Perhaps the metaphor used by Nugent and Grammick is most helpful here: “the Church teaching, teaching the Church.”¹³ Ultimately, the Church is my home. Even though some rooms in the house are closed, gays and lesbians must remain and continue to knock and ask until the doors are opened and justice is meted out without apology.

The primary theological method that will be employed in this thesis-project is a contextual and liberating one that is inspired by the model of ‘Praxis-Theory-Praxis’ proposed by Don Browning in *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and*

¹³Title of New Ways Ministry Conference, Pittsburgh, PA, March 7-9, 1997.

Strategic Proposals.¹⁴ This method must name the pain caused by the stigmatization, condemnation, and alienation inflicted by the Church and the larger society. It benefits, therefore, from Juan Luis Segundo's *The Liberation of Theology*, which formulates a hermeneutical circle, grounded in a hermeneutic of suspicion or ideology-critique.¹⁵ Many gay theologians employ this kind of critique or 'razor' to unmask the ideologies present in the biblical text and in the theological tradition. These ideologies continue to oppress and perpetuate the status quo, namely the entrenchment of homophobia and heterosexism in Church and society.

The "Pastoral Resource Manual" (PRM) applies the method of 'Praxis-Theory-Praxis' in response to and implementation of *Always Our Children*. The initial praxis is described in the way the PRM voices the narrative, history, and pastoral reality of the Integrity community on campus (Chapter 1). The theory is engaged in various ways. The PRM articulates a contextual gay theology of liberation that arises from the experience of our Integrity members (Chapter 2). It develops the gay biblical hermeneutics used by Integrity in confronting the texts that condemn same sex acts in scripture (Chapter 3). It retrieves the biblical images of hope that affirm and give life (Chapter 4). It describes how Integrity enters into conversation with the Church's magisterial teaching on the question of homosexuality (Chapter 5). The final praxis is described in the way the PRM examines the prayer texts and rituals developed by the community and the particular gay Christian spirituality that arises from them, focusing on the transformational, liberating

¹⁴Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996).

¹⁵Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1976).

spirituality and the renewed praxis that flows from common prayer and theological reflection (Chapter 6). The final praxis is also concretized in the way the PRM provides information on national and local organizations, pastoral and liturgical resources (Appendix), and literature that can serve as a resource for our gay students who are in search of assistance, as well as for the ministers who serve them (Selected Bibliography).

Conclusion

Succinctly put, the outcome of this gay theological reflection on the experience or praxis of Integrity is the “Pastoral Resource Manual.” The Integrity community and Mission & Ministry will hopefully benefit from it. Ultimately, what is critical is that this project will assist in having a better-organized ministry that responds to the real needs of the gay community at Barry. The project will also describe a particular model of ecclesial community, as well as a model for theological reflection and praxis that is liberational. The PRM will make concrete the kind of ongoing dialogue called for in *Always Our Children*: one that builds bridges and fosters “common ground” within the Catholic university and wider Church regarding this sensitive pastoral reality.

In the end the PRM will describe the transformation that occurs when Church ministers implement the suggestions found in *Always Our Children*: to be available and welcoming of gays and lesbians; to be informed in preaching, teaching, and counseling; to speak publicly using the words gay and lesbian in honest and accurate ways; to create support groups; and to provide resources, lists of agencies, groups, and counselors to assist the homosexual person.

Since our Integrity community gathers for prayer and reflection bimonthly, it is imperative that the leaders have access to models of prayer, ritual, and biblical reflection

that can assure its sustainability. These prayer texts must be capable of reconnecting and reconciling gays with their Christian tradition and spiritual heritage which calls them to act as agents of social and ecclesial transformation. It is important to clarify that the Eucharist is not celebrated at Integrity because this base community does not see itself as a substitute for the worshipping community gathered in the Sunday Liturgy. This will be dealt with further in Chapter 6, which is the synthesis of the PRM.

In the following chapter I will articulate the gay contextual theology that informed our Integrity community. The voices of Gary David Comstock in *Gay Theology Without Apology* and Richard Cleaver in *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* are given particular attention, as is Integrity's response to their contribution and our own theological reflection.

CHAPTER 2

A CONTEXTUAL GAY THEOLOGY: GIVING VOICE TO OUR EXPERIENCE

Introduction

It is my purpose in this chapter to carry out a critical reflection and evaluation of the contributions made by Gary David Comstock's *Gay Theology Without Apology* and Richard Cleaver's *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* in articulating a gay contextual and liberating theology, especially as it has informed our pastoral praxis and conversations within the Integrity community. I intend to systematically articulate Integrity's response, the fruit of our faith sharing, to each of the theological themes they develop. The objective is to spell out whether their gay theologies give voice to the lived experience of Integrity's participants. It is also my hope to further deepen and contextualize their contributions within the wider theological discourse.

A Theology of Radical Outness: *Gay Theology Without Apology*

Locating the Author. Comstock theologizes first and foremost from his experience as a gay man inserted within the Christian liberal reformed tradition. He is a fully "out" ordained minister of the United Church of Christ and university chaplain who holds a doctoral degree from Union Theological Seminary. Born in 1945 in a small New England town, he is the expression of the baby boomer generation. Formative experiences include the Vietnam War protests, the Stonewall riots and the early gay movement of the 70's, insertion in the gay communities of Seattle and San Francisco's Castro district, and the AIDS pandemic.

Locating the Theology and Method. Comstock articulates a liberating “gay theology without apology” that is inherently contextual because it rooted in his particular gay experience. The theology developed examines the Bible and Christianity not with the purpose of fitting in or finding a place in them, but of fitting them into and changing them according to the particular experiences of lesbian/bisexual/gay people. This theology primarily informed by the contribution of Latin American liberation theology, as well as feminist theology, in its content and method, gives primacy to the “epistemological advantage of the oppressed.”¹

Comstock argues that he “does not seek approval from Scripture or tradition,” but rather “seeks guidance” from them in order to “interpret, shape, and change without fear to critique those parts of Scripture and tradition that condemn gays.” He, as does the noted gay historian, John Boswell, also seeks to find in Scripture and in our past affirming words that have been obscured by traditional interpretations. Here the theological method is free to employ retrieval and revision for the sake of the obtaining the total liberation of gays and lesbians. The paradigm or model out of which he engages Jesus and scripture is that of *friend* rather than paternal authority to which we owe blind obedience and loyalty.²

This liberating model for a gay hermeneutics served Integrity facilitators and members well, especially those with a fundamentalist biblical background. In our own sharing it became increasingly important to address the feelings of condemnation, guilt, and personal sinfulness experienced by many participants as a result of their experience

¹Gary D. Comstock, *Gay Theology Without Apology* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1992), 4-5, 21.

²*Ibid.*, 4,11.

with the biblical text. As ministers our ability to offer a different vision, a new lens through which we could engage the scripture as a friend and not a judgmental authority figure, had the constructive effect of rescuing the scriptures from simply being dismissed or discarded altogether. This was possible because we gave the members simple foundational exegetical tools through our sharing of the word that allowed for a new discerning and interpretive method in light of our own reality.

“Exodus and Resurrection: Transforming Pain and Suffering.” It is precisely in a gay reading of Scriptures that Comstock engages the pivotal liberating events of the “Exodus and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus which overcome and transform pain, suffering and death.” This experience of paschal mystery in the lives of gays finds expression in the “coming out” process, which constitutes the *locus theologicus* for this gay theology. It is at this fundamental core where Comstock unveils a gay theology that is gift to the wider theological and ecclesial discourse and praxis. Gays fully “out” in the church contribute to the building of the Body of Christ in its celebration of diversity and catholicity.

The church or any community is a dead nonresurrected body without us . . . our experience is vital and valuable for the church to know its mission of transforming pain and suffering . . . without us the church is partial.³

We are essential to the ecclesial project of building God’s Kingdom or commonwealth of love, justice, and peace. Ultimately, the foundational question posed is: “How can we ever survive or how can we live as full human beings without lesbians and gay men in the church?”⁴

³Ibid., 11, 19.

⁴Ibid., 22.

Integrity members embrace Comstock's radical ecclesial understanding and hope-filled insight which places gays and lesbians at the very heart of the church. As one member put it, "without us the church can't do its thing; it can't be a church that says it is about ministering, healing, and reconciling all God's children." Our experience further corroborates the salvific significance that the "coming out" process and narrative has for gays. Often, without any planning, members share their powerful and painful "coming out" stories because this constitutes the very gut-wrenching stuff that paves their road to authenticity and truth in relation to themselves, God, and others. These "coming out" narratives were proverbially always about moving out of a place of hiding, darkness, guilt, and shame and stepping into a place of light, healing and self-acceptance. Ultimately, people often share that the core redemptive experience is rediscovering one's full humanity, a child of god, not a less-than-human freak of nature. If these liberating stories are excluded, the church cannot truly say it seeks to transform the pain and suffering of all its children.

Furthermore, Comstock's gay reading of the Exodus and Jesus events radically condemns, rejects, and nullifies the normativity of the gay texts of terror that sanction homoerotic acts in Scripture (i.e., Lev 18:22, 20:13; Gen 19; Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:9-10). This is possible, precisely because these saving events are inherently about love and liberation from all forms of oppression. The biases of the biblical texts, patriarchy, and heterosexism are unmasked and critiqued because ultimately they intend our destruction in this life and the next. Also criticized are the attempts of Boswell, Scroggs, McNeill, Helminiak, and others because they minimize the importance of the gay terror texts and "overlook the danger and hostility that lurks in the very passages with

which we have tried to become friends.” The text in Leviticus clearly underscores this reality.⁵

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination (Lev 18:22).

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them (Lev. 20:13, NRSV).

From Leviticus’ abomination to Paul’s equating same-sex acts with godlessness to the catalog of vices which exclude those who engage in homogenital acts from eternal salvation, the verdict is as clear, as it is dangerous. Comstock here proposes a radical response to the biblical texts of gay annihilation.

Those passages will be brought up and used against us again and again until Christians [and Jews] demand their removal from the biblical canon or, at the very least, formally discredit their authority to prescribe behavior.⁶

In his fourth chapter, “Lessons from Leviticus: Learning about the Misuse of Power,” Comstock uses social analysis to uncover the structures of dominance which give rise to and contextualize this text. Revealing the biases of the dominant class and the relationships between oppressed and oppressor lies at the heart of his theology and method.

Unveiling the structures of dominance as well as understanding gender and sex role biases in the ancient text enlightened Integrity members. In our conversation parallels were often found with the way the scriptures deal with issues such as slavery, war, capital punishment, and the role of women in the same prescriptive manner. People spoke of a changing sensitivity towards the inclusion of gays in society that ultimately would

⁵Ibid., 39.

⁶Ibid., 42-43.

increasingly alter the interpretation of these texts and minimize their condemnatory weight. If abolitionists and feminists had saved the scriptures from racism and sexism, surely a time was foreseeable where its heterosexism might be deconstructed as well.

“Acknowledging Biblical Bias: Constructing a Christian Sexual Ethic.” Of equal importance is a method that retrieves lost persons, silenced voices, and forgotten acts of liberation. This methodology is a critical tool for the construction of a new Christian sexual ethic that “finds it’s meaning in our interest in our bodies and our need for body pleasure; it values all parts of the body as sources of pleasure.” The biblical, patriarchal, heterosexist sexual ethic (also embraced by Augustine, Aquinas, and the Reformers) that gives primacy to the procreative act is abandoned in favor of one that celebrates the “giving and receiving of body pleasure.”⁷

Comstock discovers this new liberating sexual ethic in various biblical texts of hope that provide a new paradigm of erotic justice in relationships. This hope is found in particular in the lovers of the Song of Songs, the refusal of Vashti in the book of Esther, the friendship of Jonathan and David, and the Jesus story. These texts will be analyzed in further detail in chapter four of this thesis-project. The abandonment of neo-platonic or Augustinian sexual dualisms and scholastic understandings of natural law permits us to celebrate without guilt or shame the embodied spiritual power of the erotic.

In my opinion this project stands as one of the most profound liberating contributions of a gay theology or sexual ethic to the wider theological discourse. Integrity’s members often narrated how liberating it was for them to abandon sexual dualisms wrought with shame caused by feeling dirty and unclean, and coming to a place

⁷Ibid., 27, 33-34.

where they could celebrate their bodies and the very gift of their eroticism as constitutive of their very humanity, alive and passionate.

Leaving Jesus Behind: A Theology of Friendship and Autonomy. In chapter six, Comstock criticizes the church for the times that it has sided with the oppressor. He raises the ominous and critical question often posed by members of the gay community of how and why we stay in a church that ignores, excludes, and condemns gays. He realizes that “the church has simply gone astray from a basis, center, origin in a common carpenter who welcomed, included, and healed the broken, outcast and needy.”⁸ This broken ecclesial reality provides gays who remain with an opportunity to gift the church with the possibility of returning to that center in which she is most herself in the example of Jesus.

Paradoxically, Comstock has difficulty in appealing to Jesus. “The history of Christianity has shown that Jesus is up for grabs; whoever is most powerful determines the prevailing image of Jesus.” Relying heavily on Bultmann, Comstock criticizes the christological images of power and domination and demythologizes Jesus as lord, master, and king. The master-slave relationship rooted in patriarchy is annulled in favor of the *friend* who does not require our worship and adoration, but rather desires that we take responsibility for our choice to love one another in “a friendship of challenge, letting go, and affirming independence.”⁹

This model of friendship proposed for a gay approach to scripture and christology has radical implications for ecclesiology, especially the Roman Catholic patriarchal,

⁸Ibid., 92.

⁹Ibid., 93, 98.

hierarchical, and heterosexist experience of church often encountered by gays and lesbians. Reinhold Niebuhr's lament expresses the way Comstock feels about church.

The church has lost the chance to become the unifying element in our American society. It is not anticipating new facts. It is merely catching up slowly to the new social facts created by economic and other forces. . . . We are not creating. We are merely catching up with creation.¹⁰

Comstock's personal experience of involvement within the church serves as a particular model for attempting to answer the question of how gays can remain within. It is predicated on his having left it, on finding welcoming and nurturing gay community outside it, and then on returning as an empowered gay man, attempting to make a place for him and other gays within it. The support, rest, and renewal for this struggle are found outside the church, on the margins, in the gay community. "I wish the church were the place where I could rest, be whole, and work, but it is not."¹¹

The painful stories of so many of our youth and adults in Integrity spoke to these feelings of being an outsider in the church (as well as in their families, on campus, or at work) if they wanted to openly celebrate who they were as gay and lesbian Christians. It was precisely on the margins, outside of church, that most of our Integrity members felt comfortable being out. It was in their marginal gay groups of friends where they found full acceptance, some sense of normalcy, and ultimately strength to reenter the straight world of the university, society, and church. Our gatherings were also on the margins of church in many ways, but it provided a little door where they could enter and a space, a sanctuary, where they could be real and find some rest within a pastoral ecclesial setting.

¹⁰Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from a Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* (Chicago: Willet, Clark and Colby, 1929), 69, quoted in Comstock, 100.

¹¹Comstock, 101.

This somehow provided comfort and some solace. What ultimately did not give voice to the experience of Integrity members, most being gay Catholics, is how far Comstock demythologizes Jesus, again true to his liberal reformed tradition.

We remember him as a friend, a friend, who has departed, and who in his own terms said, I am dead, you are alive. Jesus gives us not a model to follow . . . but a nudge to get on without him – to carry on our own lives as our own persons interacting with other persons in our own Galilees, in our own mixture of problems, people, joys, relationships.¹²

While there is a clear call to personal responsibility in living an authentic gay and Christian life, one wonders if there is no apparent paschal mystery at work in our lives. Is Jesus merely a historical figure pronounced dead? One also speculates if there is then no soteriology or pneumatology, no inspiration or empowerment of the Spirit. The critical question that ultimately arises for me as for some members of Integrity is whether Comstock's *Jesus-Friend* has the power to save and redeem Christian gays or anyone else for that matter. Those gathered in Integrity had not lost their faith in Jesus as friend and savior who was alive and accompanying them on their life's journey, present in the joys, pains, and problems encountered in the everyday. A distinction was made between the person of Jesus and the church. Although their church could be unwelcoming, Jesus was not the church; Jesus could still be claimed as friend and savior.

Salvation: Embodying our Deepest Knowledge. In chapter seven this “nudge to leave Jesus behind” in favor of a personal autonomy and responsibility that takes love of neighbor seriously is precisely where Comstock begins to find “salvation as embodying his deepest knowledge” as a gay man. Tillich's insight of God as our “ultimate concern” informs his particular anthropology in which we are “most godlike when we share with

¹²Ibid., 102

others that which ultimately concerns us.” Meaning, theological reflection, and salvation occurs as a result of a gay personal narrative where God is encountered in mutuality, as well as in a gay redefinition of saving scripture and tradition which broaden the horizon of the classical texts, norms, and paradigms. Comstock is profoundly influenced by both Tillich and Bultmann’s notion that the Exodus and Christ events “occasion contemporary saving events.” Here the method of retrieval is clearly visible as it contributes to the formation of a gay history and narrative.¹³

Comstock identifies his scripture as a small body of literature where he finds himself accepted for who he is: E.M. Forrester’s *Maurice*, Herman Hesse’s *Siddharta*, Tony Morrison’s *Sula*, Audre Lorde’s *Sister Outsider*, and Beth Brant’s *Mohawk Trail*.

I skirt established Christian Scripture and tradition to gain autonomy, to locate myself within my own life, to escape an external authority and find an internal authority, to respond to my own need for the company of others. This is an act of independence, not of rebellion. . . . Actually, the Bible encourages me to enlarge my recognition and appreciation of special stories outside of it . . . it seems to be not so much a closed book as one that pushes at its own seams.¹⁴

E.M. Forster’s *Maurice* critiques the “infernal diagrams” or heterosexist scripts regarding marriage and procreation which envelop the lives of gays. The character of Maurice gives voice to the “camouflage, deception, and discretion” which is part of the gay experience. In the end he finds salvation through transformation and change by fully embracing himself and refusing to conform to Victorian societal norms and expectations.¹⁵ In Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, salvation comes in the way an “unexpected, ordinary person rescues another because he knew how to listen.” *Sula* paints

¹³Ibid., 105, 108.

¹⁴Ibid., 108.

¹⁵Ibid., 119.

the picture of a Black neighborhood where the people are called the “Bottom.” Here “aberrations were as much a part of nature as grace. . . . There was no creature so ungodly as to make them destroy it.” In *Sister Outsider*, Comstock feels invited to reveal himself “in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves,” to create “patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. . . .” *Mohawk Trail* relates the wisdom narrative of working-class people in the voice of a Native-American woman: “Now, work is work, and if you’re working and doin’ what you’re supposed to, you ain’t got time for that name calling and prejudice stuff. . . .” Comstock finds in these stories a transformative relational power

because having felt in them what it is like to be accepted, to belong, to be involved, I not only have a vision of how I want to live with others, I am not satisfied with anything short of it. As one who feels and understands myself as accepted, I can no longer beg, plead, or ask for permission from others. I see the world in a new way. I do not seek to coerce acknowledgement from others but to inform, interact, and contribute to others. These stories are not of course the world . . . they are a resource that builds expectations and shows me a new way to live in and change the world.¹⁶

The inspiration Comstock finds in his scripture leads him to the question of inherited tradition. “Instead of spending so much time rejecting and fighting with what seems expected of or forced on me, I seek to rest, to be soothed and reassured, to be challenged kindly. I need and look for solace and succor.” Gay people are challenged to discover a “new” tradition by intentionally retrieving silenced lives and narratives that can help them live more fully and abundantly. He finds particular inspiration in the lives, messages, and activities of Edward Carpenter, Walt Whitman, Gertrude Stein, Alice B.

¹⁶Ibid., 109-110

Toklas, Oscar Wilde, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and W. H. Auden. This method of retrieval is central to understanding the praxis of a gay liberation theology.

Oftentimes we have to uncover lives that have been buried or gone unnoticed; and at other times we have to dig deeply into the lives of well-known people for details that have been hidden, forgotten, or neglected.¹⁷

His interest does not lie in the literary criticism handed down and filtered through by the academy, but rather in the “letters, memoirs, and autobiographies” that reveal the person and the struggle that allows him to take courage and comfort in the shared journey.

I do not look for heroes, but simply find that household or neighborhood of ancestors with whom I laugh, scream, argue, cry, and feel at home, with those who dared to take themselves seriously enough to live against or in spite of social expectations. I fit into a past that continues through me into the present.¹⁸

Integrity’s conversations often revolved around the many other texts, other than the scriptures that brought life and not recrimination. Often the heroes and heroines that Comstock discovered were also inspirational favorites. Interestingly enough, this new generation seeking answers to questions about their gay sexuality in relationship to God and the church were now turning to Cleaver’s *Know My Name*, Comstock’s *Gay Theology Without Apology*, Boswell’s *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, Nugent and Grammick’s *Building Bridges*, McNeill’s *The Church and the Homosexual* and *Freedom Glorious Freedom*, Cherry’s *Equal Rites: Lesbian and Gay Worship, Ceremonies and Celebrations*, etc. Along with a host of other titles, Integrity now possessed a corpus of gay theological works that members could access in order to find answers, solace, and rest.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., 111.

Comstock also turns to his experiences, those “most private, hidden, and deepest,” since these embody his deepest knowing about himself. These “experiences and desires of my body” lead to intimate knowing; and they are what Audre Lorde calls “the erotic – the sensual – those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us.”¹⁹ This knowledge demands the deconstruction of the classical dualisms inherent in classical Christian theology (i.e., “body and mind, flesh and spirit, male and female”). Comstock is also informed by the work of Christian ethicist Beverly Harrison who unmasks the “tendency of the Christian theological tradition to neglect, ignore, or denigrate the body.” This dualistic attitude sacralizes “mental activity or consciousness as ‘higher’ than the rest of physical existence”:

We are conditioned . . . to view the body and bodily needs as “lower,” “animal” modalities of existence that have to be tamed or in some way overcome and transcended by a higher and loftier power that is “really rational and spiritual. This assumption of a tension between what is most deeply “spiritual” and our physical embodiment and physical needs runs so deep in Christian culture that accepting the priority of mind over body, as if mind is not a function of body experienced in a certain way, or the “transcendence” of spirit over nature, is often held to be the essence of religious conviction. “To believe” comes to mean believing such nonsense. To be religious then involves living and acting, as though a split between lower “nature” and consciousness were a part of fundamental reality.²⁰

Lorde further proposes that “we have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings, . . . to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge.” We have been taught “to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within western society.”²¹

¹⁹Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing, 1984), 56, quoted in Comstock, 112.

²⁰Beverly Harrison, *Making the Connections* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 135-136, quoted in Comstock, 112.

²¹Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 53, 57, 58, quoted in Comstock, 112.

Integrity members benefited tremendously in their own self-understanding from this prior work by feminist theologians and ethicists in redeeming the body and the erotic. They also clearly comprehended how it had paved the way for gay theologians to name and deconstruct the oppressive structures of a heterosexist ethics and theology. This was their very personal liberating praxis. There was an intentional pastoral agenda to create a new awareness. What was once cursed is now filled with the possibility of grace. This most certainly becomes the liberating gift that feminist and gay theologies bring to the banquet table of discourse and into the very existential journey and struggle of gays and lesbians. Lorde unveils the power of the erotic for us:

When we allow the power of the erotic 'projected from within us' to 'inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us,' we will not 'settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor merely safe.' We may rebel, refuse, resist, assert, take, give.²²

A profoundly salvific event for Comstock, as for most gay liberation theologians, is the Stonewall Riots of June 1969 in Greenwich Village. It is here that the contemporary gay rights movement exploded as "butch lesbians, Puerto Rican drag queens, and effeminate gay men – marginal people within their own marginalized population," initiated the contemporary redemptive and liberating moment which has so profoundly impacted gays and lesbians in this country and the world. "Whether we wanted it to or not, this event changed the lives of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered people. Stonewall was the irreversible deliverance from accepting silence, invisibility, and victimhood." This event had blown wide open the doors of the closet. It was now up to individuals to take the salvific step. Like fearful Israel in the desert, the temptation to return to the

²²Ibid, 113.

fleshpots and the safety of the closet of servitude is always around the corner, but Stonewall had provided the encouragement and opened the door to future possibilities for further emancipation.²³

In resurrecting these gay narratives, heroes and salvific events that have sustained the lives of gays, Comstock painfully acknowledges the instrumental role played by retrieval as a gay method for liberation:

. . . that past was not handed to or passed on to us. We have had to go looking for it, resurrect it, and pass it on. The project of reclaiming our ancestors would not have happened without the courage and confidence born in the post-Stonewall liberation movement.²⁴

Integrity's older faculty and staff who had been "out" for years were marked by the memory of Stonewall. For younger members it was a story they were discovering in their readings. For most, their experiences were of new Stonewalls that were taking place in their lives as they moved from anonymity, invisibility, and silence into active participation in Pride Marches (held usually in June to commemorate Stonewall), AIDS Walks, or Save Dade political rallies in support of human rights. These constituted their personal Stonewalls: the moments where they broke through the impenetrable barriers of fear, rejection, and social convention to step "out of the closet" in a public and even political way to claim their rights, to make themselves visible, to be heard; voiceless no more.

Credo: The Creative and Saving Spirit of Community. Comstock concludes his work by articulating a creative revisionist gay theology, which draws upon classical categories in theology. The trinity, sin, salvation, grace, the crucifixion, resurrection and

²³Comstock, 123-124.

²⁴Ibid., 126.

the sacraments of baptism and eucharist are engaged in a gay hermeneutic grounded in experience. This chapter is the logical culmination of a truly contextual and liberating *gay theology without apology* that unmask the structures and systems of domination and oppression operative in the lives of gays. His theology is clearly one that is meant to sustain and support gay lives inserted in a gay political movement.

His gay experience of relationships first allows Comstock to frame and reinterpret the person of God as “mutuality and reciprocity in our relationships, the compelling and transforming power that brings together, reconciles, and creates us.” This image of God is informed also by his gay reading of the narratives of Jonathan and David, the Song of Songs, and Jesus’ commandment of love where “God is the-loving-of-the-other-as-you-want-to-be-loved that creates a community in which the gifts and talents of all are welcome, developed, considered special.”²⁵

Sin is experienced as “the violation of mutuality and reciprocity, typically in the form of dominance and submission. . . . We recognize sin as the institutionalized denial of equal opportunity, participation, and representation in the social order.” Comstock does not fail to critique the sinfulness of the church’s requirement of chastity or celibacy for its gay members, lay and clergy.

The oft-repeated cop-out to “hate the sin, not the sinner,” to hate homosexuality not homosexuals, conveniently avoids the real sin, which is preventing people from becoming fully human, from living as fully sexual, affectional, active humans. And gays and lesbians need to be reminded that to submit, to do as we are told, not speak out, not to act up, not to live openly, not to become fully human is sinful, also.²⁶

²⁵Ibid., 127, 129.

²⁶Ibid., 130-131.

It is evident that this theology of sin is informed by the experience of the radical queer movement, with organizations such as *Act Up* and *Queer Nation*, which promote radical “outness.” These groups emerged out of the protests against civil and ecclesial institutions over the lack of response to the AIDS epidemic as it decimated the gay community in the 80's and early to middle part of the 90's. The urgency and desperation of these times led radical gay activists to espouse drastic measures and tactics which included *outing* prominent members of the community. Yet ultimately, Comstock does not succumb to this extreme radicalization. While upholding the urgency of a gay liberating praxis, he realizes that people's timing must be respected; “. . . we need to act, each of us in our own situation, in our own closet, in our own time, at our own pace.”²⁷

In this regard, our experience with Integrity demanded great pastoral sensitivity to the degree in which people were not only “out” but ready to be politically committed with the gay human rights movement. While some members could speak of their involvement in gay pride rallies, gay and/or gay friendly churches, and SAVE Dade, others were barely “out” to themselves. Thus Integrity fostered the respect for belief systems and the right to privacy and timing regarding the very personal and life-altering decision that “coming out” is.

Salvation and grace are also reinterpreted within the framework of a relational praxis, which renounces the exercise of “nonmutual power” and establishes inclusion, partnership, cooperation, sharing, and exchange where unjust relationships prevail. Ultimately, these are the highest ideals, aspirations and values that should guide all human relationships; but they find particular relevance in the gay person's search for

²⁷*Ibid.*, 133.

companionship. Salvation is after all “to choose yourself, not to be afraid of yourself, to live your individuality to the full – but for the good of others.”²⁸ Comstock seeks inspiration in the words of Dag Hammarskjöld,

Body and soul contain a thousand possibilities out of which you can build many I's. But in only one of them is there congruence of the elector and the elected. Only one – which you will never find until you have excluded all those superficial and fleeting possibilities of being and doing with which you toy, out of curiosity or wonder or greed, and which hinder you from casting anchor in the experience of the mystery of life, and the consciousness of the talent entrusted to you which is your I.²⁹

The Pauline notion of *charis*, or giftedness found in Romans is given expression here: “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them” (Rom 12:6, NRSV). Recognizing and celebrating who we are, as gifted and blessed people, in some ways privileged, should compel us to generously share from our abundance. In realizing our potential and in giving, “we save ourselves and others from indifference, apathy, and death.” But this requires that we recognize that we cannot save or be saved by others. Salvation is not a strategy or plan; it must allow all parties involved to be who they are. The fundamental importance of living authentic gay lives, in openness and truth, is critical to the redemptive process for oneself and others “since we cannot predict when or know how our lives lived openly may affect or save others.”³⁰

This very reality was experienced in Integrity as members who were “out” and more comfortable with themselves gently mentored others who found themselves confused, with low self-esteem, a poor self-image, and who saw themselves as flawed and sinful individuals. The very act of telling painful stories, of being heard and affirmed

²⁸Ibid., 131.

²⁹Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings* (New York: Ballantine, 1983), 12, 43, quoted in Comstock, 132.

³⁰Comstock, 133.

by the community, was often times a cathartic and healing experience that brought them from a place of shame and guilt to one of acceptance in the community as a loved and graced child of God. We took great care pastorally within the group to foster confidentiality, safe space, and thereby trust. There were many times where we would not meet outdoors on campus (e.g. on the deck) if only one person felt uncomfortable. This respect for the individual's private journey and "coming out" process was critical to the life of the community and perhaps offers a noncoercive, nonthreatening model for gay community. This is the model that Comstock aspires to when he speaks of relationships of nonmutual power where there is inclusivity, cooperation, partnership, and justice.

The person of Jesus is also most experienced as Savior in the multitude of life-giving reciprocal relationships, which he experiences throughout his life. Jesus' multiple encounters and friendships with the poor, women, the despised, the ill, as well as with powerful tax collectors, rulers, and military commanders, "directs us to take seriously the gifts of all people." Jesus is special not because he is different or set apart, but precisely because he sets himself among others in relationship. Likewise "we save and are saved by others when we live in the midst of those who take us seriously and are taken seriously by us." Comstock emphasizes the imperative that we take responsibility for our lives and actions. His Bultmannian theology is apparent when he states: "Our being saved is neither in acting like Jesus nor in adoring and accepting him; it is in accepting and living with each other as if our very lives depended on it." Consequentially, the crucifixion is the price Jesus pays for his inclusivity of others. Comstock sees this reality of the cross in the

“cruel and great opposition gays” face in tearing down the barriers which alienate and separate us as a people that refuse to be submissive.³¹

Integrity members could appreciate and embrace Comstock’s articulation of a fully contextual theology that places the responsible human person at the core of a profoundly relational ethics of inclusion. His work is the expression of theology being done from the gay experience and perspective. It therefore enriches the wider theological discourse because it brings a particular positive gay perspective to theology that was either at best not considered or at worst the object of scorn and condemnation. Integrity also found strength and hope in retelling the stories of a Jesus who befriends the outcast and the forgotten. These stories are at the heart of the Gospel’s power to save, as Comstock points out. Yet his radical demythologization did not give voice, at times, to their experience of Jesus, encountered as friend, and Christ, who freely redeems in an immanent and transcendent way. His theology of the cross further fell short of elaborating and articulating the potential richness of meaning that the cross can hold in the lives of gays and lesbians. Integrity’s reflection brought multiple and diverse experiences of the cross to the fore: the struggle for equality and inclusivity in society and church, the “coming out” process, rejection by family and friends, the personal loss of significant relationships, betrayal, illness, addictions, and the sting of AIDS.

Likewise his understanding of the resurrection stories fails to capture for me the depth and possibilities for transformation and paschal mystery present in the lives of gays and lesbians. He remains far too often exclusively at the level of political activism. “The resurrection stories remind us that even the most severe opposition does not have the

³¹Ibid., 135-136.

power to prevent the impact of our efforts on others.”³² There is often a need for urgent confrontation in the “coming out” process, which at times must be willing to be pushy, angry, hotheaded, feisty, refusing, and assertive so that we might be heard and included. Yet, for some in Integrity, Comstock’s theology did not have the capacity to move them beyond to that place where the paschal mystery transforms pain and suffering.

Comstock concludes by articulating an inclusive gay pneumatology and sacramentology. The Holy Spirit is experienced as “the community that includes and encourages each person to share his or her gifts” in the Pauline model of the Body of Christ where diversity and plurality are celebrated as gift. This Spirit of inclusive community redefines our understanding and praxis regarding sacraments of baptism and eucharist and breaks them free of the exclusive manner in which churches have administered them,

particularized along denominational lines, but their original and potential power and purpose to welcome, share, and nourish one another deserves to be reclaimed if we are to build inclusive communities in which people lead meaningful lives.³³

This is the vision and praxis which can fully sustain us. As we have been nourished and sustained by those who came before us, so too must we welcome, nourish, and sustain.

To keep these sacraments alive so that others will continue to be nourished is to feel the spirit moving us toward others and others toward us. Not to feel the spirit – not to be in and building community – is to exclude and be excluded, to separate and be separated, to deny others their humanity and to be denied one’s own, to kill others and be dead. To live forever is to nurture the impulse of community to be ever expanding and inclusive.³⁴

³² Ibid., 137.

³³ Ibid., 139.

³⁴ Ibid.

The richness of Integrity's model and experience precisely is found in its inclusive character that breaks down divisions of age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, hierarchy, and religion (as non-Christians participated). As an intergenerational community, fifty-year-olds could share their struggle, history, and wisdom with students barely eighteen. In return, older members are impacted and ministered to by a generation that is freer to accept themselves and to live more openly and authentically perhaps due to the prevailing openness in contemporary culture. Of more radical import is that this faith community of equals offers students, staff, and faculty a space within the university that defies and tears down an academic culture steeped in hierarchy. In the final analysis, there is a synthesis between the theology and praxis of Comstock and Integrity; the urgent need lies in "recognizing our new neighbors, to enlarge the dimensions of our neighborhood and love our new neighbors as we would love ourselves."³⁵

In the following section I continue with a critical reflection and evaluation of the contributions made by Richard Cleaver's *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* in articulating a gay contextual and liberating theology, especially as it has informed our pastoral praxis and conversations within the Integrity community. As with the previous work, I will systematically articulate Integrity's response, the fruit of our faith sharing, to each of the theological themes developed. Again the objective is to spell out whether Cleaver's gay theology gives voice to the lived experience of Integrity's participants.

***Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* by Richard Cleaver**

Locating the Author. True to his Catholic roots and requirements of a truly contextual theology, Cleaver begins his text with a series of "confessions" which assist us

³⁵Ibid., 140.

in locating his particular contribution as a theologian. First, he identifies himself as an educated white male, which automatically places him in a privileged position. Secondly, he is attempting to articulate a gay, white, male liberation theology and thus cannot speak for lesbians or gay men of color, even though lesbian and other feminist theologians inform him. Because his liberation theology is contextual, as such it is subversive, “dangerous to institutions, secular or ecclesiastical.” Third, his geographical location as a Midwesterner from a small town distances him from the gay urban metropolitan experience (e.g., New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles). Fourth, he defines his relationship to the Roman Catholic Church as being informed by the reality of knowing himself as a gay man prior to his identifying himself as a Christian. “I joined the church not in spite of my gayness but because of it.”³⁶

The fact that Cleaver holds on to his commitment within the Body of Christ (i.e., the church) is critical to understanding his particular theological perspective. Using the language of religious experience, Cleaver describes his being claimed by a loving presence, a *Shekinah*, which brought him into Christian community without having to “renounce his gayness in any way.” Finally, he admits that he uses “a more individual, personal voice than is just.” Given the contextual theology that Cleaver articulates, it is impossible to underestimate the validity of seeing his personal experience as the place for God’s revelation. Cleaver claims the words of lesbian liberation theologian Carter Heyward, as resonating all too clearly with his experience and need to speak out.

If theology is to be worth its doing, we do it at some personal risk, both boldly and with a humble awareness that our perceptions and images are limited by the boundaries of our own experiences in the world, which are always, to some

³⁶Richard Cleaver, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1995), vii-viii.

extent, parochial, irrational, and infused with a certain dogmatic sense that we are onto something important that seeks expression.³⁷

Through conversation and faith sharing in Integrity, interesting questions arose regarding people's unfolding of their own self-understanding and where the primacy of their commitment lay. Many were able to detect a shift over the years in direct relation to their "coming out" process, from being terrified Catholics in denial and hiding to seeing themselves as a people who desired to stretch the envelope and horizons of church and societal structures. Like Cleaver many young and older members felt that they could approach the Christian community in freedom and truth without rejecting or censoring who they were and how they loved.

Locating the Purpose and Method. Cleaver criticizes the dualistic expectations placed on gays by many Christian churches in regard to being gay and living out one's sexual identity. This false dichotomy places on gays and lesbians the burden of giving up their sexuality if they want to be accepted in community. He rephrases the fundamentalist Christian question, "What must I do to be saved?" which is viewed as inherently individualistic and privatized, with the Gospel question posed by the Rich Young Man, "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?" This question is primarily concerned with the social or common good. Cleaver argues that for Jesus the question of who is good is irrelevant, for only God is good (e.g., Mt 19; Mk 10; Lk 18).

In reflecting on the narrative of the Good Samaritan, Jesus further emphasizes this point by presenting a religious heretic, an outsider who is impure, as the model of righteous action. Cleaver suspects that the Samaritan is compassionate to this stranger

³⁷Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (Landham, Md.: University Press of America, 1982), 30, quoted in Cleaver, ix.

who has been victimized, because he perhaps knew all too well what it was like to be a victim of violence due to his otherness as a Samaritan traveling through the Jewish heartland (Lk 10: 29-37). Recognizing how heresy and sodomy have been linked throughout the ages, Cleaver finds strong parallels with the plight of contemporary gays and lesbians today. Jesus deviates from the standard stories regarding the love of neighbor and moves the religiously good to go to the heretic, other, and oppressed to seek the understanding and right teaching that comes from suffering oppression. In Jesus there is a synthesis between orthodoxy and orthopraxis as they embrace in the liberating action on behalf of the oppressed.³⁸

Cleaver finds hope for the Catholic Church, in the challenge of liberation theology, especially when it is faithful to the struggle for justice and for renewal from within (i.e., *ecclesia semper reformanda*). Thus his attitude toward the church is not filled with bitter antagonism. His option and stance is to remain within in order to achieve reform. Like Comstock, Cleaver criticizes those within the gay community who have engaged in a prolonged *apologia* that attempts to mainstream gays by downplaying any existing differences. This reductionistic approach fails to celebrate the gift of diversity that gays bring to the table of the Lord; it reduces us to mere “beggars at the gate.”³⁹

For Integrity’s Catholic members, Cleaver’s gay theology specifically addresses serious denominational concerns. His ethical considerations taken from biblical paradigms offer hope that outsiders who are considered immoral or sinful by church and society are precisely those that are held up in the Gospel as capable of doing the righteous

³⁸Cleaver, 4, 7.

³⁹Ibid., 9.

deed. Members also find it refreshing that he is free of antagonism or undue hatred for the church. His prophetic stance as an openly gay Catholic man within the church calls the church to a greater sense of inclusion.

Cleaver also rather severely criticizes the “scholarly” path taken by many gay and gay friendly authors (e.g., Boswell, Nissinen, Jung, and Smith, etc.) as anachronistic. He views it as focusing on past history and philology and therefore not developing a present theology of what it means to be gay today. His impatience with this issue is reflected in this statement:

The churches should be grappling with that question [i.e., What it means to be gay today?], as well as with the nature of the society that produced us, the functions of gender in that society, and the functions of repression and homophobia.⁴⁰

I take issue with Cleaver’s dichotomy between past and present. The contribution made by the scholarly historical works of people like Boswell and others pioneers are critical to the articulation of gay theology of liberation today. They not only have redeemed our place in history but have written our history. Does not theology ultimately arise out of historical context? Scholarship, history, and contemporary theological reflection and praxis are not mutually exclusive. Liberation can only be achieved if we are willing to entertain a symphony of voices and persons who approach this question from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Latin American liberation theology is central to the work of Cleaver, because the theological task in this system is open to all, not just the academically trained experts. He relies on the definition of Gustavo Gutierrez that liberation theology is “a critical reflection on praxis in the light of the word of God” and on Juan Luis Segundo’s

⁴⁰Ibid., 9.

hermeneutical circle in four stages.⁴¹ The hermeneutical circle as methodology allows Cleaver to insert his own gay experience of liberation, which he develops in the chapters of the book. The first stage of the circle is the experience of pain and suffering that is born out of oppression. The words of Dorothee Soelle speak of this reality: "Theology originates in pain . . . Its locus is suffering or the disregard for life we experience all the time."⁴² This reality paves the way for the second stage of suspicion, which arises in the form of fundamental questions regarding what we have been taught, since it becomes evident that it cannot help to make sense of or transform our pain and suffering. The discomfort moves us into the third stage, "searching the scriptures in a new way," suspicious and prayerful, looking for the overlooked, forgotten, or silenced word or person. Finally this word propels us to interpret our reality with new liberating insight and praxis. This challenges us to engage in a praxis that must be open to new realities that will arise, thus beginning the circle all over again.⁴³

Cleaver's gay appropriation of the hermeneutical circle is particularly relevant to the pastoral ministry of Integrity. As ministers and facilitators within the group we were able to share a practical theological tool with the community that allowed members to develop critical skills for interpreting their reality in light of the scriptures, church teaching, and contemporary social attitudes regarding homosexuality. This method fully validated the painful narratives of members and precisely brought them into the very heart of theological discourse. Cleaver's insightful way of retrieving the lost, silenced, and

⁴¹Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), 6; and Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976), 8, quoted in Cleaver, 10.

⁴²Dorothee Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 90, quoted in Cleaver, 11.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 10-11.

forgotten word or forgotten persons was critically important to the faith-sharing experience of Integrity which was meant to uphold the worth and dignity of all participants.

Cleaver further lays out two tasks that he wishes to accomplish. First, to develop the kinds of tools that will allow gays to work out their own contextual gay theology. He believes this project must be inclusive even of non-Christians, since it has the potential of providing the Christian community with an experience of mission in reverse. For the Christian, it means acknowledging a hermeneutical principal that God is present and operative wherever liberation from oppression is taking place. The second task has to do with informing the debate occurring in the churches by carrying out a gay reading of scripture and a retrieval of gay narratives that can move us beyond the dualistic sexual ethics that continues to oppress gays and straights today. The relational paradigm found in the Song of Songs and the love narratives found in the writings of mystics (such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Catherine of Siena, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Juana Inez de la Cruz, etc.), also challenge us today.

Like the mystics we have refused to sever our physical experience, including our erotic experience, from our interior lives. This body wisdom is one of the anchors of our lives, a pearl for which we have paid dearly in persecution. It is one of the gifts we have to offer to the people of God.⁴⁴

Integrity members were empowered by this theology and praxis of “liberating love” and viewed it as significant contribution to the wider theological discourse. The experience in Integrity attests to the growth that can occur in gay faith communities when they inclusively open themselves to those who seek refuge. This reality stretched the

⁴⁴Ibid., 15.

horizon of Integrity as lives were enriched and brought together across denominational and inter-faith boundaries. The gay experience shared in faith community was the glue, or common thread that fostered a particular reading and retrieval of scripture and the tradition that was able to transcend dualisms and find affirming, healing integration of the physical, even the erotic as appropriate content for theology and spirituality. In this regard, it was particularly interesting to see the fascination in members, both young and old, when they were introduced for the first time to the erotic language of the Song of Songs or of the mystic's experience of divine espousal. It is all too evident how we have buried the erotic within the tradition perhaps because of its very subversive nature, something the institution cannot control.

God Makes a New People. In reflecting on the modern experience of the gay community, Cleaver identifies the stigma of pathologization as rooted in the "social and cultural relations of modern industrial capitalism." The application of Marxist social analysis to the gay question is a thread that is woven throughout Cleaver's work. Regarding the essentialist-constructionist debate, Cleaver locates himself within the constructionist view to the extent that it takes seriously the reality of social change, since that lies at the heart of liberation theology. He seeks to move the conversation beyond past dichotomies, where both sides shift the attention, to the more pressing issue, "the living experience of lesbians and gay men in the society right now." He finds the debate within the churches fruitless because it has not transcended the underlying stigma that gays face as sodomites. The church's *modus operandi* of denial and silence will accept the person, at best, if they do not practice their homosexuality. If they do, it must be in discreet silence so as to avoid scandal (i.e., "don't ask, don't tell"). He also considers it

“useless to speculate” whether there is a historical homoerotic motif in the biblical relationships between Jonathan and David, Ruth and Naomi, or Jesus and John. What is critical is the retrieval of stories that show people breaking the yoke of oppression caused by the divisions imposed by race, class, or gender.⁴⁵

While I concur with Cleaver’s sense of urgency regarding the uselessness in speculating about the sex lives and fantasies of biblical characters and whether they engaged in homogenital acts or had “friendships” with homoerotic attractions, it is critical that paradigms of same-sex friendships and love be retrieved. These can serve all people well (not just gays and lesbians) in discovering new relational models of love based not on oppression and domination but on an ethic of friendship, mutuality, freedom, and partnership. In *Integrity*, many discovered in these same-sex friendships non-heterosexist models that they could identify with. Also, those who had been living in exile from the Bible because of its condemning language found a hermeneutic that led to a *rapprochement* and reconciliation with the Word. Thus experience showed that this endeavor contained the seeds of liberation as well.

Of particular relevance to the modern gay movement born at Stonewall is the critique of oppressive systems of gender steeped in patriarchy which have utilized homophobia and heterosexism as tools for its own perpetuation. Here homophobia is defined as “the personal loathing of everything associated with queerness” and heterosexism as “the legal, social, and economic system that codifies homophobia.” According to Cleaver, this reality of fear and exclusion is present because we “model alternative ways of relating to the nuclear family.” This can only threaten the very core of

⁴⁵Ibid., 21, 26-27.

our post-modern capitalist society. He proposes the “coming out” process as another critical piece for thoughtful reflection since it can act as a lens through which can be seen the great diversity present in the gay community.

Some research suggests that gay men who are described as masculine are more, not less disliked by nongays than those who are described as effeminate . . . gay men who conform to the stereotype promoted by patriarchy are less threatening than those who do not.⁴⁶

In Integrity’s conversations, Cleaver’s insight was fully embraced, since it reveals the pervasive gender identity and sex role bias that underlies this complex issue. As more “straight-acting” gay men and “lipstick” lesbians “come out” of the closet as a response to the popular culture’s increasing tolerance and even acceptance, classical stereotypes are deconstructed with greater ease. While this remains threatening and even subversive, Cleaver need not generalize or minimize the vulnerable position that butch women and effeminate men still find themselves in.

The painful narrative of many in the group who found themselves in this cohort attested to the fact that they regarded themselves as recognizable targets for discrimination, derisive humor, and even hate crimes. This fear and preoccupation was palpable not only outside of the university, but within the confines of campus, classroom, and residence halls as well. For many this was a cross that had been carried since childhood. This was most evident in a case of a male student whose account was broken into in the university’s computer lab. He was subjected to constant hate mail. The word “faggot” repeatedly popped up and multiplied itself on his screen whenever he entered his mailbox. The students responsible were eventually identified and disciplinary hearings

⁴⁶Ibid., 28.

were held, but no punitive or restorative action was taken. While the messages stopped, the fear of being singled out did not. Other members also reflected on the acute homophobia that they were subjected to because they were identifiably gay within an ethnic and/or first-generation immigrant community.

For Cleaver, the daily struggle against the evils of homophobia and heterosexism is what renders Stonewall as the classical liberation story. Analogous to the Exodus experience, it initiates the modern “coming out” process, in turn unraveling the evils of homophobia and heterosexism in our society. Like Moses we deny and hide our identity or desire at times to retreat into the safety of the closet, longing to return to the “fleshpots of Egypt.” Cleaver identifies our preference for the comforts of consumer society as standing in the way of our building a consciousness as an “oppressed class.” Thus the false perception entertained by many that being gay is a lifestyle and therefore chosen. “White gay men have been coopted into believing that they are free if they can afford to live a certain lifestyle.”⁴⁷

In the struggle for gay liberation, it is critical for Cleaver that we see ourselves as members of an oppressed class who must forge alliances with other oppressed groups. We cannot allow the dominant system to continue to divide us along lines of class, race, and gender if authentic liberation is what we seek, that is, becoming subjects of our own destiny. Cleaver here identifies and criticizes the false security of finding gay liberation in “affording a certain lifestyle” or in living in a gay ghetto or “liberated” zone.” The experience of Jews during the Nazi regime unmasks the real insecurity behind this feeling of being free without the consciousness of being a class in struggle. We are no longer

⁴⁷Ibid., 35

individual sinners, but a gathered people, *ekklesia*, belonging to God and one another as a gay community. There is a power to be claimed and exercised.⁴⁸

Naming and Power. The Exodus out of Egypt is parallel to the “coming out” process that shakes off the bonds of secrecy and silence and moves us into freedom. The annihilating, dehumanizing effects of a prolonged state of invisibility cannot be underestimated, especially when the wider society and church operate out of a “heterosexual assumption” that assumes that all people are or should be straight. Cleaver criticizes the church as a stumbling block for gays and lesbians because it “subordinates the commandment of love to the demands of a heterosexist culture.” He views it as a “bourgeois religion” in allegiance with a “bourgeois culture.” This bourgeois perversion of Christian love demands that we look to the Gospel experience of love. Cleaver relies on the insight of Monika Hellwig:

The Gospels introduce Jesus as one who entered into immediate, shockingly unconventional relationships with people, not evading the human encounter by the choreography of the socio-cultural role definitions.⁴⁹

Thus a gay reading of the Gospel teaches us that it is not enough to “come out” by naming our oppression and ourselves. We must be willing to “build solidarity with other oppressed groups” by first “developing a sense of class consciousness,” if we are to have a political, collective, transformative impact on society and church.⁵⁰

Cleaver’s insight regarding the false security found in the gay ghetto or in attaining an affluent lifestyle challenged the entire Integrity community to examine the values that often guide us in a consumer materialistic society. It was the group’s

⁴⁸Ibid., 36-37.

⁴⁹Ibid., 46, 48-49, 53.

⁵⁰Ibid., 61.

consensus that as much as we wanted to aspire to lives of normalcy in nice houses with white picket fences where we can remain unnoticed, there will always be a time when we will be questioned or challenged for who we are. His call to forge alliances with other oppressed people was often viewed as a “bitter pill” to swallow. Yet in the final analysis, it remains the only way of achieving liberation.

In the Image of God. Cleaver places this call to social action or liberating praxis within the theological conversation or context of our image of God. We are called to worship the God who is relational love, community, Trinity and not a privatized, bourgeois, heterosexist idol. A pivotal element in this project lies in criticizing the patriarchal, heterosexist understanding of the accounts of creation. The salvation narratives of Moses, Esther, and Rahab are viewed as reflecting the social dimension of God’s image.

Cleaver’s gay reading of Esther redeems her from Comstock’s critique that she buys into the stereotypical feminine role vis a vis Vashti, who refuses, and thus illustrates the contextual and diverse nature of this method. Cleaver uses the Jesus movement as a paradigm for liberation, unlike Comstock who “leaves Jesus behind.” What Cleaver does leave behind is the idolatrous, bourgeois, heterosexist understanding of family in favor of the “new and holy family” created by Jesus; “the family of the hearers and doers of the Word.” This family, rooted and motivated by the power of love, moves beyond the privatized and is authentically inclusive.⁵¹

The power of loving where it is forbidden – the power of extending love across boundaries, the power of offering love where we are not supposed to – is a countersign to the narrow society that forbids such loving. Drawing ever-tighter boundaries around the universe of acceptable recipients of our love is the hallmark

⁵¹Ibid., 65, 67-79.

of the godless society built in the two hundred years since the Industrial Revolution reordered society toward production.⁵²

What God has Made Clean. Cleaver notes that there was a missing element in Jesus' attempts at forming this community of love. This is most visible in the disciples' act of abandonment of Jesus in "the hour" of his passion. He identifies the resurrection as the saving moment which creates belonging, holy community, or class consciousness. As the exodus and resurrection experience created a people and a church respectively, "the struggle to create a liberation force out of the tag ends of sexual dissidence is forming a class of lesbian and gay people." Cleaver utilizes the Levitical prohibitions regarding what is clean and unclean as a way of formulating an "obscene" liberating parallel with the gay movement. "Making a people out of a bunch of slaves and social misfits undoubtedly seemed as ungodly to the Pharisees." In Cleaver's longing for a class-consciousness to be developed among gays and lesbians, one can detect his reliance on Marxist analysis and class struggle.

. . . we need to identify more clearly the basis of our oppression. So far we have tended to do this by looking too much at the superstructure and too little at the base, that is, by identifying homophobia as a cultural relic – the inheritance of Christian antigay sentiment, perhaps. It is more useful to examine what function our oppression serves in a capitalist system. After all . . . the fairly recent category of 'homosexual' was adopted as part of constructing capitalist social relations. We must get past thinking of ourselves as victims of irrational prejudice and start thinking of ourselves as exploited.⁵³

While Cleaver has many critical insights into the gay struggle for liberation, his reliance on Marxist analyses and his utilization of the principle of class struggle alienate him from the experience of most gays and lesbians in this country. I am quite comfortable

⁵²Ibid., 81.

⁵³Ibid., 85, 92.

with the use of Marxist analysis in uncovering the root causes of systemic oppression, yet Cleaver becomes reductionistic, excluding other possibilities for considering and naming the sources of our oppression. This seemed to be the consensus in Integrity as well.

Members were open to Gospel ethical exigencies, values, and paradigms that undermine and challenge consumerism, moral relativism, utilitarianism, and hedonism in contemporary culture. Boundaries of age, sex, color, class, and religion were crossed in order to forge a community of support and faith. Many young and old were involved in the gay human rights movement, yet the Marxist notion of class struggle did not give voice to their experience.

Cleaver further criticizes the exploitative and divisive role played by a bourgeois religion based on respectability, purity, cleanliness and productivity. Dorothee Soelle reminds him that a socially disconnected bourgeois ethic and religion also justified the running of the Auschwitz gas chambers. Relying on the argument of Metz, Cleaver identifies the church's turn to rigidity in discipline and doctrinal rigorism as the way in which it attempts to influence and remain in control. Authentic religion and faith reject a utilitarian ethic that places "performance as the measure of human value."

Jesus in his unconventional gospel relationships teaches us what Soelle calls the "amoral quality of charity" which discards the need for respectability (e.g., the workers in the vineyard, Mt 20:1; the woman who anoints Jesus feet, Lk 7:36; and the story of Zacchaeus, Lk 19). Cleaver, Soelle, and Metz all concur that the church relinquishes its prophetic role when it becomes the accomplice of the state in repressing the gay and lesbian struggle for liberation. The church is most itself when, in the spirit of Ruth and

Jesus, it welcomes the outsider.⁵⁴ The work of the Mexican-American theologian, Virgilio Elizondo, on marginality and *mestizaje*, is of particular relevance to Cleaver's work: "In his existence, Jesus was the antithesis of all human quests for purity."⁵⁵

This "dangerous memory" of Jesus is precisely what forced the early church to open itself to foreigners who were branded as polluted and unclean because they did not adhere to the strict Judaic dietary prescriptions of *kashrut*. Cleaver's gay reading of Peter's vision (Acts 10) and the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26) are interpreted as paradigmatic texts that call for the inclusivity of gays and lesbians in the church. These texts will be dealt with in Chapter Four as true texts of hope for the community. Suffice it to say that God's new people are formed in solidarity from the suffering and pain of the outcast and the unclean. Solidarity is the embodiment of the resurrection.⁵⁶

In the Breaking of Bread. It is in solidarity where liberation from the divisions of gender, race, religion, and class is found. Cleaver concludes his work by formulating a theology of solidarity that integrates the needs of our bodies and celebrates this reality at the "Holy Table" where Christ is recognized in the breaking of bread. The role of liturgy and popular religiosity are retrieved and reappropriated as the "need for each other and our bodies." This will be addressed further in Chapter Six, which deals with the spirituality of the Integrity community, expressed in our prayer texts.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Ibid., 95-99.

⁵⁵Virgil Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo* (Bloomington, Ind.: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988), 77, quoted in Cleaver, 103.

⁵⁶Ibid., 104-112.

⁵⁷Ibid., 116.

Conclusion

This attempt to arrive at a synthesis and integration of the texts of Comstock and Cleaver expresses the struggle of being in conversation with diverse gay theological voices. These gay discourses inform and locate my own attempts to articulate a gay liberation theology that arises from my lived experience and pastoral praxis with Integrity and others gay faith communities. Each of these authors brings to gay theology, and to the wider theological discourse, their own specific insight and approaches. Unlike Cleaver, whose impatience and frustration leads him to dismiss the scholarly historical or linguistic approach to gay studies, I favor an interdisciplinary, inclusive method which welcomes the contribution of pluralistic gay and gay friendly voices, experiences, methodologies, and theologies. One approach or one voice cannot attempt to unravel or fully respond to such a sensitive and complex issue.

Comstock attempts to articulate a “gay theology without apology” that is rooted in a gay reading of the texts of terror and texts of hope and flows from a position of radical “outness” in the church and society. The unmasking of the oppressive relationships in scripture that are based on power and domination is a critical tool for the gay struggle for liberation. The contribution of Cleaver to gay theology is also critical. His perspective on class-consciousness and struggle within the church and society is fundamental. The systematic use of Marxist social analysis to criticize the role that bourgeois culture and religion have played in sustaining a capitalist society at the expense of the oppression of the gay community is unique. He further questions what he perceives as his own community’s superficial understanding of liberation as simply “coming out,” or having economic stability, and finding safety in a metropolitan gay ghetto. The challenge is far

greater, to reclaim your spiritual identity and place in the church by forging an identity as an oppressed people who in solidarity with others who are oppressed and engage in a liberating praxis that builds inclusive community for all. Ultimately, Integrity's members were the beneficiaries of their painstaking contextual theologies that became the theological resources for a community in search of answers to fundamental existential questions and concerns.

In the following chapter, I will further elucidate the community's concern with the biblical texts of terror that have been used to condemn gays and lesbians over the centuries. The critique of these texts within a contextual liberating reinterpretation is a pivotal piece for those who take seriously their being gay and Christian.

CHAPTER 3
CONTEXTUALIZING AND LIBERATING THE
BIBLICAL TEXTS OF TERROR: A GENDER STUDIES PERSPECTIVE OF
HOMOEROTICISM IN THE BIBLICAL WORLD

Introduction

Integrity members were challenged by Comstock and Cleaver to return to the Bible in order to engage it using new interpretive lenses that are liberated from any internalized patriarchy, homophobia, and heterosexism. This hermeneutical task was critical for those gathered in Integrity who struggled to hold on to their rich Catholic spiritual, sacramental, biblical, and theological heritage. Various members claimed this legacy as theirs; this was their birthright and patrimony, which no one could arbitrarily take away.

Integrity also recognized how the scriptures have been utilized by the church's magisterium and societal institutions of domination for centuries as a weapon of oppression against gays and lesbians. Therefore, as an intentional gay community of faith, it must undertake the fundamental task of carrying on a liberating contextual dialogue and critique with the Judeo-Christian scriptures. Only then can gays and lesbians begin to reappropriate and reclaim them as being contextually salvific. Indeed, all people of faith must necessarily liberate the scripture from its human limitations and biases. These textual biases are a product of their author, time, place, history, culture, and language. Its message must be understood today if they are to efficaciously accomplish

their work of redemption and liberation in the here and now. Employing a liberating biblical hermeneutic creates renewed theologies that are contextual and therefore emancipatory and humanizing. A renewed theology can further inform new ecclesiologies and ecclesial praxis that seek to embody the value of inclusivity in the world. By being fully inclusive of gays and lesbians, without stigma and condemnation, the church becomes more catholic and authentic; that is, true to the call from the Lord to embrace all people and consequential with how she defines her very self as catholic. Only then can the Church truly become a place of welcome, encounter, embrace, and not rejection. This is precisely how Integrity members viewed our attempts to convene the gay community on campus as part of the Office of Mission and Ministry.

Gays and lesbians in Integrity benefited from the example of other marginalized and oppressed people who have been obliged by their situation to engage the sacred text in a liberating hermeneutic. The prophetic literature of the Hebrew Scriptures assisted us in this endeavor. The prophets revealed for us a God of *pathos* who embraces the cause of the poor, sick, orphan, and the stranger (Heb., *anawim*). The ethics of the prophetic literature places no moral blame or responsibility on the *anawim*. Their condition is not viewed as a consequence of personal sin, the sin of their fathers, or lack of faith. The *anawim* are rather viewed as being the victims of human injustice and therefore are the subjects of God's preferential option. God the Compassionate knows and feels their deprivation. In the kingdom they are privileged and highly favored sons and daughters. Jesus, as an heir to this tradition, views the human person as the greatest moral value over and above the law. Paul further liberates the people of the New Covenant from the legalistic slavery and bondage to that same Mosaic Law.

In more recent times, African-Americans, descendants of slaves have confronted and transcended the racism in the biblical text. These very human and historical limitations in the text were utilized by the institutions of power, societal and ecclesial, to perpetuate the insidious evil of systemic racism in this country. Women utilizing a feminist critique continue to expose the evils of patriarchy and androcentrism present in the sacred text and how these impact the way women are viewed and treated today. The human prejudice of the biblical authors is unmasked for what it is. It was critical for Integrity's theological reflection process to understand that the cultural biases of the text are not inspired word, nor are they divine will or the established natural order of things. God must be liberated from the blame for these prejudicial biases. We can no longer use God, the god "up there," as a crutch and justification for our perpetuation of the evils of racism, sexism or homophobia.

Gays and lesbians have endured much suffering throughout the ages as a result of physical, psychological, social and economic violence. Yet perhaps even more insidious is the bashing perpetrated by the institutional church through its homophobic, heterosexist interpretation of scripture. The often manipulated passages that can be used are few and brief, but they have provided extensive ammunition to fuel the fires of gay hatred, derision, and demonization over the centuries. Paradoxically, the word of life and blessing can also strategically be used as an instrument of death and curse. The consequence has often been destructive of human dignity, self-esteem, and worth as a result of the infliction of guilt, shame, and the very fear of damnation. This reality was sadly too often corroborated by Integrity's conversations. This has also been my own pastoral experience as I have read and engaged these passages anew in order to better

accompany the members of Integrity and minister within the larger gay community as well.

In question are two texts in the Hebrew Scriptures, and three in the Christian Testament. These gay texts of terror include the narrative of Sodom (Gen 19) and the Levitical sin of “abomination” (Lev 18:22, 20:13) found in the *Torah*. Paul’s Epistles contains the “unnatural relations” (Rom 1:18-27) and the “list of vices” excluding sodomites from the kingdom of God in the Christian Testament (1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:9-10).¹

Many gay or “gay friendly” biblical exegetes and historians have engaged these texts in a new liberating hermeneutic over the last three decades. This endeavor contributes significantly to the erosion of classical fundamentalist readings especially among theologians, teachers, preachers, and ministers in the churches. My understanding and interpretation of these texts particularly informs my ministerial praxis with Integrity. I rely on various gay readings that, for me, liberate the texts from its sting of condemnation. These are Gary Comstock’s *Gay Theology Without Apology*, Richard Cleaver’s *Know My Name*, Daniel Helminiak’s *What the Bible Says About Homosexuality*, John McNeill’s *The Church and the Homosexual*, and Robin Scroggs’ *Homosexuality in the New Testament*, among others. The historical work of John Boswell’s *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* and Peter Brown’s *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* have also influenced my work. Above all I am most informed by Martii Nissinen’s “gay friendly,” gender studies perspective in *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*. I find his historical

¹Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1998), 4.

work which uses the perspective of gender to be scholarly and his exposition clear, complete, balanced, nuanced, and contextualized understanding of the gay texts of condemnation.

In this chapter I will attempt to contrast and integrate the contribution of these authors and most especially Nissinen's synthesis in order to assist Integrity at arriving at a more contextual understanding of the gay texts of terror. This hopefully can assist Integrity members by providing a hermeneutical tool that allows them to befriend a scripture that is free from the sting of condemnation.

Homoeroticism Viewed Through the Lens of Gender

Locating the Author. Martti Nissinen benefits the ministry in Integrity by engaging the question of homoeroticism in the biblical world from a gender studies perspective. He identifies himself as a Finnish Lutheran scholar specializing in Old Testament studies and the ancient classical cultures of the Near East and the Mediterranean that produced the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Nissinen writes in response to the growing social and ecclesial debate in Finland regarding homosexuality from his perspective as a married man and father of two children. He recognizes the influence of his liberal Finn culture regarding sexual attitudes, as well as the impact of the Lutheran Church in shaping Finnish moral norms and values that are rooted in a certain biblical interpretation. This ongoing hermeneutical project is carried out not only by the church, but by society as well. His wife's counseling work with prostitutes informs his use of a gender studies methodology in working with this complex issue. He also

recognizes the contribution of his gay and lesbian friends in coming to a fuller understanding of this question.²

My experience tells me that Nissinen's work is a fundamentally "gay friendly" contribution to the contextualization of scriptures that furthers the liberation of gays and lesbians from "oppressed consciousness and sinful self-centeredness."³ Therefore it has the capacity to bring about a much-needed reconciliation and reengagement with the wider society and the church.

Locating Nissinen's Purpose, Terminology and Method. In dealing with the biblical texts of condemnation, it was helpful for Integrity to become aware of Nissinen's fundamental recognition. From the onset of his work, Nissinen recognized that his task, a "study of the Bible and homosexuality, was virtually impossible to work out," given the fact that the categories of sexuality and homosexuality are modern constructs. "I soon had to face the problem that sources that go back two or three millennia do not fit modern categories." The term homosexuality, as a modern construct, was unknown by the ancient cultures, Jewish, Assyrian, Greek, or Roman that form the backdrop for Biblical literature. Nissinen's fundamental argument is that gender was the category and reality that the classical world knew, experienced, and operated from.

What they knew was *gender* – desires and tensions associated with gender difference, justified and nonjustified roles, practices and self-presentations within a gendered society, all of which involved love and hate, pain and pleasure. Same-sex interaction was but one aspect of a larger system of interpretation of gender.⁴

²Ibid., vii, 2.

³James B. Nickoloff, *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings* (New York: Orbis Book, 1996), 184.

⁴Nissinen, v, vi.

Nissinen also sharpens Integrity member's critical and analytical skills by naming the ideological motivation present in all hermeneutical tasks. He is convinced that the contemporary study of the biblical texts traditionally associated with homosexuality and the cultures that frame them stems from a modern concern and discourse that is shaped by the ideologically biased and interpretive questions we pose. "The heuristic historical task becomes more and more hermeneutically motivated." Integrity was also affirmed by Nissinen's imperative to treat homosexuals not as a distinct category of people, "out there," but as neighbors in our midst that must be loved. This reality challenges us to interpret the Bible, culture, and our own lives as gendered persons with that same attitude of inclusivity.⁵

Interest and debate over the homosexual question has been extensive ever since it was defined as a category of human sexuality. Yet the debate has expanded in the postwar culture of Western Europe and North America and has certainly peaked during this past decade. The, often times, divisive debate in society and church over the texts associated with the condemnation of homosexuality and their interpretation historically impacts the manner in which ecclesial and secular power is exercised. It is necessary for Integrity to realize that any application of the scriptures to the complex problems of today's world "is always a hermeneutical event." The essential question for our reflection concerns how the ancient texts, biblical or other, pertain to today's understanding of same-sex interaction. It is crucial that the modern questions be clearly articulated in order to avoid the problems of anachronism and ethnocentricity.⁶

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 4.

Explaining Homosexuality. As a gay community, a significant part of our conversation has centered on explaining, processing, and clarifying our own understanding of homosexuality. We recognize that our contemporary world has come to accept as fact that a part of humanity is primarily or exclusively homosexual, that is, sexually oriented towards persons of their same sex. A plethora of modern studies have confirmed this fact since the Kinsey report unveiled its scale, nuancing the varying degrees existing between exclusive heterosexuality and homosexuality as the extremes with bisexuality in the center. Yet the scientific community, or our own, has not reached a consensus on the explanation or causation of the homosexual phenomenon.

Integrity further saw how attempts at modern explanations are linked to particular disciplines with their specific ideologies and methodologies, which for Nissinen poses the question of “whether a value-free approach is ever possible?” We found solace in knowing that homosexuality was no longer diagnosed as deviant or pathological since its removal from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association in 1973. Yet our experience told us that in many circles homosexuality still has not transcended the stigma of medicalization or pathologization which was imposed upon it during the nineteenth century. “It is still often considered a disorder or, more neutrally expressed, the result of abnormal psychosocial, genetic, or hormonal development.”⁷ The personal narratives of many of our members spoke to this reality. People spoke of the harsh homophobic words or actions experienced in family and church as a way of “scaring” or preventing them from becoming gay or lesbian. Others

⁷Ibid., 6.

remembered being subjected in their childhood or adolescence to conversion or hormone therapies.

Nissinen also points to how the dichotomy and polarization between essentialist and constructionist theories also retards consensus building around this issue.

Essentialists hold that the basic structures of sexuality and gender are independent of their social context, that people are born with their sexual orientation. . . .

Constructionists see sexuality and its manifestations as social constructions. According to this view, gender is not a biologically determined and immutable fact but a product of social relations. . . . Constructionists do not see sexuality as an autonomous domain within the human mind that determines human lives from the cradle to the grave but rather as a late concept that attempts to categorize erotic experience, a cultural construction rather than an intrinsic condition. . . .⁸

For obvious reasons, this was a fundamental question that Integrity members were attempting to figure out, individually and collectively, in their own discernment process. People saw this question or debate between a physical-biological determinism and a social-relational one in more simple terms. Was I born gay/lesbian or was it a behavior I learned or acquire later on in my development? Members often shared the common experience from the vantage point of hindsight, that in their earliest memories they knew themselves to be "different." This was described as an "intuitive," "visceral," "gut," preconscious knowing of their being somehow "strange," "weird," or "abnormal." Yet there was no naming it per se. There were only amoral thoughts, attractions, daydreams, fantasies, and stares. The moral judgement would come later as people were exposed to gay derision or jokes in the family or with friends at school and most certainly in the preaching at church. This is the point where terror set in and where denial and secrecy began to undermine people's lives as they were driven into "closets" of fear and shame.

⁸Ibid., 8.

Nissinen, informed by the theories of Michel Foucauld's landmark *Histoire de la sexualite*, also supports the argument that homosexuality and heterosexuality, within the broader scope of sexuality, are all modern categories, produced in the nineteenth century when "*scientia sexualis* replaces *ars erotica* as the way for interpreting the erotic experience." Nissinen argues that our modern scientific explanations find themselves rooted in a *scientia sexualis* that considers abnormal or dysfunctional anything that deviates from the norm dictated by the lifestyle of the majority:

. . . this *scientia sexualis*, which took as its task to map and categorize the observed forms of sex life, especially those that were considered abnormal or dysfunctional compared with the predominant lifestyle. In fact, "normal" sexuality was defined by the exclusion of various "perversions." The concept "homosexuality," as also the notion of the class of people sharing this anomaly, was born only as a result of this abnormalization and medicalization. . . .⁹

Nissinen exposes for Integrity what we also unmask as the inherently evil and biased systemic dynamics of heterosexism. He finds this modern attempt to pathologize homosexuality to be rooted in the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean. Paradoxically, the very condition of being "other" and marginalized as a result of this pathologization has become a critical factor in the forging of a contemporary gay and lesbian identity and political movement for liberation. Here we see a fundamental synthesis in opinions between Nissinen, the work of Cleaver and Integrity's own analysis based on experience. Our being "other" potentiates a kind of community in Integrity that is concerned with the task of emancipation and restoration of broken lives and relationships.¹⁰

Interpretation of Gender. Integrity found helpful Nissinen's proposal that we look to the insights of a feminist critique rooted in gender studies in order to transcend

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., 9.

the dualisms brought about by the essentialist/constructionist, nature/nurture, or sex/gender dichotomies. The key argument of this methodology rests on the belief that “sex is gendered, which means that gender is prior to biological sex.” The fruits of a gender approach also redeem and rescue the body and human sexuality from archaic dualisms. By undertaking a critique of both, biological determinism and social constructionism, the body is understood as “the location where eroticism, reproduction, illness, health, asceticism, religion take place and through which social relations and power structures are formed.” Integrity viewed this integrated perspective as having profound implications for the way in which homosexuality is treated.

Same-sex or both-sex eroticism is no longer simply a matter of sexual preference and its sociobiological preconditions; it must be examined in the wider framework of gender, body, and society.¹¹

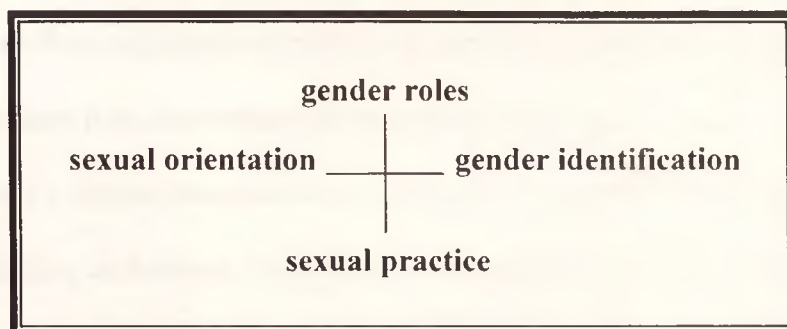
It is clear to Nissinen that if he is to evaluate ancient sources dealing with same-sex acts that are prior to the modern notions of sexuality, he must abandon a fundamental bias. This bias is to “simply equate same-sex behavior with homosexuality.” Instead, he views homosexuality within the broader understanding of gender identity. The reality of gender or personal identity is framed by a hermeneutical dynamic since it is defined as “the way in which each individual interprets his or her existence and experience in his or her specific environment and social relations – the interpretation of self.”¹²

Integrity’s conversations confirmed this fundamental insight concerning self-interpretation or definition. People valued their autonomy and individuality and thus resisted and rebelled against being labeled or pigeonholed. They each claimed the right to describe and identify themselves in their own complex multi layered understanding.

¹¹Ibid., 9-10.

¹²Ibid.

Nissinen provides Integrity with four critical components or building blocks for further understanding the dynamics of gender that assist in studying the ancient text: sexual orientation, gender identification, gender roles, and sexual practice. Following is his quadripartite figure with its corresponding axes and operating definitions, all of which are essential components or building blocks for his method.



Sexual orientation refers to the sexual preference of an individual toward the same, the opposite, or even both sexes. It can thus be heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual. . . .

Gender identification . . . that is, whether a person perceives himself or herself as a man or woman. . . . When a person's gender identification is different from his or her biological sex it is a matter of transsexuality. A transsexual (or transgender) person is someone whose physiological sexual identity is at odds with his or her psycho-social sexual identity (preoperative) or someone who has undergone surgery to bring these into closer conformity (postoperative). . . .

In most cultures gender identity is thought of as either masculine or feminine. There exist gender systems that tolerate an intermediate, third gender, neither masculine nor feminine [i.e., hermaphrodites].

Gender roles are derived from the conceptions of masculine and feminine in a gendered society. The roles are explicitly social and culture-bound, and they can vary even in the case of one individual, depending on the person's activity. . . . A man's feminine role does not necessarily have anything to do with homosexuality, and a man's homosexual orientation itself does not generate feminine appearance or behavior.

A particular form of role identification is transvestism (cross-dressing). Transvestism does not require a homosexual identity; the majority of transvestites, in fact, are heterosexual men.

Sexual practice involves much more than sexual intercourse or other physical expressions of sexuality. It includes both public and private eroticism, and,

broadly conceived, also autoeroticism and sex fantasies. Sexual practice is definitely bound to gender roles. It does not always correlate with orientation, and it does not necessarily coincide with the different aspects of a person's identity. Customs and norms of a society, more than a person's identity or identities, often determine the forms for the expression of one's sexuality.¹³

Nissinen claims that these categories fall within the realm of modern classification and consequentially are not found in the ancient sources. Yet the realities and distinctions they explicitate were lived by and known to the ancient peoples of the Bible, as is evident from the written commentaries of the day.¹⁴

Integrity's discussions also corroborated the accurateness and reliability of Nissinen's working definitions. They spoke to our reality in that they addressed the layered nuanced self-understanding of members in a way that was integrated or holistic. People were not trapped or limited by the classical dichotomies and or simplistic moralistic generalizations, which have classically plagued the treatment of this issue. There were wide-open possibilities for folks to tell their own personal narratives.

Homosexuality, Homoeroticism, and Homosociability. Integrity was further assisted by the distinctions found in Nissinen's definition of three key terms that are critical to the study of the ancient sources as they apply to a contemporary issue: homosexuality, homoeroticism, and homosociability. These were extremely helpful for our own process of clarification regarding our employment of a more precise descriptive terminology. He uses the "adjective homosexual in its neutral meaning, between the same sex, and the noun homosexuality to denote homosexual orientation." This term is a modern construct, and it is therefore problematic when applied to the ancient sources. He finds greater precision in the term homoeroticism, since it "describes men's and women's

¹³Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁴Ibid., 12.

mutual erotic interaction also on the level of roles and practices, even without a thought of homosexual orientation.” Homosociability, on the other hand, is quite useful in describing “the interaction between persons of the same-sex where the erotic-sexual aspect is less emphasized.” The latter describes gender-segregated culture prevalent in so many classical societies.¹⁵

Integrity found these categories extremely helpful in describing the relationships formed in the cultures that defined the Bible. As a former Catholic seminarian, I experienced a particular homosocial culture that completely shaped seminary life and formation. Strong parallels may be found today in the gender-segregated orthodox communities within Judaism and Islam. An ideology critique of these homosocial cultures unveils the misogyny and patriarchy that lies deep within them. At best, they promote a condescending or dismissive attitude toward women. At worst, they are vilifying and fearful of them. Paradoxically, the pertinent ancient sources, Mesopotamian, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman, which inform the biblical evaluation of homoerotic or same-sex behavior were all classical homosocial cultures.

Mesopotamia

The cultures of Mesopotamia provide us with crumbs of information regarding same-sex behavior as found in some literary works, myths, omens, and law codes. The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a foundational work in the study of the Hebrew Scriptures, has as its central theme the love between two men, Gilgamesh and Enkidu. The transformation that occurs in their relationship is particularly interesting. In its initial stage, it is passionate and sexual. With the passing of time, the relationship becomes one of deepening mutual

¹⁵Ibid., 16-17.

love. Finally, turning away from sex altogether, it is transformed into a spiritual friendship. Upon the death of Enkidu, the lament of Gilgamesh expresses the deep love which bound them: Enkidu, “my friend whom I love so much, who experienced every hardship with me.” What is enunciated here is “an equal relationship among men” where the two become one in a way that was not possible between men and women who were socially segregated. This speaks to the homosocial bonds that were so prevalent in ancient Near East societies. Later classical literature incorporates as a theme the celebration of male pairs that are hailed as folk heroes within the tradition. Examples are found in the Hebrew Scripture’s portrayal of Jonathan and David, and Homer’s Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad*.¹⁶

Integrity’s gay reading or hermeneutic of suspicion regarding these ancient narratives brought us a certain sense of affirmation regarding our way of loving. A historical recording of our presence speaks to the fact that “we have always been.” We are not transient in history nor are we a freak of nature or a phenomenon of these “corrupt times.”

Laws and Omens. The *Middle Assyrian Laws*, a later legal text, on the other hand, “assumes that one partner actively lies on top of the other.” If the object was a man of equal social status (*tappa’u*), the act was treated as criminal. Subjecting another man to penetration by way of anal intercourse inflicted shame and degradation upon him, as well as showing subjection, power, and dominion over him. More importantly, it inverted his role from that of a man to a woman. “If a man assumed the passive role, he was acting as a woman and his whole masculinity became questionable.” This distinction between active

¹⁶Ibid., 21-24.

and passive roles is critical to understanding the classical notion surrounding homoerotic acts.¹⁷

Devotees of Istar. Nissinen carefully looks at the worship and service given to the goddess Istar by her special devotees, the *assinnu*, *kurgarru*, and *kulu'u* who were known for their “wavering gender,” that is being a “man-woman.” Istar herself could invert her gender and was worshipped not only as a virgin and harlot but as a bearded soldier as well. She stood as the divine synthesis between opposing forces and dualities. Her special devotees belonged to a consecrated third gender of men by birth that eventually came to be identified as hermaphrodites or castrati. Their appearance was notoriously feminine or androgynous as they often engaged in “transvestite role-play.” Their function was cultic and shamanistic since they had recognized healing powers; but they were also sexual, since Istar desired them as her special sex partners. Although they enjoyed divinely approved status within the social order, they were often feared and considered “dirty,” and deviant. Thus their lifestyle was forbidden for ordinary people. In later centuries, the *galli*, emasculated priests in the service of the Syrian goddess Atargatis and the great Cybele, the *magna mater* of Asia Minor, inherited the role of the *assinu* as a sort of “holy” third gender.¹⁸

Integrity consensus was that while it is inappropriate to apply the modern concept of homosexuality to the context of the Mesopotamian culture, it was clear that they knew of and morally evaluated same-sex behavior. Yet this occurred within specific boundaries and understandings of rigid passive/active sex roles as applied to a group, set apart or consecrated as “third gender,” that was composed of hermaphrodites and castrati. Our

¹⁷Ibid., 26-27.

¹⁸Ibid., 28-31.

suspicion was that we knew nothing of the real hidden homoerotic or homogenital activity that may have transpired among men or women. We did find interesting links in our conversations with the paradigm of Jesus as a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom. The role of the celibate Jesus who heals endures in the classical Catholic understanding of the priest as *cura animarum* (i.e., *healer of souls*), whose otherness is divinely sanctioned. Further conversation revolved around the evolution of the cult of Mary as Virgin Mother, indeed as Mother of God, precisely in Ephesus as a synchronistic and syncretistic expression of the ancient mother goddess cult.

Of greater significance and relevance to the group was our need to confront the cultural attitudes and taboos against same-sex acts in the Hebrew culture that inform the scriptures. Integrity members, who were struggling with their faith and their homosexuality, could not possibly escape in dealing with the gay texts of condemnation. A millennial, deeply-rooted distrust, abhorrence, and nexus between homosexuality and words like abomination, sin, and death find their origins in these very texts.

The Hebrew Bible

The Holiness Code – Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Given the inflammatory rhetoric against homosexuality that is found in so many churches, one would think that the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures are filled with texts of condemnation. In reality “only two sentences in the *Torah* and a few narratives deal in some way with the issue of homoeroticism.”¹⁹ Boswell considers these texts “as the only place in the Old Testament where homosexual acts per se are mentioned.”²⁰ The two prohibitions against same-sex

¹⁹Ibid., 37.

²⁰Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 100.

acts between males are found within the Holiness Code (Lev 17-26) and carry the penalty of death.

You shall not lie with a man as with a woman (*miskebe issa*): it is an abomination (*to`eba*). (Lev 18:22)

If a man has intercourse with a man as with a woman (*miskebe issa*) [*LXX-hos an koimethe meta arsenos koiten gynaios*], they both commit an abomination (*to`eba*). They shall be put to death; their blood shall be on their own heads (Lev 20:13, NEB)

The post-exilic Jewish community (5th cent. B.C.E) produces these prohibitions upon its return after the Babylonian exile. They reflect a fundamental need on the part of the Jewish people to define themselves as separate from their pagan neighbors and their practices.²¹

You shall not do as they do in Egypt where you once dwelt, nor shall you do as they do in the land of Canaan to which I am bringing you; you shall not conform to their institutions. . . .

Observe my charge, therefore, and follow none of the abominable institutions customary before your time; do not make yourselves unclean with them. I am the Lord your God. (Lev 18:3, 30, NEB)

You shall not conform to the institutions of the nations whom I am driving out before you: they did all these things and I abhorred them. . . .

You shall be holy to me, because I the Lord am holy. I have made a clear separation between you and the heathen, that you may belong to me. (Lev 20:23, 26, NEB)

Helminiak notes that there is clearly no word to designate homogeneity in the Hebrew, but rather an awkward phrase: “the man who lies with a male as the lying of a woman.” The rabbis began to employ a shorter version of this phrase to refer to homogenital acts, *mishkav bzakur* (lying with a male), which translated literally, for Greek-speaking Jews using the Septuagint, into *arseno-koitai* (i.e., “man liers”).²²

²¹Nissinen, 37.

²²Daniel Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality* (San Francisco: Alamo Square Press, 1995), 91.

Homogential acts constitute an abomination (i.e., *toevah* in Heb.) that designates “ritual uncleanness for Jews.” Boswell identifies them in connection with the idolatrous practices of their Gentile neighbors. This text is later echoed in the Pauline teaching that view the sin of the *arsenokoitai* as a fruit of being godless, unholy, and profane (1Tim 6:9), acts as a way of reminding the Jewish people of their distinctiveness. They are set apart, holy, and separate from their pagan neighbors, who followed Molech (Lev 20:5).²³

In “Lessons from Leviticus: Learning about the Misuse of Power,” Comstock uses social analysis to uncover the structures of dominance and the relationships between oppressed and oppressor which give rise to and contextualize this text. He exposes the biases of a “declassed elite” (i.e., “royalty, state officials, priests, army officers, and artisans”), which is desperately “trying to regain social stability.”

The desperation to grab and institutionalize control is evident in the exaggerated detailing of regulations, the severity of punishments, and the bullying language that frames them. Nowhere else in Hebrew Scripture, for example, are sexual laws and prescriptions of death for them as numerous, nor is the otherwise rare phrase “I am Yahweh” used so often to infuse laws with imposing and frightening authority.²⁴

Nissinen identifies the literary genre of the Holiness Code as a didactic sermon or a type of catechism, which has as its purpose to urge the people to follow the Decalogue and separate themselves from idolatrous, unclean, pagan cult and practice. In contrast with Comstock, he argues that the code should not be equated to criminal or civil law. He also believes that the injunction of “the death penalty could not have realistically been implemented to the extent that the law dictated.”²⁵

²³Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 100.

²⁴Comstock, 67

²⁵Nissinen, 38.

Integrity realized in our conversations that according to Comstock's position, Nissinen would be seen as falling into the trap of contextualizing the text to the point of minimizing its severity. Perhaps the radical rejection of the text by Comstock and the hermeneutics carried out by Nissinen are both needed by the gay community depending upon the historical, geographical, socio-cultural, economic, and political circumstances and the exigencies of the liberation process itself.

Nissinen uniquely distances himself from any attempt to solely explain same-sex acts in relation to cultic practices and "sacred prostitution," as Boswell and so many gay and straight scholars have proposed. He finds it problematic to simply equate the *qedesa* and *qades*, female and male "consecrated person" (often translated as "temple-prostitute" and "sodomite") with *zona*, a female prostitute. Nissinen offers his own translation of the prohibition:

There shall be no *qedesa* among the daughters of Israel, nor shall there be a *qades* among the sons of Israel. You shall not bring a fee of a harlot (*zona*) or the pay of a "dog" into the house of the LORD your God in fulfillment of any vow, for both of them are abominable to the LORD your God. (Deut 23:18-19)²⁶

He altogether criticizes the notion of "sacred prostitution" as a literary construct "rather than historical fact."

Scholars have often referred to "sacred prostitution" affiliated with the so-called "fertility cult," but both terms are loaded with problems. Once declared a "historiographic myth" belonging to the "Golden Bough" school of historical anthropology, the idea of sacred prostitution has been invalidated also because the term reflects post-Victorian attitudes towards sexuality, represents patriarchal power of definition, and stimulates anachronistic perceptions.²⁷

²⁶Ibid., 39.

²⁷Ibid.

What is most plausible for Nissinen is that the prohibitions against homoeroticism not only stressed Israel's separateness, but also reinforced earlier "existing taboos regarding sexual behavior and gender roles, banning castration, cross-dressing, and male same-sex behavior." There is no room for the divine sanctioning of a "third gender" as in Mesopotamia. As its neighbor, Israel repudiates the confusion of gender identity and its prescribed roles, "Do not lie with a man as you lie with a woman," and views this problem from the classical gender and sex role distinction of the masculine as active and the feminine as passive. "Sexual contact between two men was prohibited because the passive party assumed the role of a woman and his manly honor was thus disgraced."²⁸

In the Holiness Code and the Hebrew Bible as a whole, the issue of female homoeroticism never surfaces. Nissinen argues that the patriarchal nature of the society that produced the scriptures did not concern itself with this issue because

A woman could not lose her manly honor, and it was inconceivable to think of woman in an active role in a sexual act. Neither did female same-sex activity challenge male domination. Therefore, women's homoeroticism did not pose nearly as big a problem as that of men.²⁹

Integrity's conversations unmasked the ideological motivations present within religious and cultural institutions of power that continue to prop up these texts of condemnation as normative and binding. The Holiness Code's sting has been removed from many other abominable acts condemned in the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g. the eating of prohibited foods) as a result of the changes in cultural and religious attitudes. Yet there remains a persistent bias in favor of a selective fundamentalist reading of these texts of terror even within churches that have often rejected a positivistic approach to biblical

²⁸Ibid., 44.

²⁹Ibid., 43.

interpretation (e.g. Roman Catholicism) as a result of their ongoing dialogue with modernity.

Sodom: Genesis 19:1-11. Integrity members had also felt the sting of condemnation from a Christian tradition that has for generations associated the sin of Sodom with homosexual (anal) intercourse. The fact that the term sodomy is the translation for same-sex intercourse underscores this reality.³⁰ Nissinen echoes the sentiment of Boswell who considers this text as having most influenced Christian thought regarding attitudes towards homosexuality. Since there is no word for homosexuality in the Bible, “Sodom in fact gave its name to homosexual relations in the Latin language, and throughout the Middle Ages the closest word to homosexual in Latin, or in any vernacular, was *sodomita*.” Although this word has exclusively referred to male homogeneity at some points in history, “it has connoted in various times and places everything from ordinary heterosexual intercourse in an atypical position to oral sexual contact with animals,” thus rendering it a highly ambiguous word.³¹

Integrity further became aware that it has only been in recent times that biblical scholarship has retrieved the primacy that the virtue of hospitality holds as the main theme in this narrative. The narrative belongs to a genre of ancient texts that highly valued hospitality, within the context of Middle-Eastern culture. Evidence of this interpretation is found within Scripture itself. Ezekiel points out their “pride, xenophobia, and judicial offenses” (Ez 16:10). The Wisdom of Solomon accuses them of abandoning wisdom and of “leaving their lives as monument to folly” (Wis 10:6-8) and associates them with the Egyptians, who did not welcome their guests but oppressed and enslaved

³⁰Ibid., 45

³¹Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 92.

them. In the New Testament Sodom is held up as a symbol of corruption and warning of the imminence of the end time. Jesus, who has no word of condemnation for same-sex behavior, also refers to Sodom as an example of inhospitality. When speaking to his disciples of the cities who might not welcome them he says, "I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom on the great day than for that town" (Lk 10:12, cf. Mt 10:15).³²

The Hellenistic period on the other hand will link (homo)sexual activity with the sin of Sodom. This is evident in the pseudepigraphal literature (e.g. *Book of Jubilees*, *Testament of Nephtali*, *1 Enoch*) of the intertestamental period which influences Jude 6-7 and 2 Peter 2:4, 6-10. In Jude 6-7, the men of Sodom are linked with the "Watchers" (or the giants), fallen angels who "committed fornication and followed unnatural lusts" (Gr., *opiso sarkos heteras* in Jude 6-7, NEB). Their sin was to go after "other kind of flesh (Gr., *hetera sarx*). What is exposed is the belief that angelic beings were able to have unnatural sexual contact with humans. The writings of Josephus, Philo, and the community of Qur'an also interpret the sin of Sodom in this sexual way.³³

While Nissinen maintains the value of hospitality as central to the story, he does not dismiss the prominent role played by same-sex intercourse in this Yahwist narrative of the exilic period. He rejects D. Sherwin Bailey's attempts to disassociate all sexual connotation from the Hebrew verb *yada* (i.e., to know) in the story.³⁴ "The men of the city . . . all the people to the last man, surrounded the house, and they called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we may know them.'" (Gen 19:4-5, NRSV)

³²Nissinen, 45-47.

³³Nissinen, 92-95.

³⁴Ibid., 46.

Lot's appeasing offering of his virgin daughters who "do not know of man" clearly indicates the sexual connotation present within the text. Lot's response reveals the violent misogyny of the biblical world, but it all the more stresses the sacred value which hospitality held in this same context and as the central theme of the story. Nissinen concurs with George R. Edwards, who captures "the heart of the matter by defining the Sodomite's activity as phallic aggression generated by xenophobic arrogance."

It is evident that in patriarchal societies, "Rape – homosexual or heterosexual is the ultimate means of subjugation and domination. . . . Even today, gang rape is an extreme way to humiliate another man. . . . Homosexual rape has been a traditional way of establishing the relation with captured enemies and foes."³⁵

Integrity, as does Nissinen, identifies the motivation of men of Sodom, not as lust, but as the show of supremacy, power, and domination over the guests who were strangers, and others, as Lot himself, by the use of same-sex gang rape. To equate this reality with contemporary notions or experiences of homosexuality is a travesty against the text and against gays and lesbians. How paradoxical and ironic that the sin of inhospitality, lost and forgotten in the interpretation of the text throughout the ages, nevertheless continues to be the lived experience of marginalization, victimization, and stigmatization for gays and lesbians.

Classical Antiquity

Greek Male Homoeroticism. Since both the intertestamental literature and the Christian Scriptures arise out of the encounter between Judaism and the Greco-Roman world, Nissinen carries out a detailed analysis of the dynamics of homoerotic relations in Greece and Rome. The classical Greek culture has come to be known for its openness to homoerotic interaction, particularly in the form of pederasty (Gr., *paiderastia*, i.e., love

³⁵Nissinen, 48.

for boys). Nissinen focuses on the Athenian experiences and sources. He identifies these as being “philosophical, idealistic, and elitist” and therefore possibly not in full harmony with the real historical attitudes and morals of the common Athenian citizen. Greek mythology is filled with examples of homoerotic interaction, which place the behavior in the realm of gods and heroes. This is evident in the relationships between Zeus and Ganymedes and Heracles’ partnership with Iolaos.³⁶

Nissinen identifies the Athenian experience of pederasty as being “based on a subtle system of sex and gender” that did not threaten the predominant culture. The dynamics involved a type of “transgenerational homosexuality” or “initiation” where an adult member of the community mentored a boy. The adult facilitated the youth’s sexual and social growth and instilled both spiritual and moral virtues (Gr., *arete*) that ultimately produced “brave, cultivated men [Gr., *agoge*] who would defend and serve their community in a manly way.”

In Athens pederasty was associated with cultural institutions: the aesthetic ambience of philosophy, music, arts, and physical exercise. In Sparta and some other states pederasty had an established connection with military culture. Because “only lovers can die for one another” [Plato], military troops were sometimes arranged according to pederastic relations, so that a man and a boy would fight side by side, the older serving as a model and prodding the younger to heroic actions.³⁷

The classical distinctions of passive and active are operative here, since the boy or “beloved,” (Gr., *eromenos*) took on the passive role and the adult or “lover,” (Gr., *erastes*) took on the active. Nissinen notes that while this was not a relationship of sexual equality among the partners, since ideally satisfaction belonged to the active, the sexual

³⁶Ibid., 57-58.

³⁷Ibid.

contact was described as occurring within a context of social equality, among free citizens.³⁸

Plato describes these as “mentoring” pederastic relationships in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* in their most idealized and acceptable forms that favor homoerotic interaction. This is not understood within the framework of the contemporary categories of “homosexuality” and “sexual orientation.” Plato, using a nomenclature far less clinical than our own, names the homoerotic experience utilizing the language of love – *eros* and *philia*.

. . . when the lover is able to help the young man become wise and better, and the young man is eager to be taught and improved by his lover – then, and only then, when these two principles coincide absolutely, is it ever honorable for a young man to accept a lover.³⁹

Plato’s own predilection toward pederastic relationships led him to view them as “the noblest of all human relations and the embodiment of the purest love.” The relationship was seen as evolving into a friendship that would last for life, even though it was expected that all parties marry and produce offspring. The Greek sources idealize (and find desirable) the masculinity and athletic nature of a muscular, well-trained body. A fundamental shift will occur during the Roman period in this regard. Another “platonic” ideal that was advanced envisioned a virtuous boy (Gr., *agathoi*) who did not enjoy the sex act, but rather saw it as his duty to give pleasure to the adult. He could not allow for penetration or any act to occur that would be viewed as subjugating his body since that would involve assuming the female sex role. The *eromenos* was to avoid at all costs becoming associated or labeled as effeminate (Gr., *kinaidos*). The *kinaidos* were

³⁸Ibid., 65.

³⁹Ibid., 59.

easily identified by the community, then as now, and were viewed as girlish or passive. More importantly they were known as those who desired and sought after active men who would penetrate them.⁴⁰

Nissinen contextualizes Athenian homoerotic interaction and describes it as “institutionalized bisexual role behavior that assumed that everyone was able to love both genders.” In this regard, some might argue that Greek society had far healthier attitudes toward sexuality than our own contemporary culture. Nevertheless, there is a shadow side present in the culture’s very openness to homoerotic relations among males; that is, the underlying misogyny of a patriarchal society that “mistrusted women’s spiritual capacity.” Nissinen further states that the literature would have us think “the Greeks regarded it impossible for a man to have a deep, all encompassing love relationship with a woman.”⁴¹

Integrity members appreciated the contributions of Greek culture and literature in redeeming and recording for posterity positive attitudes toward some forms of homoerotic relationships. In celebrating its noble and aesthetic qualities we are given hope that new cultural sensitivities can emerge today that are capable of eroding classical taboos and stigmas. Integrity also concurred with Nissinen’s initial suspicion that we are presented with sources that describe Athenian homoerotic behavior within ideal pederastic relationships. It is inconceivable, given the complexity involving human sexuality, that in the intimate, private, everyday sexual encounters between men and women of the classical Greek period sexual interactions always conformed to the idealistic, rigid gender identities, and sex roles spelled out in the available elitist sources.

⁴⁰Ibid., 59, 68.

⁴¹Ibid., 60, 64.

Some members suggested that a study of classical Greek graffiti is perhaps a more useful tool in uncovering the sexual desires, fantasies, and behaviors that were actually lived and experienced during the Hellenistic period. No doubt, someone had been reading the “writing on the wall.”

Roman Male Homoeroticism. Nissinen considers the Roman experience of homoeroticism separate from the Greek, since Rome’s distinct attitudes also informed the formation of the Christian Scriptures and nascent church in a fundamental way. Another reason for considering the Roman experience separately is that moral attitudes and practices differ profoundly from those proposed in the Greek texts.⁴²

Classical texts reveal that homoerotic relations were common and known in Roman society, especially among men of fame such as the emperors, consuls, senators, poets, philosophers, artists, etc. Of the emperors, Nero and Hadrian’s proclivities were *vox populi*. Boswell, based on Suetonius’ description of the sex life of the emperors, claims that “of the first fifteen emperors, only Claudius led an exclusively heterosexual life.”⁴³ The poets Catullus, Virgil, Horace (all three never married), and Ovid all wrote homoerotic verses “that may more or less indicate their actual preferences.”⁴⁴

Nissinen notes that for all its notoriety, homosexuality in Rome never became a “celebrated institution as it had been in Athens and Sparta.” Unlike in Greece, the writings of Cicero, Suetonius, and Juvenal all frown upon relationships between free men. These may have even been unlawful at given times (e.g. *stuprum cum puero* – the rape of a free born boy). Cicero opined that to act as “a woman among men and as a man

⁴²Ibid., 69.

⁴³Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 61.

⁴⁴Nissinen, 70.

among women” was immoral. It was for him *contra fas* (i.e., against good mores). The double standards are also visible in the practice of prostitution. Although it was a common and tolerated gender inclusive institution visibly present in the streets and baths of the Empire, it was reserved to slaves and foreigners (i.e., non-citizens). A free Roman citizen who engaged in prostitution “enjoyed no social respect.” Ultimately, the classical understanding of active and passive roles, common to Greeks and Romans, is again articulated, as well as the social repudiation that was conveyed when men abandoned their gender and sex role for that of a woman’s.⁴⁵

The critical difference between both societies is found in the recorded Roman practice and behavior. Here homoerotic relations normally are written of as occurring between freemen and slaves and/or and prostitutes who stereotypically assume the passive sexual role. Roman society considered it a shameful, infamous violation of the virtue of virility and personal honor for a free man to allow himself to be penetrated (Lat., *infamia*). The passive role becomes completely identified with the feminine appearance or the effeminate mannerisms of the *cinaedus* (Gr., *kinaidos*). The *cinaedus* were perceived as being available to men and were known to visit the Roman baths, brothels and homes in urban centers. This “sissiness” or girlishness in men was viewed with contempt and disgust. It was classified by its Stoic critics as a moral problem that was linked to a total lack of personal self-control.

As in Greece, also in Rome the satirists mocked men who assumed a feminine appearance and passive sexual roles and were, for this reason, permanently stigmatized.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., 71-72, 87.

It is important to note that the “Roman ideal of masculinity” was linked with aggression. This spilled over into the attitudes and practices concerning the sexual life. “Sexual activity was a manifestation of virile potency, and penetration was a symbol of masculinity, the expression of male body-language as such.” The writings of Catullus also express what may have been an established custom; upon marriage it became less permissible for a man to engage in homogenital activity.

You are said to find it hard,
 Perfumed bridegroom, to give up
 Smooth-skinned boys, but give them up . . .
 We realize you've only known
 Permitted pleasures: husbands, though
 Have no right to the same pleasures.⁴⁷

By the beginning of the Common Era, the Greco-Roman world largely viewed sex among men in a negative light. Further ancient critiques complicate matters by presenting homoerotic acts as being “against nature” (Gr., *para physin*; Lat., *contra natura*) for two reasons: it does not lead to procreation; and it inverts the natural role structure by which “the passive partner’s masculine role is changed into a feminine role.” This cultural legacy deeply influenced both Jewish and Christian traditions as they attempted to respond to this moral question. Nissinen states that: “During the formative period of the early church, Greco-Roman philosophical models prepared the soil and conceptual basis for Jewish and Christian condemnation of homoerotic relations.”⁴⁸

The soil was clearly ripened by the dualistic influences in Stoicism, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, and Manichaeism, among others. These were quickly disseminated throughout the Roman world and left an indelible mark on the nascent and

⁴⁷Ibid., 71.

⁴⁸Ibid., 87-88.

developing theology of the Early Church into the late antique period. The works of Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, and Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, are most helpful in further considering this question.

Integrity concluded in its conversations that, in both the cases of Greece and Rome, what we know of the writings of Greece and Rome are often generalizations, stereotypes, convention, mores, and understandings of particular authors situated in their specific context. The group's own hermeneutical suspicion led it to believe that perhaps much more lay hidden in the unspoken or unrecorded regarding the complexity and dynamics involved in the sexual experience and practices of the classical world. We knew only from the classical authors, cited amply by Boswell and other historians, of the notorious sexual habits of men in the upper-classes throughout the Roman period, who were known to be effeminate or passive in the bedroom with free men, male slaves, servants, or prostitutes. Our suspicions remain that human sexuality is never, in any time or place, such a neatly-packaged or circumscribed experience.

Our Integrity conversations further corroborated how Rome's influence and legacy regarding attitudes toward same-sex relations is palpable today. This is not only lived in the cultures of the Mediterranean, but also in Latin America (by way of Spain) and in the U.S. (through continued Hispanic immigration). Various Integrity members, in particular those of Hispanic background, could comment at length, about surviving Roman stereotypes and prejudices which had painfully marked their narratives. As Cuban-Americans growing up in Miami, they were overtly exposed to this cultural bias and stereotype that was part of the male and female socialization process.

It was important for members to name these homophobic words or expressions of oppression as part of their own healing process. The “known” or identified homosexual man is obviously so (Sp., *se le nota*) because he is effeminate. The culture has ample creative names and labels: *Maricon*, *mariquita*, *pato*, *pajaro*; all allude to the passive role as being effeminate, sissy, soft, loose, or promiscuous. *Invertido* specifically names the classical notion of role inversion. Calling a male *una loca* (i.e., crazy), employing the feminine tense refers to this total lack of self-control or effeminate acting out unbecoming to a man. All these appellatives depersonalize and dehumanize the individual reducing them to objects of scorn, ridicule, and abuse. *Maricon* is a particularly interesting old word in Spanish. In dictionaries it is translated as (adj.) sissy, effeminate and as (n.) sodomite. My suspicion is that it derives from the Greek word for a youth (i.e., *meirakion*) who is perceived as being effeminate (Gr., *malakos*, *malakia*, *malthakos*, or the Lat. *malacus*). The word is the most strident when used in questioning the virility of a man. This is considered in the culture as *lo mas bajo*, the most base among the dregs of society, somewhere below *delincuentes*, *criminales*, *prostitutas*, and *droga adictos* (albeit a more modern category). This attempt by the popular culture to place same-sex acts along with a host of other offenses echoes Paul’s list of vices in the New Testament.

The women in Integrity reflected on the sad reality that “butch” women or “dykes” fared no better. They are also named “appropriately” according to ancient notions of gender and sex roles: *macha*, *mari-macha*, *invertida*, etc. The first refers to the mannish appearance of woman, the second combines *maricon* and mannishness, and the last names a classical understanding of role inversion. The old adage of *pueblo pequeno*,

infierno grande (literally, “small town, huge hell”) speaks to the experience of oppression or ostracism that effeminate men and butch women in Integrity have had of being “pegged,” stigmatized, and trapped by their appearance or mannerisms. This sense of being other created solidarity with those who throughout the centuries and today were living personal hells. Interestingly enough, Integrity was able to identify that class status and wealth had the capacity to publicly silence the name-calling and nearly eradicate the social ostracism. Money provided respectability. This is not the case for the poor or the working class who have no where to run or hide.

Integrity members expressed that the social constructs of gender and sex roles have been for gays an indescribable source of oppression, from the outside and within as the result of internalized homophobia. These continue to sharply divide the gay/lesbian community along these very lines of gender identity and roles between “straight-acting” men and “lipstick” lesbians and effeminate or butch ones. Some argued that in the case of men, this stems from an evolutionary or primal need to prove their virility. Others realized that there are extensive cultural constructs and codes regarding the identity and macho role that of necessity must be learned by males in their socialization process. This defined, almost rigid identity was entrenched in the Western cultures.

Integrity also found it ironic that unlike the Jewish tradition, Roman mores did not stigmatize the penetrator since his virility was not compromised. It was brought up that this reality is embodied in the word *bugarron*, a Spanish colloquialism that names the exclusively active partner in a classical active (*macho*) – passive (effeminate) homogenital act or relationship. As with so many “double standards” which plague our classical culture, the active male or penetrator is never vilified to the degree that the

passive male is because he “hides it well” – *no lo aparenta*. To this day the self-perception remains that the active male is absolved from being classified as a homosexual so long as he exclusively assumes the active role and is known to have a wife or girlfriend. The same can be said of the feminine or “lipstick” lesbian. This has profound consequences for the way men and women relate to one another out of a paradigm of rigid gender/sex roles and sexual aggression and domination that also perpetuates a dynamics of denial and deceit.

Integrity members recognized that this split has broken down somewhat as a result of the relaxation in attitudes regarding homosexuality in Europe and North America. We seem to not be anonymous or voiceless any longer. Integrity reflected on our being out in the media, the churches, and in the center of the legislative debate. This was viewed as establishing a safer climate for people to come out. What is has achieved for us is a truly diverse gay/lesbian community that defies classical stereotypes. We seem to be more assertive and emboldened as individuals and as a community. Many express that there is a desire to transcend our victimization. Empowered and renewed we can proceed to confront the dualistic Judeo-Christian classical sexual ethic present in the Christian Scriptures in a systematic, ideological critique that can further our liberation.

Judaism

Apocrypha and Pseudopigrapha. The Jewish writings of the intertestamental period (200 B.C.E. – 100 C.E.) never become a part of the Hebrew canon, yet they deeply impacted Judaism and the later emerging Christian movement. The texts that deal with homoeroticism place it within the larger context of Gentile moral depravity and corruption (Gr., *porneia*), the source of which was found in pagan idolatrous worship.

Idolatry manifested itself in all sorts of vile practices, such as incest, child sacrifice, sodomy, etc. Same sexual behavior is ultimately understood as “one way to change the ordinary to the unordinary, to change divinely based life orders to illicit ones.”⁴⁹

Josephus and Philo. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus and the philosopher Philo of Alexandria interpret the story of Sodom in light of homosexual behavior. Josephus boasts of the law’s acknowledgement of marriage as natural “only for the procreation of children” and how the “sexual connection of a man with another man it abhors, and punishes any guilty of such assault with death.”⁵⁰ Philo’s philosophical treatment of homoeroticism is broader and leads him to assert that it causes infertility, effeminacy, and venereal diseases. Plato’s and Xenophon’s “symposia” are sternly condemned as “pederastic debauchery.” The passive partner in the pederastic act is classified as androgynous, a “man-woman.” His disgust for homoerotic relations stems not only from a role inversion that is “against nature” (Gr., *para physin*), but even more so because it “squandered semen,” the source of life and procreation. “Homoerotic relationships destroy the whole purpose of procreation because they do not generate children, thus causing cities to become uninhabited and deserted.”⁵¹

Rabbinic Literature. By the beginning of the Common Era, rabbinic oral *Torah* (Heb., *halaka*) is as esteemed as written *Torah* in the Jewish religion. The traditions, stories, and folk wisdom (Heb., *haggadah*) give rise to the *Mishna*, *Talmuds*, *Tosefta*, and the *Midrashic* literature. These explain and complement the Bible. Much of this literature is either “contemporaneous with or later than the New Testament . . . it is possible to see

⁴⁹Ibid., 89-90, 93.

⁵⁰Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:199, quoted in Nissinen, 94.

⁵¹Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* 59-62, quoted in Nissinen, 95-96.

rabbinic literature as affected by the same cultural influences as the New Testament and other texts of the early church.” While the *Talmudic* interpretation of *Torah* mirrors Roman attitudes and taboos, it is far more prohibitive and punitive. The condemnation for homoerotic practice is a sobering one. Homosexual relations are categorized along with incest, adultery, bestiality, idolatry, mockery, wrongdoing, murdering, and stealing. All these are forbidden by the Noachian commandments given to Noah after the flood. These precepts “identified a minimal moral requirement that supposedly also applied to the Gentiles.”⁵²

The Leviticus text is interpreted with the passive and active distinctions in mind and focuses on the problem as explicitly being the penetration of a male, since this act “transgresses divinely constituted gender boundaries.” Differing from Roman mores, the Rabbis also sanction the active partner, “considering it a manifestation of arrogance and hedonism, comparable even to bestiality. The death penalty imposed by the Holiness Code is upheld for both. Procreation is seen as the ultimate goal of sexuality. The great Rabbi Akiba interprets the Genesis text, “That is why a man leaves his father and mother . . . and the two become one flesh” (Gen 2:24), as excluding homosexual relations in the same category as incest, adultery and bestiality.”⁵³

His “father” means “His father’s wife”; “his mother” is literally meant. “And he shall cleave,” but not to a male; “to his wife,” but not to his neighbor’s wife; “and they shall be as one flesh,” applying to those that can become one flesh, thus excluding cattle and beasts.⁵⁴

⁵²Nissinen, 97-98.

⁵³Ibid., 99.

⁵⁴b. Sanhedrin 58a, quoted in Nissinen, 99.

Ultimately “homosexual behavior is judged as a pagan vice.” The Jewish sources agree with the negative evaluation given to certain homoerotic behavior by prevailing Greco-Roman mores. It is precisely because of their need as a minority group to distance themselves from the dominant pagan influence and contamination, that their stigmatization and condemnation goes beyond what the pagan world would have felt comfortable with. It is interesting to note that once again the rabbis are not too concerned or threatened by female homoeroticism since there is no penetration that takes place.⁵⁵

The New Testament

Paul and the Unnatural: Romans 1:26-27. Nissinen contributes significantly to Integrity’s understanding of Paul’s treatment of homoeroticism in his Epistle to the Romans, which he identifies as “the most influential—and, in fact, the only clear and direct—reference to homoeroticism in the New Testament.”⁵⁶ Fundamentalist interpretations of this text continue to stigmatize the lives of gays and lesbians. Nissinen acknowledges the profound impact that Paul’s letters have had on the formulation of moral codes and social structures throughout time. He is one of many voices which contribute to the study of this critical text. Integrity also found his conclusions balanced, contextual, and faithful to the original intent of the author. The text in question follows:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppresses the truth. . . . So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. . . .

Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading 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. . . .

⁵⁵Nissinen, 99-101.

⁵⁶Ibid., 103.

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 . . . were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (Rom 1:18-27, NRSV)

Nissinen argues that the text first and foremost must be placed in context, against the backdrop of Paul's primary goal, which is to present his teaching on justification. Homoeroticism is not the main topic at hand, but rather serves as a rhetorical illustration for his doctrine of justification and clearly exposes idolatry as the root of all sinfulness. Paul does not formulate a new Christian ethic or teaching on homoeroticism, but simply restates the teaching of the Hellenistic Jewish synagogue and Greco-Roman philosophy.⁵⁷ It is also clear that Paul knows various kinds of homoerotic behavior (as is also found in Rabbinic literature), since he speaks of women and not just pederasty. The fact that Paul mentions women engaging in gender transgressions and labels them *akatharsia* (Gr., forbidden, corrupt, or condemnable), even before addressing the male transgression, serves to emphasize how comparably unnatural these acts were in his view. Although Paul, for the sake of the Gentiles, is willing to break with the Holiness Code in certain areas, such as the dietary laws, he is unable to transcend notions of impurity and pollution regarding gender roles and practices. Integrity clearly sees how Paul's categories belong to a particular time and place, not our own; therefore, his statements cannot be interpreted as dealing with "homosexuality theoretically and generally." Nissinen asserts that:

It would not be fair to claim that Paul would condemn all homosexuality everywhere, always, and in every form. Paul's arguments are based on certain Hellenistic Jewish moral codes that are culture-specific . . . If these moral codes are regarded as binding in our time, the authority of the Bible might become confused with the authority of the Hellenistic Jewish synagogue.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Nissinen, 105.

⁵⁸Ibid., 108, 113, 124.

Integrity also realizes that Paul also does not know or speak of the modern notions of gender identity, sexual orientation, or homosexual relationships based on mutual love; he only knows “people who change the order of their nature.”⁵⁹ Richard McBrien in *Catholicism* corroborates this view when he describes Paul’s world as having “no distinction between deliberate perversion and indeliberate homosexual orientation rooted in a particular personality with a particular psychological history and constitution.”⁶⁰

It is critical for Integrity’s work that we understand Paul’s usage of the term “against nature” (Gr., *para physin*), not in the modern genetic-biological sense, but as he interpreted it, as a Pharisee who was steeped in his own Jewish rabbinical tradition, as well as in Greco-Roman philosophy and ethics. The content and usage of *para physin* is known from Greek, Jewish, and Latin sources. “In antiquity, *physis* expresses a fundamental cultural rule or a conventional, proper, or inborn character or appearance, or the true being of a person or a thing.” Against this backdrop, same-sex acts are seen as “debauchery, lustful deeds, and abnormal transgressions of gender boundaries; that is, unnatural acts performed by normal people.” Nissinen questions a fundamentalist use of this category to further condemn gays and lesbians.

Even today, the reasons for or causes of homosexual orientation remain unknown. However, the perspectives of genetics, psychiatry, and sociology, even if partially contradictory, as well as the recent formation of gay and lesbian identities and lifestyles have shed a totally new light on same-sex relationships and have thoroughly shaken the whole discussion. All the perspectives of modern scholarship would have been foreign and incomprehensible to the biblical authors. Therefore it is dangerous to assume that the biblical authors would have opposed homosexuality even if they had shared modern ideas about it. We cannot possibly know what they would say today.⁶¹

⁵⁹Ibid., 111.

⁶⁰Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (Minneapolis: Winston Press), 2:1028.

⁶¹Ibid., 105, 111, 125.

Our conversations in Integrity suggest that these texts cannot be used today to condemn gays and lesbians today who are striving to follow the dictates of their conscience and are attempting to live authentically. Various members of Integrity were in committed, loving, and life giving relationships. They experienced “communion of life and love.” Some were considering adoption. Others felt that this communion was attainable without the biological or procreative dimension being present, as in the case of heterosexual couples who cannot have children. The challenge for Integrity, indeed for all gays and lesbians, lies in freeing the Pauline text from a heterosexist and homophobic hermeneutic. This was possible for us by using the very liberating hermeneutic that women have in criticizing sexism and that Blacks have in unraveling and deconstructing its racist teachings on slavery.

Integrity became convinced that the sexist, racist, or homophobic teachings in the text could no longer be binding and normative for the Christian. A freed Pauline text remains rich in its legacy of theological and spiritual gifts: a theology of grace, justification by faith, the ecclesiology of the Body of Christ, the recapitulation of all things under Christ, a pneumatology of gifts, a theology of love, etc. The church is quite capable of informing the culture with a redemptive hermeneutic, teaching, and preaching that embraces love and inclusivity as the greatest of gifts. It also has the authority to emphasize certain texts over others. Perhaps the church’s ministry might be more efficacious in today’s world were it to emphasize the following text: “Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself.” (Rom 2:1, NRSV)

Men Who Sleep – With Whom? 1 Corinthian 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10 – The Exclusion of *Arsenokoitai* and *Malakoi* from the Kingdom of Heaven

The lists of vices found within first letter of Paul to the Corinthians and in the pseudepigraphal pastoral letter to “Timothy”⁶² are two further texts classically associated with homoeroticism. Both lists include the Greek word *arsenokoites*, but in 1 Cor 6:9 it appears alongside the word *malakos*. These words have been generally interpreted as referring to homosexual men. They along with the other sinners mentioned are among the damned who “will never come into possession of the kingdom of God.”⁶³ Integrity identified that these texts continue to be hurled at gays and lesbians by fundamentalist Christians as prescribing eternal damnation for all homosexuals in a general or universal way. Even more insidious is how the list of vices has equated same-sex acts with the very worst in human nature. This has profoundly shaped popular notions of homosexuals as being less than human. Nissinen contends that, “This verse has had a deep influence in the way homosexuals have been treated in Christian communities, in spite of the fact that the actual meaning of these two words is ambiguous and their homosexual interpretation has been challenged.”⁶⁴

In our Integrity conversations, the vice lists were of particular interest as a result of confrontations that some members had had with fundamentalist “Christians.” These were waving signs and placards during various political and religious events that gathered the gay community. One sign in particular stood out. It contained this sanctioning biblical citation.

⁶²Raymond F. Collins, *Letters That Paul Did Not Write. The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Pauline Pseudepigrapha*, (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), 93

⁶³Nissinen, 113.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

**“Do not be deceived!
Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers,
HOMOSEXUALS,
thieves, drunkards ...
will NOT inherit the Kingdom of God”
(1 Cor 6:9-10).**

These daunting personal encounters occurred over a period of time and became part of our theological reflection. One was the memorial service celebrating the life of Pedro Zamora, a young, “out,” AIDS activist and celebrity of HBO’s *Real World* who had recently passed away. The other was a SAVE DADE rally in front of the Miami-Dade County Commission chambers. At this event opposing sides had gathered as a response to an upcoming vote by commissioners on “equal rights” legislation protecting gays in the areas of housing and employment. The last incident was also a funeral that received national media attention. Here the nation watched in horror as placard-waving fundamentalists gathered outside the church where the funeral for Matthew Shephard was being held. Matthew, an “out” University of Wyoming student, died as a result of a “gay bashing.” His lifeless body was left bound on a wooden fence in the cruciform position. This contemporary passion spoke to our Integrity community of the violent consequences that result from a homophobic culture.

These events challenged Integrity, and the wider community, in its continued critique of these homophobic texts of terror, thereby chipping away at the normativity that they have enjoyed within the churches. For they constitute the very fuel that ignites the fire of intolerance, hatred, and violence. Nissinen along with Boswell, Scroggs, Helminiak, and a cadre of others all argue that these words are ambiguous and as such it behooves us to challenge their homosexual interpretation. Therefore, it is critical that we

uncover the possible meanings and contextual usage of the original Greek words and how their meaning changes through translation into the vernacular over the centuries.

Lists of Vices. Both words, *arsenokoitai* and *malakos*, are found within a list of vices that are similar to those in the Wisdom of Solomon and Romans. Lists of virtues and vices are a particular literary genre that appears in both Jewish and Greco-Roman literature.⁶⁵ The lists were especially common in the ethical teaching of the Stoics as well as in the Qumran literature, and in Hellenistic Jewish writings, especially in Philo.⁶⁶ Through these sources they make their way into the writings of Paul and his followers, who make ample use of them (cf. Rom 1:29-31; Gal 5:19-23; Col 3:18-4:1; Eph 5:21-6:9; 2 Tim 3:1-5, etc.).⁶⁷

The Pauline letters use the lists for various specific purposes. In 1 Cor 6:9-10 it is “to depict the depravity of unbelievers and to encourage believers to avoid the vices and practice the virtues.” In 1 Tim 1:9-10, it is “to expose or denounce the failure of the false teachers, to describe what is required of church leaders, and to advise a young pastor.”⁶⁸ These preformed traditions have their roots in the Hebrew Scriptures, specifically in the Decalogue. In the case of 1 Tim 1:9-10, it serves as “an example of how the law is to function and a refutation of the would-be law-teachers.”⁶⁹ The lists are also utilized to depict the depravity of the Gentile world where idolatry is seen as the root of all vices. Also noteworthy is that Paul at times includes the lists and does not adapt them to their

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Gerald F. Hawthorne, ed., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 963.

⁶⁷Nissinen, 113.

⁶⁸*Dictionary of Paul*, 962.

⁶⁹George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles, Commentary on 1 Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 1:9b, 10a.

context, as in the case in 1 Cor 6-9-10. Therefore “care will need to be taken not to overinterpret such lists as if they were intended to be accurate descriptions of the conduct of those to whom they refer.”⁷⁰

Ample historical studies have shown that “homosexual activity was not uncommon in the Hellenistic world of Paul’s day, chiefly in the form of pederastic liaisons between adult males and young teenagers. Some male prostitution was also current.”⁷¹ Paul and the author of Timothy, “the Pastor,” who is identified by Collins as a disciple of Paul, and other early Christian writers inherited the aversion of Judaism towards the homogenital practices of their day.⁷² They viewed this activity as the fruit of paganism and idolatry first experienced in their contact with their Canaanite neighbors and later with Hellenism.⁷³ This is most relevant for a better understanding of the context for 1 Timothy. Collins opines that the Pastorals are addressed to Christian churches in the Aegean area, especially in Asia Minor. Many scholars point to Ephesus as a possible site for their origination. Collins agrees with contemporary scholars who date the letters “either towards the very end of the first century or in the first decades of the second century.”⁷⁴

Integrity found that these texts read in context unveil a classical understanding of same sexual behavior. There is no awareness of our contemporary knowledge of sexual orientation and behaviors in light of the social and behavioral sciences and how these have come to view homosexuality as a non-pathological variant of human sexuality.

⁷⁰*Dictionary of Paul*, 963.

⁷¹*Dictionary of Paul*, “Homosexuality,” 413.

⁷²Collins, 93.

⁷³*Dictionary of Paul*, 413.

⁷⁴Collins, 92. (See also *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 893).

1 Corinthians 6: 9-10. *Arsenokoitai* has appeared in various modern translations as “homosexuals,” “sodomites,” “child molesters,” “perverts,” or “people of infamous habits.” It is in Corinthians where the word first appears, not by itself but in conjunction with *malakoi* which has been translated as “catamites,” “the effeminate,” “boy prostitutes,” “sissies,” and “sick.”⁷⁵ The word is a New Testament *hapax legomenon*; that is, it occurs only once in a body of literature. It is found only twice in the bible, here and in the vice list of 1 Tim 1:10.⁷⁶ Therefore, it becomes necessary to view these simultaneously.

The vice list is utilized by Paul in admonishing the Corinthians for “wrongdoing,” specifically the bad example that is given by the Christians of Corinth who bring lawsuits against one another before unbelievers in the courts (1 Cor 6:1-7). Corinth, the infamous port city, was known in antiquity for its licentiousness. Nissinen notes that there are three vice lists in 1 Corinthians, all appearing close together. Paul’s goal appears to be a rhetorical climax since he expands the list each time (5:10, 5:11, 6:9). Nissinen concurs with contemporary scholarship and places 1 Cor 6 within the context of the total chapter, which primarily deals with the issue of litigation happening between Christians. These are being victimized through the exploitation and evil deeds being committed from within their own ranks.⁷⁷

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, **male prostitutes** (*malakoi*), **sodomites** (*arsenokoitai*), thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers – none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor 6:9-10, NRSV) [emphasis mine]

⁷⁵Helminiak, 86.

⁷⁶Collins, 95, 121.

⁷⁷Nissinen, 114.

An ideology critique unmasks that, up until this century, *malakoi* was interpreted in Roman Catholic circles as “masturbators,” clearly demonstrating that as prejudice changes, so do biblical translations.⁷⁸ The same can be said of the Catholic New American Bible’s attempt to translate *arsenokoitai* as “practicing homosexuals.” As Daniel A. Helminiak points out with justifiable cynicism:

How amazing! A first-century text would now seem to teach exactly what Roman Catholicism began teaching only in the mid-1970s – to be homosexual is no fault, but to engage in homogenital acts is wrong.⁷⁹

1 Timothy 1:9-10. The word *arsenokoites* reappears in the list of vices, which is placed immediately after the author articulates the nature of false teachings that are disrupting the Christian community (vv. 3-7). Collins identifies the style of 1 Timothy (also Titus and 2 Timothy) as a “paraenetic letter,” that is, “regulatory” in nature since it is filled with ecclesial “directives and norms” that are given to an older, more established community.⁸⁰ Thus the list of vices assists the author in his *paraenesis* and emphasizes how these false teachers cannot presume to be “teachers of the law” since they are “without understanding” (v. 7) of what is “sound teaching.” Nissinen situates 1 Timothy as also condemning the “wrongdoing” in the community but in light of the Decalogue.⁸¹

The Words and their Meaning. *Arsenokoitai* is a compound word; *arsen* meaning male or man and *koitai* meaning bedroom or bed, referring to lying with or bedding with. *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* specifically renders *arsen* as referring to the male partner in sexual intercourse, the one that discharges sperm and

⁷⁸Boswell, 107.

⁷⁹Helminiak, 87.

⁸⁰Collins, 111.

⁸¹Nissinen, 114.

produces male offspring. This is inclusive of homosexual relationships, where we are referring to the “active” male who penetrates the “passive.” *Arsenokoites* is interpreted as “a male who engages in sexual activity with men or boys.”⁸² *Malakos* is rendered as “soft, gentle, weakling, sick; a reprehensible example of homosexuality.”⁸³ This certainly justifies the NRSV translations of the words as “male prostitutes” and “sodomites.” Boswell suggests that, in a moral context, it could mean “licentious, loose, wanton, unrestrained or undisciplined,” although he notes that this term was also applied to heterosexuals.⁸⁴

Nissinen questions both Scroggs’ assumption that *arsenokoites* and *malakos* strictly refers to the active and passive partners in pederastic relationship, as well as Boswell’s attempt to disassociate *arsenokoites* completely from any homoerotic connotation and place it within the strict confines of male prostitution. The sexual connotation of the word is clear since the second part (*koite*) refers to “bed” or the sexual act. Nissinen identifies the source of the ambiguity in the structure of the word, which does not reveal whether the first part of the word, *arsen* (i.e., man, male), is the subject or object. It is difficult to determine whether it means a man who lies exclusively with men (with *arsen* as object), or a male who can lie with both women and men (with *arsen* as subject). This ambiguity is illustrated in the modern word nymphomania, which does not express “madness after women” but rather “an excessive sexual desire on the part of a woman.” Although Nissinen recognizes that *arsenokoites* refers, in many contexts, to

⁸²Horst Balz, ed., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 1:158.

⁸³*Exegetical Dictionary*, 2: 381.

⁸⁴Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 106.

homoerotic behavior, its ambiguous structure lends itself to other uses as well. “If the context does not give a clear indication, the meaning of *arsenokoites* remains indefinite.”⁸⁵

He proposes the Septuagint as the being the source for and root of the word, since this Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was utilized by Paul and the Hellenistic Jewish community of the *Diaspora*. The key text is the translation of Lev 20:13 (as we saw in the previous section dealing with the Holiness Code) which profoundly connects both words: *Kai hos an koimethe meta arsenos koiten gynaikos . . .*, thus creating a neologism. This translation places *arsen* as the object or “one who lies with men.” Jerome translates it in the Vulgate, basing himself on the Septuagint, as *masculorum concubitores*. Once again, it is context and etymology that Nissinen appeals to.

The etymology of a word is its history, not its meaning. It is possible that determining the meaning of the word by combining the meanings of its component parts is semantically misleading. Attempts have been made to understand the word *arsenokoites* apart from the same-sex-or-not issue, paying more attention to the context in which the word appears.⁸⁶

Nissinen focuses on the translation of *malakos* (also its derivatives *malthakos*, *malakia*) as “soft”. It is found in diverse contexts, all relating to weakness: “frailty of the body or character, illness, sentimentality, or moral weakness.” Although, he concurs with Scroggs that this word is sometimes used for the passive partner in a pederastic relationship and can thus be translated as effeminate call boy (i.e., *kinaidos malakos*), he notes that this is not always the case in the Greek sources. He is of the opinion that *malakos* stresses femininity and that it corresponds to the Latin *mollis*, used by Jerome in

⁸⁵Nissinen, 114, 116.

⁸⁶Ibid., 116.

the Vulgate. The modern concern and critique that homosexuality and effeminacy are not one and the same “misses the point” for Nissinen.

In the Greek and especially the Roman cultures at the beginning of the Common Era the passive partner in a homoerotic relationship, the *cinaedus*, was considered especially girlish and was hence held in contempt . . . effeminacy in our sources does not refer to the sexual orientation or gender identification of a (male) person of whom it is used but to his moral quality as characterized by the traditional signs of effeminacy – lack of self-control and yielding to pleasures. This certainly motivated Paul to use the word *malakos* in his list of vices.⁸⁷

Nissinen concludes by reemphasizing the obscurity that is found in the meaning of *arsenokoites* and *malakos* when juxtaposed. Ultimately, the contemporary understanding of *homosexuality* cannot be found in Paul’s text. “Paul’s words should not be used for generalizations that go beyond his experience and world.” Thus in their context they are examples of exploitation (1 Cor 6:9) and transgressions against the Decalogue (1 Tim 1:10).⁸⁸

Integrity recognized how Nissinen profoundly contributes to the reflection that needs to occur in society and church regarding the oppression experienced by gays and lesbians as a result of our heterosexist interpretations of the biblical text.

Using individual and ambiguous biblical passages as a basis for threatening people with eternal damnation leads to a kind of scriptural positivism, which may turn out to be a matter of the cruel abuse of religious power.⁸⁹

Integrity further appreciated the fact that as with heterosexual sex or unions, homosexual sex or unions can be potentially experienced as exploitative or dehumanizing. Yet they can also be experienced as an encounter of love that profoundly contains within it the possibility for mutuality, communion, and shared life. The commandment of love is the

⁸⁷Ibid., 116-118.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid., 125.

ethical imperative that binds us as humans and as Christians. It has been my experience in Integrity and in ministry among the gay community, with families, friends, and colleagues, that when a person comes out in authenticity and integrity, stereotypes and myths vanish. Rejection, discrimination, and even eternal damnation no longer looms over the heads of people as an oppressive yoke imposed as the “wages of sin.”

Integrity reflected on Paul’s liberation of the Gentiles from the shackles of the law imposed by Jewish scripture and tradition. The Catholic Church, as well as Nissinen’s Lutheran Church, has often rejected fundamentalism in biblical hermeneutics or scriptural positivism; yet, in teaching or preaching on homosexuality, texts are grouped and interpreted literally and out of context. This reality uncovers the underlying ideologies and systemic evils of an internalized homophobia and heterosexism that imprisons the Body of Christ. Prior to the church’s entry into the third millennium, John Paul II named and asked forgiveness for the many sins the church has committed as an institution over the centuries as a sign of Lenten repentance and reconciliation. Many in Integrity found consolation and hope in this public confession and act of repentance for past transgressions committed against Jews and women, the victims of the Inquisition and the Crusades, for the church’s role in fomenting division and sectarianism within the Body of Christ, etc. Integrity members, as do many gays and lesbians, still wait in hope for that day when their church turns away from its “cruel abuse of religious power.” On this day the biblical and doctrinal stigma that continues to label gays and lesbians and their acts as deviant, damnable, disordered, intrinsically evil, and abomination, will be no more.

Conclusion

Nissinen provides Integrity the critical lens of gender identity, gender roles, sex roles, and sexual practice for its hermeneutical task. He also clarifies and applies the terms homosexuality, homoeroticism, and homosociability. This allows him, and us, to engage and contextualize the scriptural texts that condemn homosexuality in a hermeneutic that is creative, insightful, and ultimately more precise in its fidelity to the original intent of the author. His scholarly, historical, and cross-cultural methodology gives primacy to the perspective of gender identity and sex role because this is simply what the ancient biblical world knew and lived. In applying his method, Nissinen also enters into a critical and, I believe, complementary conversation with gay authors such as Boswell, Comstock, Cleaver, Scroggs, Helminiak, and others who have endeavored from a gay perspective to exegete the texts of terror and retrieve the gay texts of hope. Nissinen's hermeneutical work with the scriptural texts of condemnation understood in light of their ancient context profoundly enriches the discourse of gays and lesbians, the academy, the church and in society as a whole. One can only rejoice in knowing that their capacity to stigmatize and condemn has somehow been lessened.

Rooted in hope, the following chapter retrieves and explicates scriptural texts that provide liberating paradigms for same-sex love and friendship. As well as uncovering narratives that offer an alternative, different gay reading of the scriptures. These subversive texts of hope have the potential to undermine and critique the very heterosexism and structures of deceit and denial contained not only within the very scriptures themselves, but in the church and culture as well.

CHAPTER 4

BIBLICAL TEXTS OF HOPE: RETRIEVING THE DANGEROUS MEMORY OF LOST, SILENCED WORDS AND PEOPLE – A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR A LIBERATING SEXUALITY IN INTEGRITY

Introduction

Acknowledging the Biblical Bias. I have undertaken the task of giving a critique of the gay texts of terror in order to articulate a gay theology of liberation. Of equal importance is a gay hermeneutical method that retrieves lost persons, silenced voices, and forgotten acts of liberation in the biblical text in order to provide hope and maintain the relevance of the scriptures in gay and lesbian lives. This method is a critical tool for the construction of a new Christian sexual ethic which “finds its meaning in our interest in our bodies and our need for body pleasure; it values all parts of the body as sources of pleasure.”¹ As Comstock reminds us, the heterosexist biblical patriarchal sexual ethic perpetuated by Augustine, Aquinas, and the Reformers that gives primacy to the procreative act is abandoned in favor of one that celebrates the “giving and receiving of body pleasure.”²

It was particularly useful to my ministerial praxis with Integrity to retrieve some biblical images of hope that present liberating acts of defiance or archetypes for same-sex love that affirm gay/lesbian friendships and relationships. I include those that have

¹Gary D. Comstock, *Gay Theology Without Apology* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1992), 27.

²*Ibid.*, 33-34.

received ample attention by contemporary gay and feminist liberation theologians and thus inform my ministry with Integrity. They are the narratives of the lovers in the Song of Songs, the refusal of Vashti (Esther 1:1-22), Jonathan and David (1 and 2 Samuel), Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17), Jesus as dangerous memory (various texts), the vision of Peter (Acts 10), and the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). These constitute some texts of hope that served the Integrity community in affirming and celebrating same-sex friendship and love in the scriptures.

It is not my intention to read into the text whether homogenital intercourse existed between paired characters present in some of these biblical narratives since there is no way of proving this from the text itself. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that I do not carry out a biblical exegesis of the texts using the historical critical method, but rather employ a pastoral liberating hermeneutic simply because it is the very one used by the Integrity community in reflecting on the scriptures.

I concur with Nissinen that there is the need to make the distinction between homosocial relationships and homogenital ones, especially given that homosocial relationships were so common in the gender-segregated world and culture of the Middle East and Mediterranean that produced the scriptures. What is important to gays and lesbians now, as Cleaver reminds, is that the text celebrates same-sex friendship and love and calls for a gay liberating praxis today. The significance lies in the fact that Integrity members, as well as all gays and lesbians, can find a redemptive, blessing, and gracefilled word and image of themselves and their love for another person of the same-sex in the intentionally forgotten biblical text. This certainly can counteract the curse and condemnation that is found in the gay texts of terror.

The Lovers' Song of Songs

The often ignored and spiritualized book of the Song of Songs emerges as a voice which defies a patriarchal sexual ethics and provides us with a contemporary paradigm for erotic justice in relationships. It's a kind of justice in relationships that challenges and deconstructs classical understandings of marriage, procreation, what is natural, eroticism, gender roles, sex roles, and practices. Following are some selected verses that exemplify the celebratory tone of embodied love in this forgotten biblical ode of the lovers, the Song of Songs:

Behold, you are beautiful, my love . . . your eyes are doves.
Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely (1:15-17).

Your lips are like scarlet thread and your mouth is lovely
Your two breasts are like fawns . . . (4:3, 5).

A garden locked is my sister, my bride . . .
Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choicest fruits (4:12, 16).

I come to my garden, my sister, my bride,
I gather myrrh with my spice, I eat honeycomb with my honey . . .
Eat, O friends, and drink: drink deeply, O lovers! (5:1)

My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices,
To pasture his flock in the gardens, and to gather lilies.
I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine;
he pastures his flock among the lilies (6:2-3, RSV).

Comstock reminds us that while the text refers to the love between a man and woman, it presents for all people, heterosexuals and homosexuals alike, a sexual ethics that is devoid of the predominant biblical patriarchal sexual ethics of domination. It frees us to celebrate the body and the erotic dimension of the human person without adhering to a dualistic sexual ethic that stigmatizes the human person.

In the Song of Songs male dominance, female subordination, and stereotyping of either gender is absent. Lover and friend are synonymous; yearnings are not kept

secret; all parts of the body are celebrated; woman is neither called wife nor required to bear children; procreation is not mentioned.³

For Integrity members seeking self-acceptance, it was important to engage in a conversation regarding our own sexual ethics that led to the abandonment of a biblical patriarchal ethics or neo-platonic Augustinian sexual dualisms and scholastic understandings of natural law. This permitted us to affirm and validate, without any guilt or shame, the embodied spiritual power of the erotic. It is important to underscore the fascination experienced by the majority in community who had never been exposed to this poetic love text in church preaching, teaching, and personal reading. People were dumbfounded with its inclusion in the scriptures. This corroborates the notion that the text is dangerous and subversive, and thus it rarely is the content for preaching and teaching. Certainly one can understand why many “celibate” male clergy who need to uphold a patriarchal sexual ethic, as espoused by the church, feel very uncomfortable with leading a congregation or study group in a serious theological and ethical reflection on the Song of Songs.

Retrieving the erotic justice or sexual ethics conveyed in the Song of Songs served Integrity members in their own process and personal journey. For many it involved liberating themselves from years of internalized guilt and shame over their homosexual orientation and their particular way of loving. Integrity members also celebrated the contribution of a gay theology or sexual ethic to the wider theological discourse.

³Ibid., 44.

And Vashti Refused: Rewriting the Stories of the Silenced (Esther 1:1-22)

Comstock also uniquely retrieves the refusal of Vashti as a liberating paradigm, a suppressed voice, or act of liberation for contemporary gays and lesbians to consider. He does this in direct opposition to Esther, who has been traditionally viewed as the heroine in the story. The following is Comstock's abridged version of the narrative found in the first chapter of the Book of Esther:

King Ahasuerus, who ruled from India to Ethiopia, gave a banquet for all his princes and servants, the army chiefs and the nobles and governors of the provinces under his rule. He showed them the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his majesty for many days – 180 days. And when this banquet was over, he gave another for those who lived in the capital city, a banquet lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace. There were white cotton curtains and blue hangings attached by cords of linen and purple to silver rings and marble pillars; there were couches of gold and silver on mosaic floors of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and precious stones. Drinks were served in golden goblets, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king.

Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus. On the seventh day, when the king was merry with wine, he commanded his chamberlains to bring Vashti before him with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty; for she was fair to behold. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command. At this time the king was enraged; and his anger burned within him.

Then the king said to his wise men, who were versed in law and judgement, "According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of the king?" And they responded, "Not only to the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also to all the princes and all the peoples in all the provinces of the king. For this deed of the queen will be made known to all women, causing them to look with contempt upon their husbands. If it please the king, let a royal order go forth from him, and let it be written among the laws that Vashti is to come no more before the king; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout the land, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low." This advice pleased the king; and the king did as they proposed.⁴

⁴Ibid., 51-52.

Comstock views Vashti as “bold, defiant, disapproved of, reprimanded.” She is ultimately replaced as queen because she does not acquiesce to the patriarchal demands of her husband and her culture. Her defiant “no” expresses “those moments of refusal and assertiveness . . . when we speak out . . . and do the unexpected so that we can survive and live more fully.”⁵ Her “no” gives us the power to say “yes.” It also provides a model for how gays/lesbians can engage the scriptures:

In lifting up her little-known ignored story – in bringing it in from the margin to the center – in rewriting her story in our actions today, we use the Bible as a resource for moral agency, for making things better, for making justice . . . instead of trying to copy what is done in the bible, our confrontation with the Bible becomes a model for confronting the moral dilemmas we face in our lives today.⁶

Esther on the other hand is viewed as being obedient and conforming to the patriarchal and sexist culture of her day. She is manipulative of men within the established social order. She denies her very Jewishness, her identity.⁷

There was a great need for our work in Integrity to present the defiant example of Vashti. This was especially important to members who possessed low self-esteem and were lacking assertiveness regarding their sexual orientation. Furthermore, Vashti’s refusal to allow herself to be objectified, owned, ordered, and shown offers a model for autonomy and independence in healthy relationships of mutuality and partnership.

Integrity also found the cunning and strategy of Esther valuable for their own experience. In seeking a radical voice, Comstock dismisses the cunning employed by Esther in hiding her identity as a necessary strategy, which ultimately gains the salvation of her people from death and annihilation. Integrity recognized, as does Cleaver, the

⁵Ibid., 59.

⁶Ibid., 57.

⁷Ibid., 53-54.

valuable message hidden in Esther's character for today's gay liberation struggle. Strategy or a particular context of oppression may dictate cunning silence as a way of obtaining future victory over and against an immediate defeat. There is a time for silence and a time to speak. Yet ultimately, Esther breaks through the silence and the deception to stand with her oppressed people in solidarity. This identification brings about salvation.⁸

Seeing through the Camouflage: Jonathan as Unconventional Nurturer (1 Samuel 18-20; 2 Samuel 1:26)

The covenanted relationship of David and Jonathan has been retrieved today by gay and feminists authors as an example of a same-sex, homosocial, and homoerotic friendship within the biblical text. Comstock, Boswell, and Nissinen provide complementary readings of the text. These were all useful to Integrity's reflections and conversations regarding paradigms for same-sex relationships.

Contemporary readers are more prone to interpret the friendship of these two biblical heroes in a homoerotic context. This is understandable, especially as one views the story from a modern perspective of sexuality. Nissinen is helpful in providing a synthesis of the narrative. Saul takes in David and does not allow him to return to his father's home when he sees that "Jonathan had given his heart to David and had grown to love him as himself" (1 Sam 18:1-4, NEB). As Saul begins to plot against David and Jonathan allies himself with his friend, Saul roars in anger: "You have made friends with the son of Jesse only to bring shame on yourself and dishonor on your mother; I see how it will be" (1 Sam 20:30, NEB). When the plot turns murderous and the friends are forced to part, "they kissed one another and shed tears together"(1 Sam 20:41-42, NEB). In his

⁸Cleaver, 72-73.

lament for Jonathan when he is killed in battle against the Philistines, David cries out, “I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; dear and delightful you were to me; your love (*ahaba*) for me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women” (2 Sam 1:25-26).⁹

Comstock’s gay reading and method of retrieval allows him to see through the camouflage of a story within a story that ultimately unveils the loving, nurturing, covenanted relationship between David and Jonathan. This relationship is one of mutuality and equality. It does not seek personal gain nor is it competitive. Intimacy, friendship, comfort, and nurturing occur with the awareness that God himself is present in the midst of their relationship. Jonathan risks the loss of “social security and familial approval for the sake of personal affection.”¹⁰ Comstock finds it suspicious that the covenant form is used between the two men, since they are not political rivals in need of resolving a conflict.

The conventional and socially acceptable language and forms of covenant, friendship, politics, elegy, and soldiering may have been used to tell a love story that needed both to remain within what was socially acceptable as well as to break with convention, that is, to tell a story that would appeal to and be heard differently by two different audiences [gay and nongay].¹¹

Even though Comstock does not contest the notion that homosexuality was condemned in Israel during biblical times, he does “assume that some people desired same-gender affection and sexual contact.”¹² Ultimately, the importance of the text for gays/lesbians today has little to do with whether or not Jonathan and David actually engaged in homogenital acts. Most important, it is how persons who desired same-sex

⁹Nissinen, 54-55.

¹⁰Comstock, 87.

¹¹Ibid., 89.

¹²Ibid.

affection and contact in antiquity, and a gay person today, can take comfort in the paradigm of love, intimacy, fidelity, and spiritual friendship that Jonathan and David provide.

John Boswell's ground-breaking gay historical work of retrieval, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, also exposes the relationship between the warrior friends.

Although born into a society that took a very dim view of same-gender erotic intimacy David and Jonathan appealed to early Christian residents of the Mediterranean as fulfilling the same human longings to which stories of same-gender fidelity and devotion had been directed in the ancient world – and because they were both valiant warriors.¹³

The ancient author and editors of the Hebrew Scriptures did not silence or obscure this narrative celebrating the love and intimate relationship between two male warriors and heroes. Boswell finds homoerotic meaning in the language of the text where the same Hebrew word for the marriage covenant, *berit*, used elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, is also employed here between two men. He further supports his homoerotic covenant hypothesis by establishing a connection with the verse where David refers to Jonathan as his brother, although they were not:¹⁴

. . . the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day, and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. . . . And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants (1 Sam 18:1-5, RSV).

I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women (2 Sam 1:26, RSV).

Boswell's unique contribution lies in the retrieval of some historical perspectives on how this warrior couple's love was celebrated and spoken of throughout the ages. The

¹³Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in PreModern Europe*, 136.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 137.

Mishna, composed during the patristic era, celebrates them as the “archetype of lasting love,” in juxtaposition to the transitory nature of heterosexual passion (as in the story of Amnon and Tamar in 2 Samuel 13).

If love depends on some material cause and the cause goes away, the love goes away, too; but if it does not depend on a thing, it will never go away.

What love depended on something? The love of Amnon and Tamar. What love was not dependent on something? The love of David and Jonathan.¹⁵

In the Middle Ages Jonathan and David were often seen as the “biblical counterpart of the pagan Ganymede.” In this classical myth Zeus abducts this beautiful youth in the form of an eagle for the purpose of engaging in homogenital sex with him. The tale of David and Jonathan’s “passionate attachment find its way into the writings ranging from the monastic asceticism of Aelred of Rievaulx to the secular humanism of Abelard.”¹⁶ Boswell retrieves Abelard’s use of erotic, pathos-filled language that explores with great sensitivity and feeling the nature of the love between the two men:

More than a brother to me, Jonathan,
 One in soul with me . . .
 How could I have taken such evil advice
 And not stood by your side in battle?
 How gladly would I die
 And be buried with you!
 Since love may do nothing greater than this,
 And since to live after you
 Is to die forever:
 Half a soul
 Is not enough for life. . . .¹⁷

Nissinen also recognizes the positive values found in the narrative. Most significant is the equality that exists between the two men, as well as the absence of any

¹⁵Ibid., 136.

¹⁶Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 252.

¹⁷Ibid., 238.

distinction between active and passive roles. In this regard he views the text as offering a model for mutuality in friendship and relationships. He argues that from the perspective of the Holiness Code or the Deuteronomistic editors, there is no intention of implying or suggesting that illicit sexual practices are present in their relationship. Nissinen proposes that this story is an example of “ancient oriental homosociability” and not homoeroticism per se.¹⁸

In these relationships emotional partnership is emphasized, whereas erotic expressions of love are left in the background and only to be imagined, and there is no distinction between active and passive sexual roles.¹⁹

The Loyalty of Ruth towards Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17)

Although there is no homoerotic inference in this text, Ruth and Naomi endure as biblical archetypes of love.²⁰ Ruth’s memorable words of fidelity to her mother-in-law, indeed of covenant relationship, echo throughout the centuries:

Entreat not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you (Ruth 1:16-17, RSV).

Even Boswell opines that “there is little in the Book of Ruth to suggest that anything other than loyalty bound Ruth to Naomi.”²¹ They nevertheless are a retrievable paradigm for gays/lesbians, same-sex couples, and all of us to model the steadfast permanence and even sacrifice which are called for in covenant relationships.

For the purposes of Integrity’s praxis in this time and place, these relationships, regardless of whether they are viewed as homosocial or homoerotic, serve as a paradigm

¹⁸Nissinen, 55.

¹⁹Ibid., 56.

²⁰Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in PreModern Europe*, 138

²¹Ibid.

for many contemporary gays and lesbians who aspire to form relationships of mutuality. Integrity members noted in their reflections that same-sex partnerships based on mutuality and respect ideally need to liberate themselves from classical notions and practices of domination and subjection based on gender roles, sex roles, and practices. The description provided by the scriptures of David and Jonathan's and Ruth and Naomi's covenant, bond, friendship, love, and brotherhood/sisterhood provided Integrity with such a paradigm. It is an applicable ethical model for all people in relationships, be they friends, lovers, or spouses.

Jesus – A Life and Text of Hope: Retrieving his Dangerous Memory and Rejection of Respectability

Richard Cleaver also contributes significantly to the work of retrieving various texts of hope for the gay and lesbian community. Jesus is seen as the paradigm for inclusion in community. His community is unique in that it invites those persons that are considered unclean, dirty, and sinful by the righteous and the religious establishment. Cleaver notes that there was a missing element in Jesus' attempts at forming this community of love. This is most visible in the disciples' act of abandonment of Jesus in "the hour" of his passion. He identifies the resurrection as the saving moment, which creates belonging, holy community, or class-consciousness. As the exodus and resurrection experience created a people and a church respectively, "the struggle to create a liberation force out of the tag ends of sexual dissidence is forming a class of lesbian and gay people." Cleaver utilizes the Levitical prohibitions regarding what is clean and unclean as a way of formulating an "obscene" liberating parallel with the gay movement.

“Making a people out of a bunch of slaves and social misfits undoubtedly seemed as ungodly to the Pharisees.”²²

Cleaver advances the critique of the exploitative and divisive role played by a bourgeois religion based on respectability, purity, cleanliness, and productivity. He is reminded by Dorothee Soelle that the running of the Auschwitz gas chambers were also justified by a socially disconnected bourgeois ethics and religion. Cleaver is informed by the political theology of J. B. Metz, which identifies the church’s turn to rigidity in discipline and doctrinal rigorism as the way in which it attempts to influence and remain in control.²³ Authentic religion and faith reject a utilitarian ethic that places “performance as the measure of human value.”²⁴ Jesus in his unconventional gospel relationships teaches us what Soelle calls the “amoral quality of charity,” which discards the need for respectability (e.g. Mt 20:1-16, workers in the vineyard; Lk 7:36-50, woman who anoints Jesus feet; Lk 19:1-10, the story of Zacchaeus).²⁵ These texts attest to the tradition that Jesus stood with the “intrinsically disordered” of his day (to use contemporary church language).²⁶ For Cleaver the church relinquishes its prophetic role when it becomes the accomplice of the state in repressing the gay and lesbian struggle for liberation.²⁷ The church is most itself when, in the spirit of Ruth and Jesus, it welcomes the outsider. The work of the Mexican-American theologian, Virgilio Elizondo, on marginality and

²²Cleaver, 85.

²³J.B. Metz, quoted in Cleaver, 94.

²⁴Cleaver, 95.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 97.

²⁷Dorothe Soelle and Johannes Baptist Metz, quoted in Cleaver, 95-99.

mestizaje, is of particular relevance to Cleaver's work: "In his existence, Jesus was the antithesis of all human quests for purity."²⁸

For Comstock, the ministry of Jesus also provides impetus for the construction of a new sexual ethics. Jesus gave primacy to the human person and their needs over and against "the demands of the principalities of the social order."²⁹ This paradigm is also retrieved as a contemporary strategy for a liberating sexual ethics. There is encouragement from Jesus to transform that, which is "oppressive in our tradition and repeal those rules, laws, and immoral lessons in the Bible that serve death and pain." Interestingly enough, Comstock, deviating from other gay authors, severely challenges and critiques the silence and nonrecognition by Jesus of lesbians and gays as contributing to our invisibility, anonymity, and silent experience of the closet. He can take no comfort in this silence because he believes that "we have been in all places at all times." The silence of Jesus allows Comstock to disclose his personal bias regarding the question of the debate between essentialists and social constructionists.

John Boswell has shown that there have always been persons self-conscious about their homoerotic desires. Although cultural and historical recognition facilitates the development and expression of homoerotic attraction, we know that the feelings themselves are not dependent on or determined by such recognition.³⁰

Ultimately, he recognizes our role in completing that which Jesus left undone; the building of the kingdom – "you will do greater things than I."

Nissinen also recognizes that the person of Jesus provides a paradigm as well as source of refuge and consolation for gays. Unlike Comstock, Nissinen does not find

²⁸Virgil Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, quoted in Cleaver, 103.

²⁹Comstock, 48.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 47.

Jesus' silence over the question of homoeroticism or sexual ethics in general to be problematic. What is evident is his "sympathetic attitude toward the marginalized and the despised." Nissinen cannot assert with certainty whether or not the ranks of the despised within the disciples of Jesus and the post-Easter Jesus movement included people with same-sex preferences. My suspicion is that he raises the question only to affirm that if they were not, then they would certainly be today, if Jesus were physically in our midst.³¹

Nissinen also deals with the sensitive issue of the depicting of Jesus throughout the ages as a sexless person in a Christianity plagued by dualisms. This expresses the classical manner in which sexuality is negatively viewed in the church's culture. Jesus' virgin birth and the depiction of the absence of lust in his life have been traditionally equated with his freedom from sin. With Jesus (as with Mary) there is a glorification of the denial of the body and repression of sexuality. Nevertheless speculation about Jesus' sexuality and singleness has been with us since the dawn of Christianity, especially in light of his Jewish culture. "Singleness – an unmarried lifestyle – was exceptional, even suspicious among the Jews, because it was seen as an offense to the divine obligation to procreate." Although the Gospels attest to Jesus' single state, there has been speculation regarding his relationship with Mary Magdalene. The Gnostic *Gospel of Mary* presents her as his "most beloved disciple." The Gnostic *Gospel of Phillip* further conveys her significance in Jesus' life (59:6-11):

There were three women who always walked with Lord: Mary, his mother, and her sister and the Magdalene, the one who was called his companion (*koinonos*). For Mary is his sister, his mother and his companion.

³¹Nissinen, 119.

Nissinen concurs that although the term *koinonos* sometimes refers to spouse or sexual partner, Mary here is depicted more as a spiritual consort.³²

The fact that Jesus apparently remains as a single man living in a Jewish world has also raised speculation about his possible homosexual tendencies. Homoerotic meaning has been found in the relationship of Jesus and the “beloved disciple” in John’s Gospel. Although rare, “singleness and celibacy were part of the role of some ascetics, prophets and vagrant preachers like John the Baptist.” While Jesus in some ways fits this description, he nevertheless defies traditional definitions of asceticism in the way he eats and drinks with sinners and tax collectors (Mt 11:18-19; Lk 7:33-34). Nissinen affirms that from the text we can assume that “he did not lead a conventional family life.” It is this unconventionality of Jesus that needs to be retrieved from our experience as gays and lesbians. Jesus is incarnate in our unconventionality as well.³³

Nissinen focuses on Jesus’ positive comments regarding the unmarried life and those who were incapable of marriage, that is, the *eunouchoi*.

For while some are incapable of marriage because they were born so, or were made so by men, there are others who have themselves renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let those accept it who can (Mt 19:12, NEB).

In a broad sort of way, Nissinen interprets eunuch here, as “anybody who finds marital life impossible.” The message was clearly conveyed that the Matthean community as well as the church of the Acts of the Apostles (8:26) would no longer exclude eunuchs from the ecclesial community as had the *Torah*, which banned them from Jewish cult and

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., 120.

life (Deut 23:2). Nissinen concurs with the hypothesis that perhaps Jesus, in defending the eunuch, is defending his own place in Jewish life as an unmarried man and rabbi.³⁴

The Gospel of John further speaks of Jesus' special relationship of love (*agape*) with the disciple "whom Jesus loved." Boswell identifies them as "the most controversial same-sex couple in the Christian tradition."³⁵ This disciple presents himself as being closer to Jesus than the rest of the disciples and further lets us know that he is the author of the Gospel. Emphasis is placed on his being present in the key events of Jesus final hours. He reclines on Jesus chest at the Last Supper and serves as the spokesman for the disciples (13:23-25; 21:20). He also stands at the foot of the cross where he is entrusted the care of Jesus' mother (19:26-27). While Boswell finds homoerotic meaning in these images, Nissinen places this relationship within the context of a homosocial culture that allowed for intimacy and physical expressions among men.³⁶

These texts of hope allowed for our Integrity community to recall Jesus' dangerous memory and reaffirm the centrality of his ethical paradigm for our lives. Jesus ethics of inclusion in relationships became the model that we aspired to our particular way of being community on campus. In the end we did not want to become lost in the quagmire of speculation regarding Jesus sexuality. What was important to us was Jesus' praxis as retrieved by our theological sources. We found hope in the fact that, in the Gospels, he has no explicit word of condemnation for gays and lesbians. We knew that we were included in his community, although we faced condemnation by the church. The religious authorities of his day also condemned him and his friends being public sinners

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions*, 138.

³⁶Nissinen, 121-122.

and tax collectors, outcast, and unclean. He who lived free of the need for human respectability could also help us to liberate ourselves. We were further motivated by his call to do “greater things.” Our living in authenticity and in truth, without hiding our significant relationships broke new ground. Our involvement in political action on behalf of gay rights also slowly chipped away at the systemic heterosexism and homophobia present in ecclesial and societal structures.

We found hope in that Jesus had created a new and unconventional family, a community of lovers, with his beloved disciples. This reinforced for Integrity the value of creating new gay families and same-sex partnerships founded upon respect, mutuality, and love. Finally, John’s Gospel reveals Jesus as experiencing *agape* for another man, the beloved disciple. Integrity was challenged by this paradigm to live out same-sex relationships in the way of Jesus and the Johannine community, that of life-giving unconditional love.

“A Church Made Clean by Strangers”

Peter’s Vision (Acts 10). It was precisely this “dangerous memory” of Jesus that forced the early church to open itself to foreigners who were branded as polluted and unclean because they did not adhere to the strict Judaic dietary prescriptions of *kashrut*. This is apparently the main question (which led to the first crisis) posed by the nascent Church: “Does one have to ‘keep kosher’ to be a Christian?”³⁷ Cleaver’s gay reading of Acts 10 recalls the encounter between Peter and Cornelius, a Roman centurion who is described as a “devout man who feared God with all his household.” In a vision

³⁷Cleaver, 104.

Cornelius is told to send for Peter. Peter meanwhile is having a vision of his own where he is invited by God to “kill and eat” a myriad of polluted creatures:

. . . he fell into a trance and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has cleansed, you must not call common. (Acts 10: 10-16, RSV)

Peter then encounters Cornelius and his family, who are desirous to hear the message of the Gospel. Realizing that “God shows no partiality,” Peter preaches the *kerygma*. Upon hearing the word, Cornelius and his family experience the descent of the Holy Spirit. Witnessing their conversion and speaking in tongues, Peter promptly baptizes them, thus receiving the first uncircumcised gentiles into the fledgling Christian community. We are told that Peter remains with them in their house for some days, thus persisting in the violation of Jewish law. Peter then has to answer to the criticism of the “circumcision party,” which is scandalized and worried that he has visited and eaten with uncircumcised men. Indeed, what Peter was proposing was the change of Mosaic Law. To the observant Jews who were disciples/apostles of Jesus the Rabbi, this was outside the realm of their authority. Yet Peter’s view prevailed, and Moses’ teachings were altered. The later ministry of Paul to the Gentiles further ignited this movement.³⁸ This missionary activity would quickly transform the followers of Jesus from being a Jewish sect localized in Galilee, Samaria, and Judea into a catholic church that would initially spread throughout the Mediterranean world and later push beyond the limits of the Roman Empire itself.

³⁸Cleaver, 107.

Cleaver presents this text as a paradigmatic narrative for the situation of exclusion faced by gays and lesbians in the church and society. He uses God's response, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane," as a profound metaphor for the inclusion of gays and lesbians in the church today.³⁹

If we look to the example given in this story, we will try a bolder strategy, proclaim the liberating acts of God in our lives, take our place among the ministers of the church, and thus show the presence of the Spirit. Then we can wait for the successors of the Apostles to catch up with God.⁴⁰

The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26). Cleaver also interprets the narrative of Phillip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch as another metaphor calling for the inclusion of gays/lesbians in the church. The eunuch was deprived of "justice and posterity." Although God-fearing, he was barred from admittance into the assembly of God and could not become a convert to Judaism: "No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord" (Deut. 23:1, NRSV). He stands as a symbol for how God's new people are formed in solidarity from the suffering and pain of the outcast and the unclean. Solidarity is the embodiment of the resurrection.⁴¹

In our Integrity conversations, Peter's vision affirmed the notion that we are not profane or unclean, but rather brothers and sisters at the table. The inclusion of the eunuch reminded us that Jesus community could exclude no one. The visceral human responses of disgust (i.e., abomination) and irrational fear (i.e., homophobia) lie at the very heart of this question of cleanliness. They continue to be sources of ecclesial and

³⁹Ibid., 104.

⁴⁰Ibid., 107.

⁴¹Ibid., 104-112

societal oppression for gays today, yet the text gave hope to Integrity that through our acts of defiance they may become undone.

Conclusion

All these texts of hope retrieve some biblical images that present a new ethics, liberating acts of defiance or archetypes for same-sex love that affirm gay/lesbian friendships and relationships. These are the Song of Songs, Vashti's refusal (Esther 1:1-22), Jonathan and David (1 and 2 Samuel), Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17), Jesus as dangerous memory, Peter's vision (Acts 10), and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). These texts of hope, as retrieved and interpreted by our gay theologians, served the Integrity community in furthering its contextual theological reflection. They also assisted in affirming and celebrating same-sex friendship and love in the scriptures. Most importantly, by engaging the redemptive word we are moved along in our process of liberation, which Gustavo Gutierrez identifies as "liberation from oppressive socioeconomic structures, emancipation from oppressed consciousness, and redemption from sinful self-centeredness."⁴²

In the following chapter, I consider and evaluate the conversation between Integrity as a gay and lesbian faith community on a Catholic university campus and contemporary church teaching on homosexuality. Particular attention will be given to *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, since this document informed so much of our pastoral praxis.

⁴²Nickoloff, *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings*, 184.

CHAPTER 5

A LIBERATING HERMENEUTIC OF CHURCH TEACHING IN INTEGRITY: TOWARD A NEW SPEECH IN COMMUNITY

Introduction

Inserted in the heart of the late twentieth century's many struggles for liberation lies the Gay Liberation Movement. Since the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City, gays and lesbians of faith have courageously struggled to also forge a religious and spiritual movement with its own particular contextual theology, biblical hermeneutics, ecclesiology and spirituality. This movement seeks to further empower gay people in achieving a kind of integral liberation that transforms the reality of secrecy and denial, that is where "gay oppression" turns to "gay pride."¹ It also seeks to establish gay ecclesial communities that speak a new language that is freed from classical biblical, theological or ecclesial constructs that attempt to label or describe who we are from the outside. Ultimately, this movement is about achieving full inclusion as open gay people in society and church.

It is this context of oppression that has created the need for Integrity as a community of faith to identify the ecclesial texts of terror and engage their teaching in a liberating hermeneutic and ideology critique. We also claim and name various ecclesial texts of hope used in the Integrity that contribute significantly to our liberating task. As I

¹Thomas C. Fox, *Sexuality and Catholicism* (New York: George Braziller, 1995),129-130.

have noted in previous chapters, liberation theology is our most effective tool and ally for this task. Mark D. Jordan in *The Silence of Sodom, Homosexuality in Modern*

Catholicism describes the effectiveness of liberation theology for our task:

Certainly liberation theologies remain among the most exact instruments for analyzing the forms and functions of religious ideologies – that is, of the speeches of religious bureaucracies. So liberation theologies are among the earliest lesbigay theologies for Catholics and among the most recent.

Liberation theologies written by Catholic homosexuals demonstrate more generally . . . [that] analyzing Catholic teaching on “homosexuality means something more than pointing out its inconsistencies, fallacies, and misuses of evidence. It means as well contesting certain rhetorical programs in official moral theology. Such challenges require contending almost immediately with the principle of authority in moral theology. In challenging the official teaching homosexuality, we are questioning, privileged assumptions about the approved methods of moral reasoning – assumptions that resemble and perhaps reproduce larger form social oppression.

Liberation theologies have recognized these resemblances very astutely. They have applied a sharp-eyed suspicion not only to oppressive misuses of scriptural texts, for example but to ideologies of oppression that have written themselves in the Scriptures themselves.²

Juan Luis Segundo's “hermeneutical circle” which employs a “hermeneutic of suspicion” and “ideology critique” rooted in the “primacy of experience” is particularly useful to our community.³ This allows the gay and lesbian community to identify the root causes of ecclesial oppression and to critique traditional stereotypes, doctrines, biblical interpretations and spiritualities that are destructive of us. This very hermeneutical act can empower and propel excluded gays and lesbians to embrace an emancipatory process and engage in a liberating action on behalf of justice.

²Mark D. Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom, Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 89.

³Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, quoted in Cleaver, 10-11.

This praxis and method of liberation has not occurred in isolation. It has happened alongside the many who find themselves poor, disenfranchised, marginalized, oppressed, and “other” within the larger society and ecclesial community. Women in their feminist critique have confronted the demons of patriarchy, sexism, and androcentrism. Many in Latin America, Africa, and Asia struggle daily to carry out a liberating critique and praxis against poverty, the legacy of colonialism, violence, and totalitarian regimes. African-Americans continue to name and struggle with the evils of racism, classism, and the legacy of slavery. Hispanics in the U.S. experience xenophobia and exclusion from certain sectors in society and church. As an integral dimension of this liberating process, all these struggling communities have discovered how the Bible, theology, spirituality, liturgy, popular religiosity, and in particular church doctrine have been used by those in power as convenient tools of oppression and perpetuation of the *status quo*. This *status quo* seeks to keep us in “closets” where assigned places and roles are rigidly conscripted.

Within this context the urgent need arises for Integrity, as a first step, to engage any oppressive ecclesial text, teaching or praxis in a hermeneutic of suspicion before it can move on to enter into any meaningful dialogue based on mutual respect and recognition. We do this informed and sustained by the many texts of hope that have served to uphold our dignity within the church, in particular *Always Our Children*, which contributed by providing the mandate for ministry to the gay community on our campus.

Transforming Pain: Homophobia as a Gay Reality.

Homophobia in Society. Integrity members were also involved in this very slow process of transforming “oppression into pride” at both an individual and collective level. The community knew from its own experience that “nowhere has homosexual activity

been viewed with as much abhorrence as in the Judeo-Christian West.”⁴ We corroborated the stigma that had been placed on our lives: “branded a sinner by religion, judged a criminal by law, and diagnosed as sick by the medical profession.”⁵ Integrity in its conversation recognized the many ways in which our human dignity has been violated: through spiritual, mental and physical torture, external and internalized homophobia, heterosexism, gay bashing, familial rejection, moral and religious guilt, civil and religious persecution, and discrimination in housing, employment, and health. The description provided by anthropologist G. Gorer accurately voiced our concerns and captures the inordinate and systemic cultural homophobia present in U.S. society:

Among the generality of Americans, homosexuality is regarded not with distaste, disgust, or abhorrence, but with panic; it is seen as an immediate and personal threat. . . . The lives of most American men are bounded, and their interests drastically curtailed, by this constant necessity to prove to their fellows, and to themselves, that they are not . . . homosexuals. It is difficult to exaggerate the prevalence of this unconscious fear.⁶

Homophobia in the Church. As community of faith established on a Catholic university campus, we were particularly concerned with how this liberation from oppression included not only the cultural, social, political, economic, legal, and psychological realms, but also how it attempted to liberate gays/lesbians from the theological (Chapter 2), biblical (Chapters 3 and 4), and ecclesial oppression which has marked our history. It is precisely the objective of this chapter to narrate Integrity’s conversation with the Church’s magisterial teaching on the question of homosexuality.

⁴Anthony Kosnik, et al., *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 188

⁵Robert Nugent and Jeannine Gramick, *Building Bridges, Gay and Lesbian Reality and the Catholic Church* (Mystic, CO: Twenty-Third Publications, 1995), 23.

⁶G. Gorer, *The American People*, quoted in Nugent and Gramick, *Building Bridges*, 30.

This narrative is informed by the tension that exists between being gay and lesbian members of an ecclesial base community on a Catholic university campus and the Church's teaching concerning the "disordered" nature of our orientation and the immorality of our homosexual acts. This tension bears the imprint of struggle and challenge as gay men and women in Integrity attempt to affirm their human dignity and the dignity of their loving in light of a church's teaching that evaluates their condition as disordered and their actions as intrinsically evil. Thomas C. Fox in *Sexuality and Catholicism* described for Integrity some root causes for the love-hate dynamics present in the relationship between gays and the Catholic Church.

The history of Catholicism is replete with stories of gay bashing: witch hunts, Inquisition trials, and even burning of homosexuals who were viewed as moral outcasts and sinners. The church, as molder of the wider Western culture and as a product of its time, was often unforgiving in its treatment of homosexual. According to traditional teaching, homosexual acts are intrinsically evil. Deliberate homosexual acts, the church has taught, are mortal sins, meaning that those who commit them will be damned unless they confess and are forgiven by a priest. But while the church has contributed to self-hatred in gays and lesbians, it has also been their spiritual home. It is said: "Once a Catholic, always a Catholic," meaning that whether or not they choose to practice their faith, Catholics are the products of its sacramental traditions, rituals, and worldviews.⁷

Integrity's liberating reflection and hermeneutics on the question of how the institutional church has dealt with us in its teaching is informed by this very reality of ecclesial homophobia and stigmatization that has been described above. Fr. Robert Nugent in an article written for *Crossroads*, "Homophobia and Campus Ministry" describes for us the very reality we often encounter on campus:

Homophobia, like homosexuality, is an emotional and complex issue because for many people their beliefs and feelings about sexuality are related to deeply-held and religiously connected convictions about being male and female,

⁷Fox, 130-131.

the meaning and purpose of human sexuality and a two-thousand year old Judaeo-Christian tradition about sexuality. At the same time there are certain psychological dynamics around issues of sex, gender, and power, especially for men who are more fearful of homosexuality than women, which explains some forms of male homophobia.

While some human fears are functional and help protect the organism against perceived threats to survival or well-being, homophobia is an 'irrational' or 'dysfunctional' fear . . . homophobic individuals usually justify their fear by constructing what they feel is a rational basis for it and then blaming the objects of their fear.⁸

Therefore this liberating struggle must begin by naming and analyzing the reality of homophobia and exclusion that gays and lesbians have experienced in a Western society and culture that has been deeply influence by the church's prejudicial teachings on homosexuality. The church as the principal exponent, arbiter, and interpreter of the Judeo-Christian tradition bears the weight of history for the role it has played in shaping the homophobic attitudes of our Western civilization. For Integrity, the context and ground of our theological reflection is precisely the pain experienced by many in the gay community resulting from the condemnation and alienation from church and society. This constitutes our *locus theologicus*, the primacy of our experience brought to theological reflection. It's a reality that demands justice and requires a transformative healing process.

The Impact of Homophobia on Gay Lives and Culture. Integrity identified the very experience of alienation and condemnation as being one of the determining factors contributing to the spiritual void, lack of meaning, lack of self-love and worth often found among some gays and lesbians. The dehumanization that occurs when one's personal dignity is questioned may manifest itself in an uncritical participation or immersion in a

⁸Robert Nugent, "Homophobia and Campus Ministry," *Crossroads* (April 1992): 4-5.

culture of substance abuse, hedonism, and materialism experienced by some in the gay community. The inordinate value placed on being part of the “scene,” or the preoccupation with physical appearance, strength, youthfulness, leads many to the use of recreational drugs, and steroids even when HIV+. Michelangelo Signorile analyses this reality in his critical work, *Life Outside. The Signorile Report on Gay Men: Sex, Drugs, Muscles, and the Passages of Life*.

But many assumed that the wild and carefree all-night extravaganzas, the competitive and highly regimented bodybuilding culture, the drugs, the orgies, and the weekend-long affairs of reckless abandon had come to a halt. These things did subside for a short time during the 1980's, but the scene came back quite powerfully, particularly for men in their twenties and thirties, even while many gay men of all ages broadened their lives and created alternatives to it. The scene is now viewed by many gays as an actual antidote to AIDS. These men see the scene as an escape valve that lets them cope – even though its frenetic pace and the anxieties it exacerbates and exploits seem to be contributing to the pressures that have in part created a breakdown in safer sex among the younger generations, and we are seeing the resulting serotransmissions that are contributing to the AIDS epidemic in the gay population.⁹

It was Integrity's evaluation that the violent rejection and condemnation of society and church profoundly influence these self-destructive behaviors, produced by low self-esteem and deep-rooted personal insecurities.

Through the involvement of various Integrity members in Proyect YES, a gay youth advocacy project, we were further made conscious of the high levels of teen suicide among gay youth. Peter Liuzzi, O. Carm., corroborates this sad fact in his work, *With Listening Hearts*. Drawing from the Department of Health and Human Services' 1989 *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide* he finds that “gay and lesbian

⁹Michelangelo Signorile, *Life Outside. The Signorile Report on Gay Men: Sex, Drugs, Muscles, and the Passages of Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), xxii.

youth are two to three times more likely to commit suicide than heterosexual youth.”¹⁰

Eric Marcus in his work, *Is it a Choice?*, describes this challenging situation which demands urgent social and ecclesial attention:

The statistics on suicide sadly confirm how unhappy many people are about being gay or lesbian – especially while they’re first dealing with their feelings of attraction for the same sex. . . . Some studies say that 40 percent of all homosexuals make attempts on their lives when they’re young. . . . And one-third of teenage suicides involve gay and lesbian teens.¹¹

Project Yes statistics provided further challenging information about the difficult reality faced by gay teens. These impacting national statistics affecting sexual minority youth were also drawn from the Department of Health and Human Services’ *Report of the Secretary’s Task Force on Youth Suicide* (1989) and the Massachusetts Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth. Lesbian and gay youth comprise:

40% of all homeless youth
 28% of all dropouts,
 50% of the males and 20% of females who are harassed or assaulted in school,
 31% of males and 18% of females who abuse substances,
 50% are rejected by their families,
 80% report severe isolation problems, and
 97% hear anti-gay comments in school.

This harsh human and pastoral reality more than anything informed, justified, and called for Integrity’s existence as a community of support and ministry with and for the gay and lesbian students, faculty and staff on campus.

¹⁰Department of Health and Human Services (1989), *Report of the Secretary’s Task Force on Youth Suicide*, quoted in Peter J. Liuzzi, O.Carm., *With Listening Hearts, Understanding the Voices of Gay and Lesbian Catholics* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001), 104.

¹¹Eric Marcus, *Is It a Choice?* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 29, 33, quoted in Liuzzi, *With Listening Hearts*, 104

The AIDS pandemic, which has so severely impacted the contemporary gay community, has also exacerbated the entrenchment of old stereotypes and phobias and has further contributed to our marginalization. Although this has subsided somewhat in the U.S. due to new medical treatments which have allowed people to live with and survive AIDS, yet the stigma remains in many circles. The Public Media Center published in 1995 a Special Report titled, *The Impact of Homophobia and Other Social Biases on AIDS*. It fully captures the intimate connection that exists between the stigma of AIDS and homophobia, especially as it pertained to attitudes prevalent during the 80's and 90's:

It is our contention that just as AIDS-Related Stigma is the driving force behind our nation's lackluster response to HIV/AIDS, so the undressed issue of homophobia remains the unseen cause of the rapid increase of AIDS-Related Stigma within U.S. society. . . . We believe that until the underlying issue of homophobia is properly and adequately addressed in America, our nation is unlikely to generate an objective, focused response to the epidemic of HIV/AIDS.¹²

This statement, now viewed in hindsight, has proven to be prophetic. Since this report was published significant cultural, social, and legal transformations have occurred in the U.S. regarding the erosion of certain systemic homophobic policies and practices which have been intimately connected with the significant gains made in HIV/AIDS research and treatment.

Fundamental Questions Raised. This reality of systemic homophobia and exclusion gives rise to some fundamental questions posed by some Integrity members, indeed by many in the gay community: How can gays, lesbians, bisexuals and

¹²*The Impact of Homophobia and Other Social Biases on AIDS, A Special Report by the Public Media Center* (San Francisco: Public Media Center, 1995), 27.

transgendered persons remain in a homophobic church that rejects, condemns, and excludes us? Can we still consider ourselves Catholics and dissent from the church's teaching on homosexuality?

As a Catholic gay man, ministering within this community of faith, I experienced the tension that arose from the critical questions posed not only by the gay community but by the church as well: How might we all be challenged by the church's proclamation of the gospel of truth and justice which invites all people to walk in the ways of discipleship and live lives of moral integrity? These are the profound questions at hand.

Integrity recognized that a gospel message and church teaching that is freed from homophobia and heterosexist attitudes has much to offer and challenge the gay community. Given the tension that exists, it is critical that we maintain a prophetic critique that challenges fundamentalist interpretations of scriptural and ecclesial texts and teachings that condemn gay people, especially in the area of sexual morality. By the same token, we might be well served by also adopting a discerning stance of attentive listening to church teaching, especially with regards to social morality and justice. Perhaps the metaphor used by Nugent and Gramick best describes this paradigm for meaningful conversation: "the Church teaching, teaching the Church."¹³ Ultimately for many in Integrity the church is spiritual home. Even though some rooms in the house are closed, some gays and lesbians opt to remain and continue to knock or coexist in alternative life-giving communities until the doors are opened and justice is meted out without apology and recrimination.

¹³*The Church Teaching/Teaching the Church: A National Dialogue on Lesbian/Gay Issues and Catholicism*, The 4th National Symposium, New Ways Ministry, Pittsburgh, PA, March 7-9, 1997.

Recent Developments in Catholic Teaching

The Impact of Stonewall and the Depathologization of Homosexuality.

Church pronouncements regarding homosexuality in the last thirty years have come about in large part as a reaction to the sweeping changes in attitudes that have been experienced in North America and Europe post Stonewall. The Stonewall riots of 1969 gave birth to a gay movement that has liberated gays and lesbians from “closets” of silence, invisibility, and shame. Thomas Fox in *Sexuality and Catholicism* vividly describes the shift:

Stonewall ignited an already fledgling gay and lesbian movement that spread across the nation. Gays and lesbians began to reject the homosexual and began to speak with a new, self-affirming and self-defining consciousness. The movement produced marches, protests, sit-ins, and in some cases, disruptive demonstrations. Thousands, then tens of thousands, even millions eventually publicly claimed their gay identity, breaking silence. It was a nationwide “coming out of the closet.” The days of hiding, self-hatred, and shame were ending. Not that the transition was without enormous personal turmoil. In the 1970’s a new awakening was occurring in the United States and there was no turning back. Publicly declared gays and lesbians were gaining places along side heterosexuals in U.S. society and abroad. Gay oppression had turned to gay pride.¹⁴

Integrity’s conversations recognized the tension that this consciousness of pride has created between Catholic gays and their church. Members who attended our Integrity meetings often confessed that their initial approach had been cautious and suspicions given that ours was a Catholic Campus Ministry group. For many this was a return to church after years of being distanced. Some had given up on the church. Fox describes again this love-hate tension:

Many gays and lesbians, loathing their church’s homophobic role in history, still find themselves looking to it for spiritual guidance and meaning. Tens of thousands have simply disassociated themselves from the institution; tens of

¹⁴Fox, 130.

thousands of others have managed to accommodate themselves, finding room somewhere under its large cloak.¹⁵

Another significant change in attitudes has come about as a result of the behavioral sciences evaluation of homosexuality as a sexual “orientation” that is not chosen. In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of pathologies. Although the numbers are heavily debated, it has been estimated that about 10% of the population may be gay.¹⁶ Moreover, the scientific community has not identified the origins or causes for the homosexual orientation. *The Kinsey Institute Report on Sex* (1990) states:

Many theories have been proposed, but so far most have not held up under careful scrutiny and none have been proven. In fact, scientists probably have a clearer idea of what does “not” cause a homosexual orientation. Children raised by gay or lesbian parents or couples, for instance, are no more likely to grow up to be homosexual than are children raised by heterosexual parents. . . .

It also is not true that people become homosexuals because they were seduced by an older person of the same sex in their youth. The childhood and adolescent sexual experiences of both homosexuals and heterosexual recall later that they found opposite-sex encounters less satisfying than did heterosexual.

Current theory is that there probably are many different development paths by which a person can come to be homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual.¹⁷

Peter J. Liuzzi, O.Carm., in his reconciling pastoral work, *With Listening Hearts, Understanding the Voices of Gay and Lesbian Catholics*, also added to Integrity’s clarification regarding the possible causes for homosexuality. As director of Gay and Lesbian Ministry for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, he brings to the table over ten years of ministerial work with the community. He synthesizes for Integrity the evidence provided by contemporary scientific research on homosexuality. “The origins of

¹⁵Ibid., 131.

¹⁶Ibid., 131-132.

¹⁷*The Kinsey Institute Report on Sex*, quoted in Liuzzi, *With Listening Hearts*, 52-53.

homosexuality are to found in genetics, pre-natal/hormonal, adult post-natal/hormonal and psychological factors.” Liuzzi points to the fact that many Catholics (indeed many people) still “take for granted that sexual experience is what makes one homosexual.” As Nissinen also concurs (Chapter 3), homosexuality involves other factors as well, such as “love, sexual attraction, fantasy, and self-identification.” The Kinsey Institute tells us that “these factors can change over a period of time.” Thus it is more accurate to assert there are “a number of homosexualities.” Liuzzi, whose reconciling work is considered accommodating (to the magisterium) by many gay liberation theologians, nevertheless supports the Kinsey Institute’s understanding of the homosexual orientation as being “multidimensional, situational, and contextual. Homosexuality is comprised of a variety of experiences and expressions.” In this regard it’s a “misleading and inaccurate generalization” to speak of a homosexual lifestyle.¹⁸

Integrity reflected on how the church has been impacted by the gay liberation movement and by recent developments in the social and behavioral sciences. In our estimation these have placed the church on the defensive. The consequences for moral theology have been obvious. If gays and lesbians have no choice in regard to their orientation, due to its deep-seated biological and psychological nature, then there is no sin. Furthermore, if a significant part of the population is homosexual, one might argue that it is part of God’s plan for creation.¹⁹ It is no wonder that the church’s magisterium (i.e., the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) has undertaken a process of formulating, clarifying, and defending its teaching on homosexuality in light of the

¹⁸Ibid., 53-55.

¹⁹Ibid., 132.

positive and/or morally neutral evaluation given it by the sciences and the greater acceptance it has found in a postmodern culture. Moreover, with regard to this painful issue (as well as so many others – women, divorce, clerical celibacy, etc.), it seems to have abandoned the spirit of openness and dialogue espoused in the conciliar documents of the Second Vatican Council.

Given this context, it was important for Integrity to engage the ecclesial texts that attempt to formulate church teaching concerning our lives and who we are. Some of these texts have been for us ecclesial texts of terror; others have been texts of hope. Paradoxically, we engaged in this process in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council who offers us a model of church that is not defensive or fearful of dialogue with the culture. But rather recognizes that it too has much to benefit from its riches and wisdom. In the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* we find this refreshing openness that somehow has been lost today. “Everything we have said about the dignity of the human person, and about the human community and the profound meaning of human activity, lays the foundation for the relationship between the Church and the world, and provides the basis for dialogue between them.”²⁰ Moreover, the Council describes a church that seeks to transcend the age-old dichotomy between faith and science and is thus committed to dialogue with the sciences especially when it concerns the pastoral care of souls. Following is an excerpt of our guiding text of hope which calls the church to make the gospel relevant in lives of all people:

. . . it is sometimes difficult to harmonize culture with Christian teaching. These difficulties do not necessarily harm the life of faith. Indeed they can stimulate the

²⁰*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes), The Documents of Vatican II* (Baltimore: America Press, 1966), Walter M. Abbot, S.J, ed., no. 40.

mind to a more accurate and penetrating grasp of the faith. For recent studies and findings of science, history, and philosophy raise new questions which influence life and demand new theological investigations.

Furthermore, while adhering to the methods and requirements proper to theology, theologians are invited to seek continually for more suitable ways of communicating doctrine to the men [and women] of their times. For the deposit of faith or revealed truths are one thing; the manner in which they are formulated without violence to their meaning and significance is another.

In pastoral care, appropriate use must be made not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially of psychology and sociology. Thus the faithful can be brought to live the faith in a more thorough and mature way . . . also, the preaching of the gospel can become clearer to man's mind and show its relevance to the conditions of human life.²¹

Church Texts Terror and Hope: Commingling Voices About Who We Are

Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics (Persona Humana)

Humana). This document is the first official contemporary Vatican response to deal with homosexuality. *Persona Humana* would also become the first in a series to be promulgated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF), which has zealously monitored this issue. Fox recognizes the significant breakthrough that is achieved by its distinctions: "This document for the first time granted the legitimacy of the distinction between a 'transitory' and a 'definitive' homosexual orientation, yet unfortunately did not explore its implications for moral judgements."²²

Integrity's conversations noted that the recognition of the homosexual orientation was a positive step that promoted further dialogue regarding the implications for a renewed sexual morality. Yet members were dismayed that although the document teaches that the orientation is not morally wrong, the acts are in all cases.²³ For gays and

²¹*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 57.

²²Fox, 139.

²³*Ibid.*, 132

lesbians there is a sting in its emphasis in teaching that there is no justification for homosexual acts. Although it seems to be aware of some arguments and claims presented by the homosexual community and its allies, they are articulated for the sake of refuting them:

Some people conclude that their tendency is so natural that it justifies in their case homosexual relations within a sincere communion of life and love analogous to marriage insofar as such homosexuals feel incapable of enduring a solitary life . . . No pastoral method can be employed which would give moral justification to these acts on grounds that they would be consonant with the conditions of such people.²⁴

It was also clear to Integrity that the document appealed strictly to a theology of natural law: "According to the objective moral order . . . homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality," that is, the procreative dimension. Thus homosexual acts are deemed "unnatural and a sin against God's creative design of male-female complementarity."²⁵ Integrity identified that the greatest difficulty or cruelty of the text lies in its recognition of homosexuality as an orientation that in most instances is not chosen, yet it denies people with that orientation the possibility of seeking and achieving sexual intimacy in relationships. Celibacy, although recognized as gift in biblical and ecclesial tradition, is imposed upon gays and lesbians in a general or universal way.

To Live in Jesus Christ. Meanwhile U.S. bishops attempted to steer a pastoral course between *Persona Humana* and their growing gay and lesbian flock. In 1976, the bishops attempted to present a more sensitive pastoral document, *To Live in Jesus Christ*,

²⁴Ibid., 139.

²⁵Ibid.

that offered a more balanced view and a language of moral values whose tone was meant to counter the stern, dry, and technical language of Rome.

Some persons find themselves, through no fault of their of their own, to have a homosexual orientation. Homosexuals, like everyone else, should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights. They have a right to respect, friendship and justice. They should have an active role in the Christian community. . . . Homosexual activity, however, as distinguished from homosexual orientation, is morally wrong. . . . Because heterosexuals can usually look forward to marriage, and homosexuals, while their orientation continues, might not, the Christian community should provide them a special degree of pastoral understanding and care.²⁶

Integrity found hope in the very tone of the U.S. bishops, as well as in their attempt to push the envelope of dialogue further. The cut and dry legalistic, act-centered morality and language of the CDF is replaced by one that shows more concern for the struggles and suffering of gays and lesbians who are trying to reconcile their desire for authentic living with their church. We were also affirmed by the attempts of the document to defend the basic human right of gays as well as its denouncing discrimination and prejudice. It was a timely document, given that it came out during the bicentennial year. Integrity welcomed its validation of our need for “respect, friendship and justice” as well as our inclusion in the Christian community, but sadly only as celibates. Yet members recognized that they could not turn back the hands of time. We acknowledged how this changing tide of public opinion in favor of recognizing the human dignity of gays and lesbian had incrementally swelled throughout the 80’s and 90’s, altering even the sensitivities of many Catholics in this country.

The Church and the Homosexual. Also during this time (1976), the Jesuit theologian John J. McNeill authored his groundbreaking work, *The Church and the*

²⁶*To Live in Jesus Christ*, quoted in Fox, 140.

Homosexual. His was one of the first theological works in modern times calling for “a complete revision of traditional church teaching on homosexuality.” This work unmasked erroneous interpretations of scripture and articulated a person and relationship centered morality (vis-a-vis act centered) as it applied to the specific case and context of homosexuals. This was in keeping with the spirit of the wider renewal that had taken place in Catholic morality. McNeill urged the church to evaluate its natural-law-based teaching on homosexuality in light of the insights of the behavioral sciences. He concluded that homosexual relations were morally justifiable if they were authentic expressions of human love. He asserted that “the nature of an authentic love relationship should no longer be viewed for its biological aspect, i.e., the procreative meaning of sexual intercourse and male-female complementarity.” One year after its publication, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith removed the book's *Imprimi Potest* and silenced McNeill, forbidding him to discuss homosexuality in public.²⁷ Frustration and dismay with the institutional church filled McNeill and many gay and lesbian Catholics.

Instead of allowing public debate on homosexuality, the church fell back on its “creeping infallibility . . . claiming that its teaching was based on divine revelation and, therefore, was not open to change, regardless of any new evidence to support that change.”²⁸

Rome feared that McNeill’s work gave a false impression that the magisterium was modifying its teachings on homosexuality; this it was not.

Various Integrity members had read *The Church and the Homosexual*. This was a text that we recommended to students and faculty who were interested in further

²⁷Fox, 141-142

²⁸John J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976, 1993), viii.

exploring the issue. It was viewed by the group as being a groundbreaking contribution to the growing body of gay theological works, and thus we could rejoice in its redeeming potential. The community also affirmed how public and legal attitudes had improved regarding gays and lesbians in the U.S. In hindsight, we saw the fruit of McNeill's liberating work. Some members had heard him speak and lecture since he and his partner had made South Florida their home. He has continued to be involved in Dignity (Ft. Lauderdale) throughout these past years. Unfortunately, we experienced in his story how the desire for reconciliation and dialogue between gays and their church finds itself at the cross of condemnation and silencing.

New Ways Ministry. Sr. Jeannine Gramick and Fr. Bob Nugent founded New Ways Ministry in 1977 despite the censure of John McNeill. Both had been involved in ministry with the gay community of Philadelphia for various years, celebrating home liturgies and providing counseling and spiritual direction. They began to write and speak on the pastoral care of homosexuals. When Nugent in Philadelphia and Gramick in Baltimore, respectively, initiated efforts on behalf of advocating for gay right legislation, they clashed head on with their respective ordinaries. Fox describes the tension:

What was emerging was a conflict between two components of the Catholic faith: a gospel-based call to compassion and a call to uphold traditional church teachings. This conflict was to characterize much of the tension and debate in the church on homosexuality for the next quarter century.²⁹

Nugent and Gramick were opening doors that would soon translate into the establishment of various diocesan ministries to gays and lesbians throughout the country.

²⁹Fox, 137.

For Integrity their work had a particular relevance. Various members had participated in their conferences and had been challenged by their call to minister in justice and compassion to the gay community. Indeed, Integrity as a community owed its existence to this very call since both of its facilitators established the group after participating in the 4th National Symposium held in Pittsburgh in 1997. Our community had benefited from their liberating work.

Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought. This landmark 1977 study on human sexuality commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America further showed pastoral sensitivity and consideration of the issues faced by gay people and their church. Moreover, it did not shy away from identifying some of the significant root causes of our oppression:

. . . there are more than a few questions to be raised, myths to be dispelled, and mistakes to be corrected. Above all, there are matters of justice to be recognized. The alienation, loneliness, and discrimination suffered by homosexuals can be attributed in no little part to the attitudes of the Church. The reasons for these attitudes lie deep within the Judeo-Christian tradition.³⁰

The authors presented their work in the “spirit of the Second Vatican Council” with the intention of helping “beleaguered pastors, priests, counselors and teachers.”³¹ In the section devoted to issues concerning homosexuality, it profoundly questioned traditional teaching:

Homosexuals have the same rights to love, intimacy, and relationships as heterosexuals. Like heterosexuals, they are also bound to strive for the same ideals in their relationships, for creativity and integration. The norms governing the morality of homosexual activity are those that govern all sexual activity, and the norms governing sexual activity are those that govern all human ethical activity.

³⁰Kosnik, et al., 188.

³¹Fox, 143.

The question arises at this point: Are homosexuals, by reason of their condition, denied by God and nature the right enjoyed by heterosexuals to the intimate, sexual expression of love? Is it to be presumed that homosexuals by virtue of their condition, have been guaranteed by God the charism of celibacy? (The data of the behavioral sciences seem to indicate the contrary). Heterosexuals are free to choose or not to choose a life of celibacy. Are homosexuals denied that free choice? Heterosexuals may see continence as a call in life. Must homosexuals see continence as their destiny?³²

It is important to identify how Integrity as a community of faith was strengthened by these diverse affirming theological voices. They were seen as our advocates within the church. We also were conscious of the fact that theologians share in the magisterium of the church. Their challenging voices, inspired by the conciliar mandate in *Gaudium et Spes* to dialogue with the sciences, were sowing the seeds of change within the minds and hearts of many Catholics in the pew and in the hierarchy as well. The conciliar teaching reminded us all of the shared call to ministry within the church and for the world:

. . . the Church requires special help, particularly in our day, when things are changing very rapidly and the ways of thinking are exceedingly various. She must rely on those who live in the world, are versed in different institutions and specialties, and grasp their innermost significance in the eyes of both believers and unbelievers. With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish, and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine Word. In this way, revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and set forth to greater advantage.³³

As facilitators, ministers, and theologians within Integrity, we were informed by this conciliar teaching. In highlighting the contributions made by *Human Sexuality* and emphasizing this text of hope we were clearly making very pastoral choices meant to respond to the concrete needs of our gay ecclesial community. Even though this work had

³² Kosnik, et al., 214.

³³ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 44.

not been well received by many in the hierarchy, it was “affirmed by the majority of mainline contemporary theologians.”³⁴ Most importantly, at an existential level, it helped many members in dealing with their own doubts regarding their sexual issues as well as affirming their relationships. These works further validated the inherent dignity of our members. They helped us to affirm that each of their lives as gays and lesbians was grace and blessing.

The 1980's: Expanding Gay Ministries. The early 1980's were replete with signs of hope for gays in the church. Bishop Joseph Bernardin, speaking on behalf of U.S. bishops at the Synod “On the Family” assembled in Rome in 1980 called on the church to renew its theology of human sexuality due to the increasing gap that existed between the beliefs of the laity, the clergy, and the hierarchy. He reminded the gathering that the church's teachings “are seldom accepted solely on the argument of authority but had to be perceived as reasonable, persuasive and related to the actual experience.”³⁵

John Boswell, medieval historian from Yale, published his monumental work *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* in 1980. Here he showed that the church had created spaces for gays in the past and that in certain periods there had been greater tolerance. He also continued the work of unraveling fundamentalist interpretations of the scriptural texts of condemnation. New Ways Ministry also held its first national symposium (1981) which gave birth to the publishing of *Homosexuality and the Catholic Church*. Later Robert Nugent went on to publish an anthology of pastoral and theological

³⁴Fox, 144.

³⁵Ibid.

articles on homosexuality titled *A Challenge to Love: Gay and Lesbian Catholics in the Church*.³⁶

Various dioceses also began to establish ministries to gays: Baltimore being the first in 1981 and later San Francisco in 1983. San Francisco was the first to establish a comprehensive pastoral plan for ministry. In their pastoral reflections, members of the Senate of Priests of the Archdiocese captured the dilemma of gays and lesbians in their 1983 document: "One of the worst burdens is being outwardly taboo in society and religious circles, while inwardly sensing a rightness about their sexuality."³⁷

The Washington State Catholic Conference led by Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle, also published (1983), *Prejudice against Homosexuals and the Ministry of the Catholic Church*. This document called for "rethinking and development" on the teaching of homosexuality. It also urged the church to continue "ongoing theological research and criticism, with regard to its own theological traditions on homosexuality, none of which is infallibly taught." Archbishop Hunthausen later that year welcomed Dignity members assembled in Seattle for their convention to celebrate mass at St. James Cathedral. Dignity had been founded in 1969 to minister to gay Catholics and counted five thousand members among its ranks, with over one hundred chapters in the country. This welcoming gesture on the part of a kind and gentle pastor

³⁶Ibid., 145.

³⁷Archdiocese of San Francisco Senate of Priest Document (1983), quoted in Nugent and Gramick, *Building Bridges, Gay and Lesbian Reality and the Catholic Church*, 148.

ended in his censure by Rome. He was shortly thereafter stripped of some episcopal authority and a co-adjutor bishop was appointed to oversee the diocese with him.³⁸

Various Integrity members were old enough to remember the hope that was present in certain sectors of the Catholic gay community regarding the increasing openness to gay ministry in the church. This openness was also sadly being brought about by the impact of AIDS in society and in our parishes. Compassion seemed to be the gospel value that was most needed. There was also hope in the young, energetic, and very pastoral ministry of the new pope, John Paul II. His message of human dignity and social justice was seen as possibly allowing room for our inclusion. Yet the disciplining of Archbishop Hunthausen, which violated the very principal of collegiality affirmed by the Council, augured what was to come.³⁹

Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons. In 1986 the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, now under Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as prefect, responded to the pastoral outreach that was taking place with the gay community in the U.S. by Bishops, clergy, and lay pastoral ministers. Most of the letter covered no new ground. Yet the little that was novel had to do with how it spoke of the homosexual orientation *per se*.

Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is more or less a strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder. Therefore special concern and pastoral attention should be directed toward those who have this condition, lest they be led to believe that the living out of this orientation in homosexual activity is a morally acceptable option. It is not.⁴⁰

³⁸Fox, 145.

³⁹Ibid., 146-147.

⁴⁰*Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, quoted in Fox, 148-9.

Integrity members understood how the orientation or inclination now classified as an “objective disorder” further provoked the alienation of Catholic gays and lesbians. Younger members in the group became conscious of the pain experienced by those who had lived through that time. Hope was found in the outcry that came from diverse sectors within the church. The letter had been published in English, not in the usual Latin or Italian and was thus seen as targeting the U.S. John McNeill, who had now been silent for ten years, could no longer remain so. Integrity saw him as speaking for all of us. McNeill acknowledged the positive steps taken by many U.S. bishops to protect the civil and religious rights of gays and lesbians. Yet he recalled that “every time any move was made toward a better understanding and spiritual care of gay people, the Vatican intervened demanding that the Catholic Church in the United States maintain a homophobic stance on gay issues.”

McNeill further expressed his indignation in a letter to Cardinal Ratzinger. His response is another text of hope for it gives voice to our own. “Since most gay people experience their homosexual orientation as part of creation, if they accept this Church teaching, they must see God as sadistically creating them with an intrinsic orientation to evil.” As a homosexual priest and psychotherapist, McNeill fully understood the pain experienced by gays as a result of the church’s alienating attitude and prohibitive language. He acknowledges some further disturbing insights for Integrity.

In my more than twenty years experience of pastoral care with thousands of gay Catholics and other Christians, the gay men most likely to act out their sexual needs in an unsafe, compulsive way and, therefore, to expose themselves to the HIV virus, are precisely those persons who have internalized the self-hatred that their religions impose on them.⁴¹

⁴¹Fox, 150.

McNeill went on to issue a statement to the New York Times and the National Catholic Reporter condemning the Ratzinger letter. This text of hope brought about increased pressure on his Jesuit superiors by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and eventually ended in his excommunication from the Jesuit order.

It was clear to Integrity that the Ratzinger letter was meant to make clear that all homosexual acts are condemned, as were any pastoral approaches or theological arguments that might lead to confusion regarding the issue. The letter was particularly aimed at precisely eliminating the activity of Dignity, being that it was the largest Catholic gay/lesbian organization promoting the said "confusion." Since Dignity did not accept official church teaching, it was barred from using church property for its gatherings. This act literally exiled many Catholics from their church. Dignity responded to the letter by affirming that gay and lesbians also were capable of expressing their sexuality in a physical way that was "loving, life-giving, life-affirming." This was another text of hope for us in Integrity. Dignity members as well as gay/lesbian Catholics and other non-Catholic allies went on to stage protests, sit-ins, and "disruption" of liturgies, such as the "cathedral project," where expelled gays/lesbians would stand during the homilies of Cardinal O'Connor in silent protest. Integrity also viewed these acts of defiance, like the refusal of Vashti, as liberating and hopeful.⁴²

Despite the opposition, Integrity knew that it existed in the very heart of a Catholic campus, as did many other gay Catholic groups throughout the country that had survived this persecution and exile. Our reflections viewed the image of God found in the Declaration to be more a human idol and projection, not the living and true God of

⁴²Ibid., 150-151.

liberation and salvation. The churches, in particular the Roman Catholic, were steeped in a patriarchal tradition guilty of creating this god/idol of heterosexism that promotes a homophobic world view, interpretation of doctrine, and reading of scripture that continues to oppress gays and lesbians. Integrity identified the source of ecclesial oppression as stemming paradoxically from those who most loudly claim to “represent God” and orthodoxy. Their fundamentalist approach to the Bible and church doctrine, their moralistic sexual ethics and legalisms turn the liberating God of the poor, widow, orphan, and alien into a god of wrath, condemnation, and punishment.

The community did not encounter the *Abba* God revealed by Jesus in the gospel, but rather what appears to be an evil, cruel god, who creates people with flawed inclinations and disorders. For gays and lesbians this means that they are then condemned if they do not live a chaste or celibate life. They must renounce the possibility of establishing relationships where intimacy and mutuality in all its forms (i.e., physical, psychological, and spiritual) might be achieved. The experience of the group brought us to assert that the outcome of such a dualistic sexual ethics often results in truncated, self-deprecating lives filled with guilt, isolation, and loneliness, where human maturation and integration are difficult to achieve. These very lives are the ones that are prone to be given over to promiscuity or to dysfunctional behaviors, such as the cases of pedophilia among the clergy seem to indicate. This scenario is more the construct of a sadistic prankster god; this is not the God that Integrity members have come to know and acknowledge.

For many in Integrity who were either in long-term committed relationships or aspired to them, this teaching was viewed as a violation of their lives and their relationships. Their very consciences were compromised. These obvious pastoral

exigencies called us to reflect and emphasize the greater weight and primacy held by the teaching on the dignity of the moral conscience as expressed in the conciliar document on *The Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*. The beauty, depth and spiritual dimension of its language provided for us, yet, another text of hope:

In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil; the voice of conscience can when necessary speak to his heart more specifically: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged.

Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor. In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals and from social relationships. Hence the more that a correct conscience hold sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by objective norms of morality.⁴³

There was also a need for us to clarify for the group how the Vatican text was using a particular kind of philosophical scholastic language in its use of “objectively disordered” and “intrinsically evil.” If anything, the contextualization of this “speech” might minimize its sting. It was important for Integrity to understand that in a classical understanding of Catholic sexual ethics all sexual activity must be ordered toward procreation and the complementarity of the sexes for it to be considered moral or ordered. In this system, all acts such as masturbation, contraception, and same-sex intercourse are not ordered toward procreation, nor do they provide for male-female complementarity. Thus they are deemed “disordered” or “intrinsically evil” acts. Within this narrow natural

⁴³*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* no. 16.

law view of sexual expression, Integrity began to understand the reasoning, archaic and out of touch as it is, behind the use of such language.⁴⁴

The often-quoted clarification of Archbishop Quinn offered Integrity an insight into the philosophical language and categories of thought that are employed here. Although for many gay people it is most often heard when referring to their “illicit” sexual acts, it is not only used in the case of homosexuality, but also has more general implications.

This is philosophical language. The inclination is a disorder because it is directed to an object that is disordered. The inclination and the object are in the same order philosophically. . . . In trying to understand this affirmation, we should avert two things. First, every person has disordered inclinations, for instance, the inclination to rash judgement is disordered, the inclination toward cowardice, the inclination to hypocrisy, these are all disordered inclinations. Consequently, homosexual persons are not the only ones who have disordered inclinations. Second, the letter does not say that the homosexual person is disordered. Speaking of the homosexual person, the letter states that the Church “refuses to consider the person as a ‘heterosexual’ or ‘homosexual’ and insists that every person has a fundamental identity: a creature of God and, by grace, His child and heir to eternal life. . . .” Consequently, the document affirms the spiritual and human dignity of the homosexual person while placing a negative moral judgement on homosexual acts and a negative philosophical judgment on the homosexual inclination or orientation, which it clearly states is not a sin or moral evil.⁴⁵

John Paul II encyclical, *The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis Splendor)*, further elucidates a wider social and systemic context for our understanding of intrinsically sinful acts. Integrity found his message of social justice particularly beneficial in that it moved the question of intrinsically evil “out of the bedroom” and into the challenging social realities that demand urgent attention.

⁴⁴Liuzzi, *With Listening Hearts, Understanding the Voices of Lesbian and Gay Catholics*, 38.

⁴⁵John R. Quinn, “Toward an Understanding of the Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons,” *America* 156 (1987), 94, quoted in Liuzzi, 46.

Reason attests that there are objects of the human act which are by their nature “incapable of being ordered” to God, because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image. These are the acts which, in the Church’s moral tradition, have been termed “intrinsically evil” (*intrinsece malum*): they are such and always per se, in other words on account of their very object and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances. . . . The Second Vatican Council itself, in discussing the respect due to the human person, gives a number of examples of such acts: “Whatever is hostile to life itself, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture and attempts to coerce the spirit; whatever is offensive to human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution and trafficking in women and children; degrading conditions of work which treat laborers as mere instruments of profit, and not as free responsible persons: all these and the like are a disgrace, and so long as they infect human civilization they contaminate those who inflict them more than those who suffer injustice, and they are a negation the honor due the Creator.”⁴⁶

As ministers in Integrity we responded to the very individual struggles and questions of our brothers and sisters in community and indeed our very own. The value of attentive listening and dialogue guided our pastoral praxis. We were inspired by the metaphor employed by New Ways Ministry “the Church teaching, teaching the Church.” In our listening we discovered that the group had benefited from an understanding of the philosophical and moral language used by the church. Nevertheless the alienating sting caused by the language in our contemporary church documents was difficult to justify and minimize. The attempts by the pope and Archbishop Quinn to be inclusive and democratizing of the words “disorder” or “intrinsically evil” still leave us a condemned people in the eyes of God and society. There is no redemption that we can claim by this exercise in semantics.

Integrity challenged the church to abandon outdated Aristotelian Scholastic categories in favor of a new speech of gospel justice and compassion. A new language

⁴⁶Pope John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis Splendor)* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1993), no. 80, quoted in Liuzzi, 39.

and hermeneutic is needed that is inspired by more contemporary philosophical categories such as those found in existentialist phenomenology, humanistic or in a philosophy of language. Furthermore, the group understood that the church desperately needed to renew its sexual ethics by entering into a deeper interdisciplinary conversation with the social and behavioral sciences. This would be in keeping with the imperatives of the Second Vatican Council where the church remains as a viable, credible, inclusive gospel voice that effectively ministers to diverse people with real needs, concerns, and pains.

Observations & Questions that arise in *Heterosexism: An Ethical Challenge*.

This work, authored by Patricia Beattie Jung and Ralph Smith (1993), offered Integrity a text of hope for a new sexual ethic. The stated purpose of this work clearly demonstrates how it serves as an effective tool for Integrity's pastoral mission. Its objective is to promote dialogue in "two worlds of discourse" and ultimately "make a positive biblical and theological case for a new paradigm shift in sexual ethics" which can in turn reform Church teaching. We could not help but to question how this might occur in the polarized, entrenched, and fearful climate which prevails in the church today?⁴⁷ Because this is a work by and for gay people, it recognizes the painful, draining and offensive nature of the debate over the morality of homosexuality. Jung and Smith radically turn this question upside down by presenting heterosexism as a "reasoned system of prejudice" that needs to be critiqued and challenged (e.g. racism and sexism). This in turn

⁴⁷Patricia B. Jung and Ralph Smith, *Heterosexism: An Ethical Challenge* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 2, 8.

will also unmask how straight people might be imperfect, defective, or diseased. In Jung and Smith's "egalitarian principle," heterosexists "carry the burden of proof."⁴⁸

For Integrity, this is a liberating perspective that allows us to survive and transcend the bashing that is present in the ecclesial texts. We found hope in Jung and Smith's attempts to dismantle heterosexism by "challenging the consistency, comprehensiveness, coherence, and fruitfulness of the heterosexist ethos." They effectively modeled for us how a hermeneutic of suspicion is utilized to interpret tradition because of its capacity to unmask the bias inherent in culture and religion. They further unveil the principal bias, the fact that the texts of terror against homosexuality are clustered rather than treated in their particular context.⁴⁹

These are also theological voices that Integrity needed to hear. Paradoxically, this listening stance in ministry, modeled in Integrity, is upheld in the earlier writings of the theologian Joseph Ratzinger. In his reflections on *Dei Verbum* (1968), all the baptized share in the teaching ministry of the church. This retrieved lost word might serve the church as a more excellent paradigm for a conversation with alienated gay and lesbian Catholics.

The explicit emphasis on the ministerial function of the teaching office must be welcomed as warmly as the statement that its primary service is to listen . . . it must constantly take up an attitude of openness toward the sources . . . in the last analysis the whole church shares in the upholding of true teaching.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Ibid., 13, 35.

⁴⁹Ibid., 44.

⁵⁰Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)* Chapter II, quoted in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 1968.

Some Considerations Concerning the Catholic Response to Legislative Proposal on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons. The CDF issued another directive in 1992 (an election year in the U.S.) that was aimed at addressing the growing support for gay rights which had come to the fore as a political issue, at the national and local levels. Various major urban centers and municipalities had passed human rights legislation protecting the civil rights of gays and lesbians against discrimination. *Some Considerations* promoted the notion that supporting gay rights constituted an erosion of “family values,” indeed an attack on the institution of the family itself. Thus, it claims that discrimination against homosexuals is not unjust, and even desired in some instances, especially when involving the employment of teachers or coaches, housing, adoption, foster care, and military service. Catholics were being taught that if they supported hate crimes or human rights legislation protecting gays from discrimination they were *de facto* also supporting the “homosexual lifestyle.” Conservative Catholics hailed the document as a welcomed moral clarification, while progressives viewed it as meddling from the Vatican.⁵¹ Following are some excerpts from the June 1992 letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith considered by Integrity:

Recently, legislation has been proposed in some American states which would make discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation illegal. . . . Such initiatives, even where they seem more directed toward support of basic civil right than condonement of homosexual activity or a homosexual life-style, may in fact have a negative impact on the family and society. . . .

The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law. But the proper reaction to crimes committed against homosexual person should not be to claim that the homosexual condition is not disordered. When such a claim is made and when homosexual activity is consequently condoned, or when civil legislation is introduced to protect behavior to which no one has any conceivable right, neither the church nor society at large

⁵¹Fox, 152.

should be surprised when other distorted notions and practices gain ground, and irrational and violent reactions increase. . . .

Even when the practice of homosexuality may seriously threaten the lives and well being of a large number of people, its advocates remained undeterred and refused to consider the magnitude of risks involved.⁵²

For Integrity this was yet another text of terror. Again many of the older members in the group had been negatively affected by its homophobic message replete with contrived stereotypes and archaic notions of human sexuality. Its callous language and tone further expressed the abysmal distance that existed between Vatican documents and our experience of a more pastoral church in the U.S. The document suggested that hate crimes were on the rise because gays were no longer willing to be silent and invisible. Integrity considered this rationale being similar to “understanding” how women provoke being raped if they dress “provocatively” or perhaps “understanding” why blacks in the south were lynched when they did not “mind their place” in a white dominated society. Our consciousness in Integrity of the growing incidents of hate crimes had been informed not only by the case of Matthew Shepard, but also by the brutal slaying of James Byrd in Texas, a black man who was dragged for miles tied to the back of a pick-up truck.

Another sector of the gay community was perhaps the most impacted by this justification for discrimination, those persons suffering from AIDS. They already felt the double sting of discrimination, being gay and having AIDS. The local church in the U.S. (clergy and laity) had begun to be moved by a spirit of compassionate ministry to AIDS victims and their families. This document was seen by many as attempting to unravel all the good being done on behalf of the gospel. Given the inertia of the Reagan (and the

⁵²Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Some Considerations Concerning the Catholic Response to Legislative Proposal on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons*, quoted in Fox, 153.

Bush) administration during the decade of the 80's and early 90's in addressing the AIDS pandemic as a result of its nexus with homophobia, this document further entrenched deadly stereotypes for the AIDS community.

Integrity found voices and texts of hope amidst the outrage and further alienation caused by this text. These voices were raised boldly and defiantly within the heart of Catholic Church. Dignity's statement denounced the Vatican position as "an affront to the conscience and sensibilities of all persons, homosexual, heterosexual, Christian and non-Christian. It has no place in a society that seeks justice." New Way Ministry called the document "unfortunate" and stated that it expressed "an attempt to impose a unified ideology that appears out of touch at least with contemporary and firsthand awareness of these issues in our society." More poignant still was the statement issued by U.S. Conference of Major Superiors of Men, representing the male religious orders. This text of hope fully captured the breach existing between Catholic priests in the U.S. and the Vatican:

. . . this statement clouds the institutional Church's stated views on justice and human rights. We view this statement as a hindrance to the church leaders of the United States in this most difficult and sensitive area of human living. . . . We are shocked that the statement calls for discrimination against gay men and lesbian women. We find the reasoning for supporting such discrimination to be strained, unconvincing and counterproductive to our statements and actions to support the pastoral needs and personal dignity of such persons. . . . Moreover, we find the argument used to justify discrimination based on stereotypes and falsehoods that are out of touch with modern psychological and sociological understandings of human sexuality.⁵³

Various bishops also raised their voices in support of the gay community despite the very real threat of censure or forced retirement. They saw this not as a "rights" issue,

⁵³Fox, 154.

but a “gospel demand.” Among these were Walter F. Sullivan, bishop of Richmond, Virginia, William Hughes of Covington, Kentucky, Kenneth Untener of Saginaw, Michigan, and Thomas Gumbleton, Auxiliary of Detroit, who defiantly unmasked this text as contrary to gospel values:

This statement is clearly based on an ignorance of the nature of homosexuality. It is also totally in conflict with Gospel values that condemn discrimination and insist that we recognize the dignity inherent in all persons. . . . I cannot in good conscience accept the statement as consistent with the Gospel nor can I justify implementing it.⁵⁴

In March of 1992 these bishops attended the New Ways Ministry symposium in Chicago. Here Gumbleton, ever the generous pastor, acknowledged the gift of the gay community to the church and society: “The church should affirm and bless the gay community for teaching what it means to love.” He praised “the beautiful expressions of love and care within the gay and lesbian community toward those afflicted with AIDS . . . nowhere else is the grace of God as powerfully alive.”⁵⁵

Gay and Lesbian Rights, A Question of Sexual Ethics or Social Justice.

Integrity has further benefited from this text of hope, published in 1996 by the Dominican friar, Richard Peddicord, O.P.; this insightful and scholarly work supports the passage of anti-discriminatory legislation as being within the parameter of Catholic moral teaching. Peddicord convincingly argues that the issue of civil rights for gays and lesbians is a social justice and human rights issue and not a question of sexual ethics. The position taken by the CDF in *Some Considerations Concerning the Catholic Response to Legislative Proposals on Non-Discrimination* “does not take into consideration Catholic

⁵⁴Ibid., 155.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

teaching on human rights.” Its ambiguity reflects that this issue is a clear example of “the principle of development of doctrine.” Integrity could not help but to wonder why there exists such fear in the Vatican regarding this issue, even to the point “where it rewrites the rules of Catholic moral theorizing by sometimes making obligatory the performance of a direct evil without requiring a proportionate reason to justify it.” Peddicord named for us a reality which we clearly understood, that is, the immorality of all acts involving discrimination.⁵⁶

Integrity further identified that the Congregation’s unwillingness to move the conversation beyond the realm of sexual ethics was an attempt to thwart any future passage of effective legislation that guarantees justice in civil rights legislation for gays and lesbians. Various Integrity members were involved with SAVE Dade’s efforts to pass a human rights ordinance for Dade County. They were supported in their struggle by Peddicord’s advocacy on our behalf. Some in our community felt that this issue in the church demanded having open conversations at all levels. It is only in openness that fear can be overcome and stereotypes exposed for what they are. In looking back at the Vatican’s discriminatory efforts in 1992 as it allied itself with the religious right in the U.S., it seemed that the gay emancipatory struggle to achieve equal respect, dignity, and protection under the law would come to a screeching halt. Some members commented that the document sounded more like Falwell or Robertson and not the Catholic Church.

Our community also found hope throughout the years that we gathered in community (1997-2000) in seeing the changes in the “signs of the times.” More

⁵⁶Richard Peddicord, O.P., *Gay and Lesbian Rights, A Question of Sexual Ethics or Social Justice* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996), 140.

communities moved to pass hate crimes and anti-discrimination legislation. Many U.S. bishops who understood Peddicord's argument that this was an issue of justice and not sexual ethics supported these efforts. The Vatican had gone too far in violating American sensibilities regarding justice, discrimination, and equal protection under the law. More recent developments in our law courts and state governments have brought about the repeal of sodomy laws, a greater openness to legislation that would allow for civil unions, and further anti-discrimination policies in the sensitive areas of adoption and foster care. Given the sexual scandals in the Catholic Church, we begin to see why such a "hysterical" need to repress homosexuality exists within the church and society. Our hermeneutical suspicion tells us that this is an issue that is too close for comfort for the institutional church.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. The English version of the new catechism published in 1994 attempted to synthesize the contemporary teaching of the church regarding homosexuality. Integrity found its language and tone more pastoral than that of the prior CDF documents.

The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. They do not choose their homosexual condition; for most of them it is a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.⁵⁷

⁵⁷*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana), 1994, nos. 2357-2358.

Integrity's conversations acknowledged that the Catechism attempted to rectify the excesses of the 1992 directive in regard to its rejection of discrimination. We also acknowledged that it recognized the homosexual orientation as being not chosen. Nevertheless, much to our sadness, it restated the CDF 1986 distinction that the homosexual inclination itself was "objectively disordered."⁵⁸ For many Integrity members who had integrated their sexuality there was no longer trial, cross, or even need for compassion. What abided was a growing sense of pride, personal blessing, and grace experienced in our gay and lesbian lives. Many could claim that after having transcended the pain of being "other" or having felt excluded "they would not want to be anything else but their very gay and lesbian selves."

New Ways Ministry 4th National Symposium. For three days, March 7-9, 1997, New Ways Ministry gathered again for its National Symposium, "the Church teaching, teaching the Church." New Ways Ministry had mustered the moral authority to convene 650 clergy, religious and laity to the city of Pittsburgh. Most significantly, those gathered were not outside the church, but mainly pastoral ministers, superiors of congregations and directors of diverse ministries such as formation, youth, campus, gay and lesbian diocesan offices, family life, etc. The symposium also included the supportive pastoral presence of Bishops Mathew Clark of Rochester who presided and preached at the closing Eucharist and Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit who prophetically called the church to embrace authenticity in a radical way:

I hope that within our Church every gay person, every lesbian person, every bisexual or transgendered person will come out. Because that is how our church is going to truly change. I would say this especially to bishops and priests who say

⁵⁸Ibid., no. 2358.

they are gay but who are afraid to come out. What a loss that is to our church. If they were willing to stand up on Sunday morning in front of the community and say who they really are, our church would much more fully and effectively appreciate the gifts that homosexuals can bring to the whole community of our church and our society as well.⁵⁹

While this approach was considered by many to be naïve, foolhardy, or even disastrous, it challenged the church to embrace a new culture of authenticity. Accepting the kind of truth that Bishop Gumbleton proposes, dispels the institutional denial and internalized homophobia in the church and heals the “schizophrenia” or “neurosis” that plagues us in regard to the issue of homosexuality. Bishop Gumbleton himself had shared his own personal experience with the “coming out” of his brother Dan to his family. The narrative of “My Brother Dan” served as a metaphor for the church’s urgent need to embrace gays and lesbians without the sting of condemnation. By bringing us into the light, the great mercy and compassion of God is revealed. The call of the symposium was bold and clear and both sides heard it. It would eventually bring about very negative consequences for the ministerial lives of Fr. Bob Nugent and Sr. Jeannine Gramick, its founders.

My participation in this New Ways Ministry Symposium, “the church teaching, teaching the Church,” along with my fellow campus minister, Elsie Miranda, contributed in no small way to the creation of the Integrity community on campus. Shortly later that year we would be empowered again by another text of hope that would deeply inform our ministry with Integrity.

Always Our Children. A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers. Given the church’s extensive rhetorical speech

⁵⁹*National Catholic Reporter*, Mar. 21, 1997.

or language of condemnation to this date, great hope was generated by the publication of *Always Our Children*. This statement of the Bishop's Committee on Marriage and Family, released in October of 1997, actually empowered us in the Mission and Ministry Office of the university to advocate for the creation of sanctuary or safe space for the gay community on campus. As campus ministers we were concerned about the situation of various gay students whom we saw in pastoral counseling situations. As residents on campus they experienced the homophobia that is so often prevalent among teens and young adults. We also were motivated to act by our growing consciousness of statistics, referred to earlier, showing the high incidents of suicide, substance abuse, and academic related problems experienced by gay teens. The pastoral imperatives and challenges contained in the document voiced our concerns and provided the framework for a pastoral plan for our ministry with Integrity.

After various years of experiencing such frustration and pain with ecclesial documents (i.e., CDF letters), *Always Our Children* (1st ed.) was refreshing in tone and language. It was a positive, compassionate, pastoral formulation of Catholic teaching that was also more informed by the behavioral and social sciences. It emphasized the affirmative word or speech in previous CDF and bishop's statements and attempted to steer away from condemnatory or inflammatory philosophical scholastic categories such as "disorder" or "intrinsically evil." Although the document did not "endorse the homosexual lifestyle," it affirmed gays/lesbians and their families in pastoral ways that had not been articulated in past magisterial documents.

This pastoral language and tone is evident in the following excerpts from the document. Parents are called to "accept and love your child as a gift of God." The letter

profoundly recognizes that there is a further gift for the family: “becoming more honest, respectful, and supportive.” It reiterates that homosexual orientation is not freely chosen and therefore cannot be considered sinful. We are invited us to “concentrate on the person, not on the homosexual orientation itself.” Most importantly, it respects fully the dignity of the person and their “freedom to choose or refuse therapy directed toward changing the homosexual orientation.” There is a clear recognition that “Given the present state of medical and psychological knowledge, there is no guarantee that such therapy will succeed . . . there may be no obligation to undertake it.” Parents are assured that “God does not love someone any less simply because he or she is homosexual. . . . Every person has an inherent dignity because he or she is create in God’s image” We are further reminded that “nothing in the Bible or in Catholic teaching can be used to justify prejudicial or discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.”⁶⁰

As facilitators and ministers in Integrity, we were most empowered by its call to the Christian community to “offer its homosexual sisters and brothers understanding and pastoral care.” Most importantly, the document offered various pastoral recommendations to church ministers which we attempted to implement in our ministry with Integrity:

- 1) Be available with “pastoral help, spiritual guidance, and prayer.”
- 2) Welcome marginated “homosexuals into the faith community without stereotyping and condemning.”
- 3) “Learn more about homosexuality and Church teaching so that the preaching, teaching, and counseling are more informed and effective.”
- 4) “Use the words homosexual, gay, and lesbian in honest and accurate ways when speaking publicly.”

⁶⁰*Always Our Children*, 1, 5, 6, 7, 10.

- 5) "Maintain a list of agencies, community groups, and counselors" as referral resources.
- 6) "Help to establish support groups for parents and family members."
- 7) "Learn about HIV/AIDS so you will be more informed and compassionate in your ministries" and celebrate liturgies commemorating World AIDS Day.⁶¹

Clearly, *Always our Children* provided the mandate and framework for the establishment and the continuation of the Integrity community on campus. In its concluding remarks, the document captures the sadness involved in the experience of exodus and exile experienced by gays and lesbians who have abandoned their families and their church. Our pastoral efforts precisely were focused on welcoming back, creating safe-space, healing and reconciling in the spirit of *Always Our Children*: "Though at times you may feel discouraged, hurt, or angry, do not walk away from your families, from the Christian community, from all those who love you. In you God's loved is revealed. You are always our children."⁶²

Needless to say, the document caused elation among progressive Catholics, especially those in ministry with the gay and lesbian community at a diocesan and national level (e.g., Dignity, New Ways Ministry, etc.). Yet it also provoked immediate protests from a vociferous minority of clergy and laity who called for its retraction. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith quickly pulled the document and forced the Bishops Committee on the Family to revise the text. The CDF wanted the committee to clarify and give emphasis to all that which it intentionally did not desire to highlight in the first place (i.e., objective disordered inclinations, intrinsically evil homosexual acts, a

⁶¹Ibid., 9, 11-12.

⁶²Ibid., 13.

life of chastity and celibacy, etc.). The committee and the CDF reached a compromise and a third revised edition was published in June 1998 with the most offensive language appearing in the footnotes of the text and not the main body.

Despite the unrelenting censure by the CDF and violation of the principles of collegiality and subsidiarity espoused by the council, the pastoral work envisioned by *Always Our Children* with gays, lesbians and their families continues and flourishes in many places. Beyond the confines of our ministry with Integrity on campus, the letter also generated our involvement with the *Always Our Children Archdiocesan Task Force*. This task force of the Archdiocese of Miami sponsored conversations and retreats with gays, lesbians, and their parents. These encounters often transformed pain and brought profound healing and reconciliation within individuals, within families and with the church. Ultimately, the struggle is over whether truth and love, as fundamental gospel values and virtues, can prevail over hatred, ignorance, bigotry, and violence and whether it can bring about the reformation of the church in this critical area. *Always Our Children* concludes with the following word from scripture, showing its most authentic intent in publishing this pastoral message, despite the imposed changes by the CDF: "There is no fear in love . . . perfect love drives out fear." (1 Jn 4:18, NAB)⁶³

Beyond Ecclesial Documents: Finding New Language and Community

Integrity's conversations concurred that the hypocritical and duplicitous stance adopted by some members of the Catholic hierarchy, who influence official magisterial teaching, clearly demonstrated the significant level of internalized homophobia present

⁶³Ibid.

within the institutional church. Bob Nugent says, "This homophobia is termed 'internalized' because gay and lesbian people have often internalized societal and religious judgements about their sexuality."⁶⁴ Both historical works of retrieval by John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* and *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-modern Europe* provided ample evidence regarding the not too insignificant presence of people with homoerotic tendencies who have lived, suffered and thrived in the heart of the church throughout the ages. People with homoerotic tendencies have been historically present in the clergy, religious life, and the hierarchy at the highest levels, most often hiding "in closets." Moreover, the number of cases of illicit [homo]sexual activity involving religious, priests and bishops with young men and boys in recent years has exposed this reality in the church. The presence of homosexual males within the clergy and religious life has been revealed by the very fact that the significant amount of these cases often do not involve children, that is pederasty or pedophilia properly understood, but rather predominantly involves young men in their teens, that is epebophilia. As Mark Jordan notes this kind of "pedophilia points in fact to homosexuality."⁶⁵

Integrity presents some valid and poignant questions that arise from its own hermeneutic of suspicion: Why the corporate projection in ecclesial texts? Why such fear by the Catholic Church over gays and lesbians coming out? Why such lack of humility and arrogance in Church teaching on homosexuality? Why an ecclesial don't ask don't tell policy? Why the faith/science split in this issue? Why is there such a preoccupation on the part of the hierarchy with this issue?

⁶⁴Nugent, "Homophobia and Campus Ministry," 7

⁶⁵Jordan, 94.

Integrity believed that the lack of honesty and unwillingness to dialogue with Catholic gays and lesbians and the sciences in dealing with the critical personal and collective issue causes the dysfunctional behavior to continue in this most dysfunctional ecclesial family. Outside sources are not needed to substantiate this fact; all that is needed is an evaluation of how the institutional church has dealt with theological or ecclesial dissent in the cases involving: silenced theologians, priestly celibacy, women in ministry, etc. In all these cases the reaction on the part of Rome has been the same: to mute and silence all dialogue. The church at an institutional, hierarchical level has created a culture that is steeped in patriarchy, androcentrism, homophobia, and heterosexism. Although no longer called the Holy Office of the Inquisition, it is not forgotten that the CDF is still quartered in the *Palazzo dell Sant'Ufficio*. It still exercises its authority through coercion, intimidation, censures, and suspensions. It cares little for magisterial collegiality which is supposedly shared with local bishops, theologians, pastors, and the entire People of God. Its arrogance and heavy-handed *modus operandi* has been felt in no small way by gays and lesbians and those within the church and the academy who have defended our cause.

A Critique of Hope: *The Silence of Sodom*. Mark Jordan, noted Professor of Religion at Emory University, in his controversial work *The Silence of Sodom, Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* names and unmask for us in Integrity a culture of “denial and deceit” operating within ecclesial structures of dominance. These rule over the “empire of closets” that is the contemporary Catholic Church.⁶⁶

A poignant illustration of how authority is exercised in this “empire” came on July 13, 1999 when the CDF, after years of investigating the founders of New Ways Ministry,

⁶⁶Jordan, 89.

Sr. Jeannine Gramick and Fr. Bob Nugent, announced that they were “permanently prohibited from any pastoral work involving homosexual persons.” Their pastoral approach was evaluated by the CDF as containing “ambiguities and errors” which had “caused confusion among the Catholic people.” Jordan reminds us that: “dissent from the teachings of homosexuality is now silenced with blunt claims of authority.” Furthermore, as with the forced revision of *Always Our Children*, what matters most to gay and lesbian Catholics is how this “affects the possibilities of sustained dissent from the official condemnations of ‘homosexual action’ and the official stigmatization of ‘homosexual propensity’.”⁶⁷

Integrity found that the significant contribution made by the *Silence of Sodom* lies in that it unmasks the “rhetorical effects” of the “repetitive official discourses” about homosexuality. One obvious effect is that we are kept busy, spending our energy, attempting to explain over and again the reasons why the documents are unscriptural, self-contradictory or unscientific. This has the purpose of sidetracking us from achieving alternate forms of community.⁶⁸ As Mary Hunt says, “That’s the sinister genius of Roman Catholicism: to prevent lesbians and gay people from being church, so that we are always reacting to something that we are not a part of in an integral and intimate way.”⁶⁹

Another rhetorical effect is to “keep reinforcing certain categories” when speaking about homosexuality. Jordan reminds that “repetition is a powerful way of teaching language.” The motivation that he identifies is that this authoritative repetition “limits our

⁶⁷Ibid., 48-49.

⁶⁸Ibid., 49.

⁶⁹Mary Hunt, quoted in Jordan, 49-50.

response in another language, a new language.” The most dangerous effect is to “convince us that the talk might lead to reform.” Thus Jordan urges us to respond to the “rhetorical devices not with more repetitions of the arguments about objective disorders or procreation and unity, but with a more realistic analysis of the relations of doctrine to power in Catholic ‘teaching’ on homosexuality.”⁷⁰ His analysis is that same-sex desire “overturns one of the most important social allocations of power: that of gender divisions.” But even more insidious is that homosexuality is identified as being “important in Catholic moral theology because it has been intimately connected to the exercise of power in the construction of priestly lives.”⁷¹

Jordan notes that the work of A.W. Richard Sipe, priest and psychotherapist, has been valuable in uncovering that an estimated half of the total population of priests in the American church is homosexual.⁷² Unfortunately, the recent scandals involving clerical pedophilia also gives us further insight as to hierarchy’s preoccupation with homosexuality. The “empire of closets” with its culture of secrecy, cover-up, and denial is being exposed, sometimes on a daily basis in the media. The billions paid in settlements to victims, under the table and as a result of public legal proceedings, continue to ravage the coffers of dioceses throughout the country. This dualistic ecclesial culture of deceit and denial has produced pain, suffering, and much dysfunction within the Body of Christ.⁷³

⁷⁰Jordan, 50.

⁷¹Ibid., 82.

⁷²Ibid., 105.

⁷³Ibid., 94-98.

These painful experiences have radically eroded the credibility of the church and has alienated and hurt its most vulnerable members. For all its attempts to silence and condemn, our homoerotic desires and relationships remain. Mark Jordan also names the challenge and the gift that we contribute by our own very contextual theology:

We ought to be engaged not in endless disputes with official theologies, but in reconceiving their terms. Before we can begin an argumentative theology of homoerotic life, we need what traditions have called a 'negative' theology of it. We must criticize and perhaps surrender our central terms, our favorite metaphors, and our paradigms for argument. . . . We should see the theological controversy over homosexuality for what it is: a privileged opportunity to rethink the genres of moral theology altogether. Our lives can challenge not just the principle that sex has to be procreative, but the assumption that moral theology has to be founded upon such principles.

Guy Hocquenghem once wrote, in a utopian moment: "Our homosexuality is not a revolutionary value that must be extended to the whole world, but a permanent situation of putting into question." We might want to hope that a queer Catholic theology would view its objects and itself as permanent questioning. It could thus be a reminder of the modesty, the ingenuity, the skepticism, and the linguistic discipline that all Christian thinking is supposed to exhibit so far as it professes the venerable ideals of negative theology.⁷⁴

In the final analysis the vision and hope that Jordan holds is what Integrity experienced in being a "community that is a school for new speech." Despite the fear and condemnation we gathered to affirm and "member" ourselves in a gay and lesbian ecclesial community where a new language was spoken about our "erotic and sacramental lives." In dealing with the ecclesial texts of terror and hope we found ourselves participating in what Comstock identifies as the movement that "transforms pain and suffering." The self-hatred, guilt, fear, and hiding gives way to the knowing of yourself as gay, lesbian, graced, called, gifted, and sacramental, created in the "image and likeness of God."

⁷⁴Ibid., 259-260.

This experience of paschal mystery for gay people is a personal and communal movement from death to new life. With the assistance of the medical and scientific community we came to the realization that our “homosexual identity is a variant form of human psychosexual development within the range of healthy psychological functioning.”⁷⁵ Moreover our being gay is, as Nugent and Gramick suggest, a profoundly vocational reality; its “authentic humanity and Christian living.”⁷⁶ The reality and language of “disorder” no longer had any resonance, power, or hold over us. As Seubert says, “Until the homosexual experience is truthfully spoken and truthfully heard, the disorder will not be homosexuality, but the inability of the church [and society] to stand in truth, endure it and live from it.”⁷⁷

Conclusion

In this liberating reflection grounded in the experience of oppression suffered by gays and lesbians in Integrity, I have attempted to unmask the systemic evils of homophobia, patriarchy, and heterosexism inherent in our Judeo-Christian culture and in the Roman Catholic ecclesial texts that condemn us. Integrity’s (and my own) critique of the church’s magisterial teaching regarding the question of homosexuality has been undertaken from the inside, out of love for the church, and with a profound sense of catholicity which permeated our community. Our wrestling with the church’s condemnation and labeling of gays and lesbians as people possessing “objectively

⁷⁵Nugent and Gramick, 149.

⁷⁶Ibid., 154.

⁷⁷Seubert, quoted in Nugent and Gramick, *Building Bridges*, 152.

disordered inclinations” and whose acts are “intrinsically evil” has been a painful process throughout, but it has been dealt with and transcended in order for healing to occur.

Moreover, I have attempted to leave this institutional “rhetorical repetitive speech” behind so that it might become truly a non-issue. We have not been hindered from claiming our tradition and our rightful place in the church in open and liberating ways, not in closets of repression. We also have looked for and found various inspired texts of hope filled with new images of God, new paradigms, metaphors, ethics, and language that liberate and assist gays and lesbians in reclaiming a new spirituality. This spirituality is rooted in the experience of a contextual gay community that is theological, biblical and ecclesial and it is informed by the dream and vision of the kingdom that keeps the struggle and hope alive:

Only when lesbian and gay persons have been accorded full and equal respect and dignity as human beings in society and in the church so they are no longer categorized as inferior insiders or outsiders, will the Christian community be able to say that the god of heterosexism has been eradicated. Only when there is no societal, economic, or religious prejudice felt by individual because of his or her sexual orientation, gender, color, religious, or political beliefs, can the church claim that humankind is beginning to feel on this earth the freedom of the daughters and sons of God.⁷⁸

We rejoice in the prophetic words of Bob Nugent, when writing “Homophobia and Campus Ministry” in 1992. There he recognizes what has now come to pass even more fully. “Fortunately three of society’s most powerful institutions, law, medicine, and religion, have begun to revise their former negative attitudes towards homosexual people,

⁷⁸Nugent and Gramick, *Building Bridges*, 196.

and this has helped in the struggle to eradicate homophobia and its destructive impact on individuals and communities.”⁷⁹

In the course of a decade we have found hope as gay people in the passage of anti-discrimination or hate crimes laws, the recognition of same-sex partner benefits in the work place, the rulings by the Supreme Court against state sodomy laws, and the recognition by some states of same-sex civil unions. We cannot lose hope that these humanizing sensitivities will impact the Catholic Church also through its dialogical relationship with the culture. There are no signs yet from the top, but there is plenty of hope on the bottom. Elsie Miranda, my colleague in ministry with Integrity, reflects this hope: “Healing occurs when we look to the cross and finally are able to forgive, in the same discerning or critical way that Jesus forgave: ‘Father forgive them for they know not what they do’.”

In the following chapter we will look at some of Integrity’s rites, liturgies, scripture sharing, and prayer services in order to arrive at some description of our community’s spirituality. This new speech with God and one another is free from all repetitive rhetorical ecclesial language about us. It is truly Integrity’s own contextual language of spirituality clearly revealed in our contextual prayer texts or *ordos* that were created to meet the pastoral needs of our community.

⁷⁹Nugent, “Homophobia in Campus Ministry,” 5.

CHAPTER SIX
INTEGRITY'S PRAYER TEXTS:
A SPIRITUALITY OF GAY LIBERATION

Introduction

This final chapter of the PRM is concerned with the spirituality of our Integrity community that was established as a support group for gays and lesbians on a Catholic university campus. Our mission and pastoral objectives were to facilitate the transformation that occurs when Church ministers implement the suggestions found in *Always Our Children*: to be available and welcoming of gays and lesbians; to be informed in preaching, teaching, and counseling; to speak publicly using the words gay and lesbian in honest and accurate ways; to create support groups; and to provide resources, lists of agencies, groups, and counselors to assist the homosexual person.

Since our Integrity community gathered for prayer and reflection bimonthly, it was imperative that the leaders have access to models of prayer, ritual, and biblical reflection that could assure its sustainability. These prayer texts had to be capable of reconnecting and reconciling gays with their Christian tradition and spiritual heritage which calls them to act as agents of social and ecclesial transformation.

My participation in Integrity as co-minister, convener, theological resource person, and participant-observer informed how the community theologized, prayed, and shared its faith. Our ministry facilitated and convened a community of reflection and

prayer that sought to nourish and sustain the Christian spiritual life. It is my conviction that without a Christian ecclesial spirituality, the gay emancipatory process is devoid of depth, meaning, and ethical integrity.

That is why in this concluding chapter I draw from various selected prayer texts used in Integrity in order to describe our particular spirituality which is rooted in gay theology. These texts were developed by Elsie Miranda (Integrity's co-minister) and me as a response to the expressed and perceived needs of our members. As Mark Jordan proposes, they attempt to formulate a "new speech" or discourse with and about God and one another that is free from all repetitive rhetorical ecclesial language about us.

What is revealed in these texts is Integrity's own contextual language of spirituality clearly articulated in our contextual prayer texts that were created to meet the pastoral needs of our community. In naming Integrity's spirituality in a broad, general way, I have selected five themes or threads which are woven throughout our prayer texts that reinterpret and reappropriate traditional categories in theology and spirituality:

- 1) A Spirituality of the "Radical Outness": The Gay Paschal Mystery
- 2) A Spirituality of Autonomy: A Gay Credo and Approach to Scripture, the Church and God
- 3) A Spirituality of *Communio* in Gay Relationships
- 4) A Spirituality of New Words and Speech
- 5) Gay Sacramentality: An Embodied Spirituality of Solidarity.

These themes in spirituality, present in our prayer texts, were informed by the gay theologies articulated in the previous chapters and as such serve to formulate a synthesis of this thesis-project.

Theological and Spiritual Themes: A Gay Interpretation

A Spirituality of “Radical Outness”: The Gay Paschal Mystery. The Integrity community’s gay reading of Scriptures engages the pivotal liberating events of the “Exodus and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus which overcome and transform pain, suffering and death.” This experience of paschal mystery in our gay lives finds expression our “coming out” process, which constitutes the *locus theologicus* for our gay theology and spirituality. It is at this fundamental core where Comstock unveils for Integrity a gay theology and spirituality that is gift to the wider theological, ecclesial, and spiritual discourse and praxis. Gays fully “out” in the church contribute to the building of the Body of Christ in its celebration of spiritualities of diversity and catholicity.

The church or any community is a dead nonresurrected body without us . . . our experience is vital and valuable for the church to know its mission of transforming pain and suffering . . . without us the church is partial.¹

We are essential to the ecclesial project of building God’s Kingdom or commonwealth of love, justice, and peace. Ultimately, the foundational question posed is: “How can we ever survive or how can we live as full human beings without lesbians and gay men in the church?”² This leads us to embrace and affirm the truth about ourselves as graced and gifted people.

A Spirituality of Autonomy: A Gay Credo and Approach to Scripture, the Church, and God. Integrity’s prayer texts demonstrate that we “do not seek approval from Scripture or tradition,” but rather “seek guidance” from them in order to “interpret, shape, and change without fear to critique those parts of Scripture and tradition that condemn gays.” Integrity’s spirituality is nourished by its seeking to find in Scripture and

¹Comstock, 11, 19.

in our past affirming words that have been obscured by traditional interpretations. Here our theological method and spirituality is free to employ retrieval and revision for the sake of the obtaining the total liberation of gays and lesbians. The paradigm or model out of which we engage scripture, Jesus, and tradition is that of *friend* rather than paternal authority to which we owe blind obedience and loyalty.³

Integrity's gay reading and spirituality of the Exodus and Jesus events radically condemns, rejects, and nullifies the normativity of the gay texts of terror that sanction homoerotic acts in Scripture (i.e., Lev 18:22, 20:13; Gen 19; Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:9-10). This is possible, precisely because these saving events inspire spirituality based on love and liberation from all forms of oppression. Thus the biases of the biblical and ecclesial texts, patriarchy, and heterosexism are unmasked and criticized because ultimately they intend our destruction in this life and the next.

A gay understanding of sin is precisely rooted in identifying the systems of oppression at work in our lives. Sin is thus experienced as "the violation of mutuality and reciprocity, typically in the form of dominance and submission. . . . We recognize sin as the institutionalized denial of equal opportunity, participation, and representation in the social order."⁴

Integrity members begin to find "salvation as embodying [our] deepest knowledge" as a gay people. We affirm that we are "most godlike when we share with others that which ultimately concerns us." Meaning, theological reflection, spirituality and salvation occurs as a result of a gay personal narrative where God is encountered in

²Ibid., 22.

³Ibid., 4,11.

⁴Ibid., 130.

mutuality, as well as in a gay redefinition of saving scripture and tradition which broaden the horizon of the classical texts, norms, and paradigms.⁵

Our gay experience of relationships allows us to frame and reinterpret the person of God as “mutuality and reciprocity in our relationships, the compelling and transforming power that brings together, reconciles, and creates us.” This is the image of God that is celebrated in unveiled in Integrity’s prayer texts. This image of God is informed also by our gay reading and spirituality of the narratives of Jonathan and David, the Song of Songs, and Jesus’ commandment of love where “God is the-loving-of-the-other-as-you-want-to-be-loved that creates a community in which the gifts and talents of all are welcome, developed, considered special.”⁶

A Spirituality of Communion in Gay Relationships. Our Integrity prayer texts are rooted in this gay affirmation of faith and understanding of God, which necessarily speaks to the ethical imperative that guide our living in gay relationships, as being grounded in mutuality, reciprocity, and companionship. Gay relationships, like all intimate and loving relationships, mirror and make present God’s love among his people. Here the exercise of non-mutual power in relationships is viewed as sin, oppressive and dehumanizing.

Salvation is to protest and resist the exercise of nonmutual power, nonreciprocal power; to replace unjust relationship with partnership, cooperation, sharing, and exchange; to include people and to recognize differences as a resource building meaningful relationships rather than as the basis for the unequal distribution of power.⁷

⁵Ibid., 105, 108.

⁶Ibid., 127, 129.

⁷Ibid., 124.

The church's requirement of chastity or celibacy for gay people in relationships is also viewed as dehumanizing: "the real sin, which is preventing people from becoming fully human, from living as fully sexual, affectional, active humans."⁸ We find solace and comfort in the paradigms of same-sex love and friendship found in scripture such as Jonathan and David and Ruth and Naomi. As gay people, we too experience covenanted relationships that are based on trust, commitment, and equality. These have the potential to transform pain, bring about healing, and reconciliation in our lives. Ultimately, they can be creative, life-giving, and capable of offering us the experience of communion as we encounter our partners in love.

A Gay Spirituality of New Words and Speech. Integrity prayer texts are filled with words about gay people that mirror the paradigm of the "Word made flesh" in the prologue of John's gospel. What we claim for ourselves are words and a language that dispels the darkness of falsehood regarding who we are. Our words shed "true light, which enlightens everyone" (Jn 1:9, NAB). They claim our truth and our grace as gay and lesbian children of God. Most importantly, our prayer texts are freed of the "rhetorical effects" of the "repetitive official discourses" about homosexuality. They do not buy into or "keep reinforcing certain categories" when speaking about homosexuality. In fact, these categories are transcended and left behind as obsolete and empty words, which we do not recognize. If "repetition is a powerful way of teaching language," then Integrity's prayer texts reveal a language of spirituality that affirms our being as unique, loved, graced, and called. They are liberated from all authoritative repetition that "limits

⁸Ibid., 131.

our response in another language, a new language” of gay and lesbian pride that builds the body of Christ.⁹

Gay Sacramentality: An Embodied Spirituality of Solidarity. Integrity’s prayer texts and spirituality is informed by Cleaver who reminds us that it is in solidarity where liberation from the divisions of gender, race, religion, and class is found. Ours is a theology and spirituality of solidarity that integrates the needs of our bodies and celebrates this reality at the “Holy Table” where Christ is recognized in the breaking of bread. Cleaver retrieves and reappropriates for Integrity the role of liturgy and popular religiosity as the “need for each other and our bodies.” Integrity and its prayer texts celebrate the body as the place where “we learn about ourselves.” This dispels the kind of disembodied dualism that has tainted sacramentology, sexual ethics, and Catholic theology and spirituality in general. Our Catholic sacramental theological tradition informs our viewing of liturgy and popular devotions as ritual actions that are done by our bodies. Therefore, they have tremendous liberating potential when celebrated by gays and lesbians. This is precisely the spiritual experience that our prayer texts facilitated.¹⁰

Integrity critiques the church for dismissing our body knowledge as hedonistic. Our witness is as dismissed as the witness of Mary at the tomb: completely untrustworthy. Gays stand in truth as outsiders, marginal people, acting upon what we hear, hoping that our discipleship will break down the fears that prevent the insiders in the church institution from “coming out” of their own confining, imprisoning tombs. Jesus, in encountering Lazarus, his dead friend, bids that the stone be removed so that he

⁹Jordan, 49-50.

¹⁰Cleaver, 116.

might “come out!” – unbound. This is the greatest testament to the power that embodied love has in conquering death. “Once this bodily presence, the ‘sacrament’ of the bond of love is restored, Lazarus’ life is restored, in a moment of unbinding and setting free.”

This is precisely why Integrity’s spirituality and prayer texts challenge gays and lesbians:

... look hard at the untidiness of our passions for one another. In the breaking of bread we do away with the classical dualisms and touch the body of the lord. Jesus has a body and eats, even in the resurrection, and he tells us to touch it. We cannot spirit God’s body away to avoid the political implications of the incarnation, and we cannot avoid it because we feel squeamish about one man touching another. We must face Jesus’ body. Only then, when we have touched his body and eaten with him, can we theologize. And we must theologize.¹¹

This has been the theological and spiritual experience of our Integrity community. It attests to the power that lies in a gay reappropriation of ritual and prayer. The members in the community came alive when they were able to celebrate, worship, pray, sing, reflect on the word, and theologize as openly gay and lesbian persons.

We are like the disciples on the road to Emmaus called to “create a community of lovers.” Integrity invited gay people to celebrate, through the liturgy, the feasts, memorials, and commemorations that bring life and pride to the experience of being gay. Our commitment to the church lead us, as ministers, to pronounce a word of caution to gays and lesbians who might be tempted to form a new “sect,” since this act would violate the very principal of solidarity. Our stance is to remain within as a prophetic voice for change within the church; we seek ecclesial conversion and transformation. “Our exile is one of our tools; it offers us the critical distance that we need to resurrect the whole church.” The exile of gays is not permanent. We wait in hope for a day where our

¹¹Ibid., 129.

gifts will be fully accepted at the table where Jesus is truly present in the breaking of the bread.¹²

Integrity's Prayer Texts: Paradigms for Gay Spirituality

In this following section various prayer texts from the Integrity community are included as practical models or specific applications of the themes in gay theology and spirituality articulated above. They concretely demonstrate how we fostered a gay spirituality of outness, autonomy, communion in relationships, language, and sacramentality through our prayer, songs, scripture, and reflections. These prayer texts further serve as models or paradigms for continued ministry to gay and lesbian students, faculty, and staff at Barry University. They meet the objectives of this Pastoral Resource Manual, as they are an expression of liberating forms of prayer, which reconcile and welcome our alienated gay brothers and lesbian sisters.

¹²Ibid., 137.

INTEGRITY

*Prayer & conversation for the Gay / Lesbian
community at Barry University.*

*Come to a safe place to listen, to share, or to simply be.
Tuesday, February 10th, from 4pm to 5:15pm in the
sanctuary of the Cor Jesu Chapel*

Sponsored by: Barry University, Office of Mission & Ministry; ext. 3650

Song: *Hands* by Jewel

Opening Prayer: God is present among us,
 In our bodies breathing together
 In our hearts beating, in our music playing
 In our fire burning, in the water flowing, in the midnight stars
 In our brother's courage, in our sister's love, in our lives embracing.
 God is present among us!

Courageous One, you have loved us since you breathed life into us.
Hear our voices this day as we cry unto you. As members of a sexual minority,
we are denied the very life you gave us.

By Zalmon Sherwood

Reflection: How can *Integrity* grow to meet the needs of the Barry Community?

How can we provide greater sanctuary for our own lives and for the
Gay / Lesbian community here?

Conversation :

Closing Prayer:
O Creator God,
we glorify your name
and enjoy you forever,
you have immersed us in your world
and baptized us with your Spirit.

We see your beauty reflected
in our community and in your creation:
We enjoy you forever.

We feel your love in the warmth of sun,
the smiles of strangers,
the hugs of friends,
the bodies of lovers:
We enjoy you forever.

We taste your refreshment
Of sleep, of breath, of food and drink:
We enjoy you forever.

We smell your fragrance
of flower and field,
of flesh and flavor:
We enjoy you forever.

O Creator, our Creator,
we glorify your name
And enjoy you forever. Alleluia!

Closing Song:

Gesture of Peace

Welcome and Introductions

Opening song of reflection: *How Can Anyone*

How can anyone ever tell you,
you are anything less than beautiful?
How can anyone ever tell you,
you are less than whole?
How can anyone fail to mention,
that your loving is a miracle.
How deeply your connected to my soul.

Reading: Romans 8: 31 - 39 *God's Love In Christ, Jesus*

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? God who did not withhold God's own son, but gave him up for all of us, will God not with Jesus also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all

day long;
we are accounted like sheep to be slaughtered."

No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Word of God

Reflection on the Word:

Quiet time:

How is God calling you "home" again?
What does God say to you in your heart?

General Sharing on song, reading or reflection:

Shared Prayers of petition: God of Love, be with us

Anointing:
Nothing can separate you from the love of God



Closing song: *Peace Be With You* by Shatina

Peace be with you, oh my dear one.
Peace be with you, precious child.
Peace be with you, oh my dear one.
Peace be with you, precious child.

Angels hover all about you,
they protect you night and day.
Angels hover all about you;
they will guide you on your way.

God is with you, oh my dear one.
God is with you, precious child.
God is with you, oh my dear one.
God is with you, precious child.

You are blessed and you are holy,
precious gift God gave to me.
You are blessed and you are holy,
You're an angel I can see.

Peace be with you, oh my dear one.
Peace be with you, precious child.
Peace be with you, oh my dear one.
Peace be with you, precious child

INTEGRITY

Happy Valentines Day!

Reading for reflection & conversation:

"Love Never Ends;
 as for prophesies, they will pass away;
 as for tongues, they will cease;
 as for knowledge, it will pass away.

So faith, hope and love abide, these three;
 But the greatest of these is love." *1 Corinthians 13*

Love making God,
 God who is love,
 this scripture puts everything into perspective.

We struggle to be prophets,
 to speak meaningfully,
 to gain knowledge,
 but our efforts must always be surpassed,
 as "new occasions teach new duties."

We struggle to keep faith and hope alive,
 yet faith and hope are forever
 a part of the human experience.

Our most important, valuable and eternal struggle
 is to give and to receive love.
 may we recognize your eternal presence
 in all that is done for love
 and give you thanks.
 Amen.

Welcome and Introductions



Song: "Everybody Hurts" -- by R.E.M.

Opening Prayer:

God, from whose womb we are born and reborn,
 you call us to be ourselves,
 your children,
 your image and essence,
 your beauty.

Lead us toward the integrity and harmony
 you enjoy in heaven and earth,
 that we may share your commonwealth,
 grace-fully-empowered.

Amen.

Conversation: Dr. Jay Asher: *Suicide Among Gays & Lesbians*

Elsie & Frank: *"Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers"*
 (National Conference of Catholic Bishop's Committee on Marriage and Family).

Closing Prayer:

Divine Lover,
 voices other than my own
 dictate what sin is to me.
 Yet what they label "sin"
 my reason and my feelings
 do not label so.

O Holy Lover,
 bolster my self-trust,
 increase my confidence in my perspective,
 help me listen to the heart and mind
 you have given me
 as I follow the guidance of your Spirit,
 as I learn from the Embodiment
 of your love for me.

Amen.

Song: "What the Day Brings" -- by Brad

Gesture of Peace

Welcome and Introductions



Song: Don't Let the Sun Go Down On Me
by Elton John

Opening Prayer & Reading: Isaiah 10:20 - 21, 24

On that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on the one who struck them, but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.

Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts: O my people, who live in Zion, do not be afraid.

Reflection: A Celebration of Lesbian and Gay Pride from *Equal Rites*

One: Gay and Lesbian people have survived thousands of years of brutality and persecution. We have been hunted, burned, tortured, ex-communicated and labeled as heretics, sinners, and demon-possessed.

All: Still we have survived. How is that possible?

One: We survive because we share a common story and we gain strength from that story. One generation tells the next. We cannot be destroyed unless they make us forget who we are.

All: Then let us not forget. Let us tell our stories and not leave out a line. Let us tell even the painful parts.

One: Lesbian and Gay people have existed in every time and place. Let us remember with pride our story, even the tragic and painful parts. Weep if you must, but never forget.

Conversation:

Closing Prayer: We Remember Our Hope

One: Like the stories of others who have known the sting of oppression, our story is filled with pain and sorrow. We cannot pretend that it is otherwise.

All: But that is not our whole story. Let us collaborate our victories and our heroes, too.

One: They are really two sides of the same story. Sometimes it takes a tragedy to make us recognize our heroes. Sometimes it is only in the midst of pain that we can see there is hope.

All: We believe that evil cannot prevent God's promises from being fulfilled. Therefore the light of our hope grows stronger as we hold firm in our faith in God and in each other.

Lighting of the First Candle of Hope (*relationships*)

One: Let us remember the courage of those who express their love in courage and pride.

All: May the love in our lives shine through for all to see.

Lighting of the Second Candle of Hope (*heterosexual heroes*)

One: Let us remember all those who are not gay or lesbian, but who share our struggle for justice and hope.

All: May our arms be open in our journey to embrace all who come in peace.

Lighting of the Third Candle of Hope (*Gays and Lesbians of Faith*)

One: Let us remember people of faith who made it possible for us to live authentic lives and also be people of faith.

All: We celebrate the great love of God for us and those who helped us know that love.

Lighting of the Fourth Candle of Hope (*Gay and Lesbian Heroes*)

One: Let us remember those who by the courageous way they lead their lives are our heroes today.

All: Let us follow their example and leave a brighter way for those who follow us.

Song: *Let It Be* by The Beatles

Gesture of Peace

Conclusion

Integrity's search for Christian spirituality and the pastoral imperatives articulated by *Always Our Children* informed this thesis-project or "Pastoral Resource Manual" (PRM). The manual had various stated objectives, which I have attempted to meet. The PRM gives voice to the pastoral reality of our gay students, faculty, and staff on campus. It also expresses the particular theological reflection and biblical hermeneutics employed by the community. Furthermore, it narrates Integrity's struggle with the magisterial teaching on homosexuality. Most critically, the PRM describes the gay spirituality that emerges from the group's prayer and theological conversation. Finally, the project concretely presents resources for the ongoing development and ministerial growth of the Integrity community. This includes a detailed listing of national and local support organizations, pastoral and liturgical resources, and an extensive reading list in the area of gay theology and spirituality. The outcome is a pastoral guide or handbook for Church ministers, as called for in *Always Our Children*.

The PRM's content, articulated in the different sections or chapters of the thesis-project, described and reflected upon the pastoral concerns of our Integrity community. First in the "Pastoral Resource Manual" I provided the history, personal narratives, and pastoral reality of the Integrity community on campus as *locus theologicus* of God's revelation and grace. The pain caused by the members' experience of condemnation, stigmatization, and marginalization constitutes the data of theological discourse and conversation.

Second, I articulated a contextual gay theology of liberation that arises from and gives voice to the experience of our Integrity members. This contextual gay theology is a

systematic theological reflection on the lived experience of the community and its members. It identified the theologies and theological methods of the community. Those are the very theologies that have brought life, hope, and a restoration of dignity and wholeness.

Third, I described the gay biblical hermeneutics used by Integrity in confronting the scriptural “texts of terror” that classically have been utilized to condemn same sex acts: The narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19), the sin of “abomination” in the Hebrew Scriptures (Lev 18:22, 20:13), along with the “unnatural relations” of Paul (Rom 1:18-27), and the “list of vices” excluding sodomites from the kingdom of God in the Christian Testament (I Cor 6:9-10; I Tim 1:9-10).

Fourth, I retrieved various biblical images of hope that affirm same-sex friendships and/or relationships. They are the narratives of the lovers in the Song of Songs, the refusal of Vashti (Esther 1:1-10), Jonathan and David (I and 2 Samuel), Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17), Jesus as dangerous memory, the vision of Peter (Acts 10), and the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). These constitute the texts of hope.

Fifth, I narrated Integrity members’ conversation with the Church’s magisterial teaching on the question of homosexuality. This narrative is informed by the confrontation between the truth of being gay or lesbian and the Church’s teaching about the immorality of the homosexual act. The confrontation bears the imprint of struggle and challenge as Catholic gay men and women in Integrity attempt to affirm their human dignity and the dignity of their loving in light of a Church teaching that evaluates their condition as disordered and their actions as intrinsically evil.

Sixth, I examined the theological and spiritual themes that arise out of the prayer texts or programs used by the community for its reflection and thus demonstrated the essential role of ritual in a gay spirituality of liberation. These texts present a Christian spirituality of gay liberation as the bridge that empowers the gay community to critique the internalized homophobia and heterosexism within the Church.

In the Appendix, I provided information on pastoral resources for the use of Integrity and Mission & Ministry that can provide pastoral ministry to our students, faculty, and staff. This includes information about national and local organizations that minister to gays and lesbians, such as Dignity, New Ways Ministry, In Always Our Children Task Force, Parents and Families of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), Soulforce, Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), and Project YES.

The Selected Bibliography served to provide pastoral, liturgical, and spiritual resources as a kind of reading list that is critical for serving gay students.

It is my hope that this "Pastoral Resource Manual" adequately responded to the invitation of *Always Our Children* by placing this thesis-project at the service of the Integrity community and the Office of Mission & Ministry in any future attempts to minister to gay people on campus. The desired result was a systematic, organized, focused, and pastorally sensitive response to the gay and lesbian community present at Barry University. My hope above all was to give a theological voice to our Integrity community as J. Michael Clark calls for:

Gay men and lesbians need henceforth . . . to speak theologically as gay people, rather than continuing to acquiesce, to accept, and therefore passively to endorse our exclusion from religion, spirituality, and theology. Gay people must make a commitment to be a force to be reckoned with in theology, not solely via

apologetics, but by claiming and assuming our right to theologize and to speak prophetically.¹³

In the end Integrity came to realize that the fundamental importance of living authentic gay lives, in openness and truth, is critical to the redemptive process for oneself and others “since we cannot predict when or know how our lives lived openly may affect or save others.”¹⁴

¹³J. Michael Clark, *A Place to Start: Toward an Unapologetic Gay Liberation Theology* (Dallas: Monument Press, 1989), 11, quoted in Elizabeth Stuart, *Religion is a Queer Thing* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997), 21.

¹⁴Comstock, 133.

APPENDIX

The following organizations/associations are valuable resources in the local community. For further information contact their web sites.

DIGNITY: Ministry/Advocacy on behalf of GLBT Catholics.

SOULFORCE: Ministry/Advocacy non-denominational Protestant.

PFLAG (PARENTS/FAMILIES OF LESBIANS & GAYS): Advocacy/Ministry for families.

APA RESOURCES (AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION)

PROYECT YES: Advocacy/ Ministry non-denominational for GLBT teens and families

SAVE DADE: Political Advocacy on behalf GLBT in Miami-Dade County.

MCC (THE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH): Non-Denominational Church ministering to GLBT community.

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