

James L. Empereu, S.J., "The Right of the Gay Person to Have a Spiritual Life," in *Spiritual Direction and the Gay Person*, (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 19980, 24-44.

### The Right of the Gay Person to Have a Spiritual Life

After what has been presented in the first chapter, it seems strange to begin the treatment of spiritual direction with gay persons with the need to establish their right to have a spiritual life. Is that not the right of every human being? Does that not follow from being created in the image and likeness of God, which is a central religious insight? Whatever we might use as the starting-point for our Christian (and other religious traditions') anthropology - patristic recapitulation, reformation's grace alone, Catholic sacramentalism, or Rahernian transcendental Thomism - it seems obvious that each human person is called to union with God and that the path to this union is what is called the spiritual life. To assert the opposite would appear to be equal to blasphemy, a denial of the loving kindness of the creator which is a central theme of both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. So why the need to begin with the assertion of this right for the gay person? Because, as Francoise Susset puts it:

Our sexuality is an indivisible aspect of our humanity. To ask us, regardless of our sexual orientations, to deny and reject our sexuality - who we fantasize about, who we desire, who we fall in love with, who we love - is to ask us to split ourselves away from the most fundamental part of our being, the place which is at the center of our humanity, from which all longing, desire, passion and creativity emerges. **1**

I know of no writer who claims the gays do not have the possibility of a spiritual life. In fact, there is a growing literature on the subject of gay spirituality.<sup>2</sup> In spite of that it is necessary to make a case for the spirituality of gay persons because their spirituality precisely as gay is at the least implicitly denied in several ways. Two areas where this right is, if not denied, at least, highly qualified are the positions on homosexuality of the Christian churches and the *de facto* legislation regarding gay/lesbian civil rights. We must examine both of these areas in order to establish the right of the gay person to engage in the spiritual task. To leave this issues unaddressed would mean that anything said about spiritual direction with the gay person would be left under a cloud of ambiguity about their spiritual lives at all. Or the process of spiritual direction would be highly prejudiced in the direction of getting the directees to conform to the positions of the churches or be reduced to helping them to remain in the closet so that they could lessen the amount of discrimination and suffering they would experience in daily life. I suspect that even those who place a negative judgement on homosexuality would be able to see that such is not what is meant by the traditions of spiritual direction as it has been passed on by the religious traditions.

### **The Christian Churches and Homosexuality**

First we turn to the Christian churches because, as noted in the introduction, the primary audience of this book are Christians. **3** I try to provide here for the director and directee a view of what is happening in the churches in regard to homosexuality that I consider basic for their interaction. **4** The treatment is far from exhaustive. As has already been pointed out, this is not a book on ethics, nor one on moral theology. The intention is not to present the full position of any denomination regarding the morality of homosexuality. That has been more than adequately taken care of by other sources, to some of which I will be referring. **5** The topic of this book is

spiritual direction with gay persons, especially as it is experienced in the Christian denominations. The concern is with spirituality. Certainly, there is a connection between the ethical life and the spiritual life, but they are not synonymous. **6** One cannot be reduced to the other. Unhappily, such was the case for Roman Catholic seminarians in much of their seminary training between the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican Council.

There was something in traditional Catholic theology that went by the vague title of mystical theology, but what often passed for spirituality was little more than moral theology coated in more personalistic terms to make it more palatable. Few would maintain that this is what spirituality in its own right and so worthy to be studied as a separate discipline. **7** Happily, this interest in spirituality now has moved well beyond the confines of Roman Catholicism. It was during the late 1960's and 1970s when I was participating in the life of several Protestant seminaries in Berkeley California, that I experienced the reawakening of interest in spirituality and spiritual direction among Protestant seminarians.**8** Because spirituality is an ecumenical concern, directors need to be aware of the varying discussions taking place in all the Christian churches regarding homosexuality.**9**

*Caught in the Crossfire: Helping Christians Debate Homosexuality* **10** attempts to give both sides of the argument regarding Christian gays/lesbians. If we keep in mind that each denomination has its own particular emphasis in this matter,**11** this book represents in general the discussion going on in the churches. Pairs of authors, one conservative, the other liberal, **12** address several topics such as: what does the Bible say about homosexuality? what does science teach about homosexuality? are Christianity and homosexuality incompatible? and so on. Using the imagery of weaving, Donald Messer does a concluding chapter on a theology of homosexuality in which he summarizes the two positions on homosexuality under the warp threads of Scripture, traditions, experience, reason and the weft threads of God the creator, human nature and sin, grace and Jesus Christ, and Church and ministry. He shows how differently each side treats each of the threads. Sometimes the difference is radical, sometimes subtle. Here are some experts from the thread, God as creator:

Probably the foremost and most fundamental question posed is whether being gay or lesbian is a matter of choice or a mode of creation..Conservatives who speak of homosexuality as 'unnatural' or 'contrary to God's intended plan' believe people were not created that way by God. Or they view homosexuality as a 'flaw' in creation or sinful result of the 'Fall' that needs repentance and correction. Generally, persons who affirm traditional views reject theories that advocate a genetic or constitutional basis for homosexuality. **13**

Messer points out that the liberal side would see same-sex relationships in the context of a God who allows for variation in creation, that the stories of creation as found in the Hebrew Scriptures are not scientific explanations but are literary expressions. Jesus himself said nothing about homosexuality, and condemnation of homosexuals seems inconsistent with his gospel of love. Homosexuality, whether due to genetic causes or to socialization, is, like all sexuality, a gift from God. **14**

The conservatives stress that various scriptural references that condemn homosexual practice while the liberal side emphasizes the area of social sin and how gays/lesbians are not only sinners but those who are sinned against by society and individuals. The history of the Christian Church is chequered when it comes to the point of gay-bashing and the physical and

psychological violence perpetrated against persons of this orientation. If homosexuality is a sin, then is not being homophobic also sinful? **15**

Part of the debate is whether homosexuals can and should change. The conservatives tend to be more optimistic about this while the liberals point to the evidence that would support that such orientation is lifelong and that attempts to change it have been more unsuccessful than successful. For conservatives, gays and lesbians must pledge themselves to a life of celibacy, while liberals emphasize that celibacy is a gift chosen freely, not imposed upon people by a God who created them that way in the first place. **16**

For those for whom homosexual practice is but proof of the fall and human depravity, Jesus is the one who comes preaching repentance and who will judge us on the last day. Grace is not cheap. The gate to salvation is narrow. These are all familiar themes that have been part of the Christian tradition. But for those who do not see all homosexual practices as sinful, the picture of Jesus is one who calls everyone to his kingdom, who is always welcoming to all people, especially to the marginalized and oppressed. Jesus does not ask us to reject our sexuality but that we exercise it in a responsible and loving fashion. The commandment 'Love one another as I have loved you' should be the guiding norm for human relationships, not a small section of the book of Leviticus. **17**

For conservatives the Bible is clear and simple: sex is heterosexual, restricted to monogamous marriage and allowed nowhere else. Liberals think this is too simplistic to describe a biblical sexual ethic. Conservatives claim they do not hate gays and lesbians. It is a matter of loving the sinner but hating the sin. **18**

When discussing Church and ministry Messer admits that here especially the labels of conservative and liberal break down the most. The same people take a conservative position on some issues but not on others; liberals are liberal on some points but not others. He summarizes this way:

Generally, the more 'liberal' or 'mainline' denominations have supported the civil rights of gays and lesbians, while more 'conservative' or evangelical churches have been less public in their support or worked in clear opposition to efforts to ensure homosexual rights or to remove sodomy laws. **19**

And even those who support civil rights for gays/lesbians do not necessarily do the same regarding rights in the Church, such as ordination to the ministry. However, what are we to make of the fact that at certain times in the history of the Church it was not so antagonistic to gays/lesbians and that then and now many members of the Church's ordained ministry were and are gay? **20** Both sides see the Church as a community of compassion but while one side notes that lack of solidarity with those suffering because of their sexual orientation, the other side stresses that love of the homosexual does not entail approval of their practices. Messer notes that a future battleground for the churches will be same-sex unions. In fact that conflict has already surfaced in the recent court decision in Hawaii which says that for the state to disallow these unions may be unconstitutional. **21**

Messer concludes with a call to disagree in love. That may be important for a general mode of procedure in the churches at any time, but in the area of spiritual direction we need to be more conclusive. Many others who, like myself, have worked in spiritual direction with gays and lesbians would find elements on both sides of the debate with which we would agree or disagree on the basis of our own extensive experiences in direction. I suspect that the majority of us would find more on the liberal side than on the conservative side that we could affirm. An

important reason for this is that the conservative argument tends to be scripturally literalistic or insufficiently nuanced. When dealing with people's spiritual lives we are rarely dealing with something which can simply be categorized in black and white terms. Also, the emphasis in the conservative agreement moves more along ethical and moralistic lines than specifically spiritual ones.<sup>22</sup> Christianity is not an ethical system articulated primarily in terms of moral imperatives. Certainly, Christianity has concrete moral implications, but it is primarily a tradition of a worshiping community which expresses its relationship to God, its spirituality, in terms of symbols, metaphors, images and ascetical practices.<sup>23</sup> The very nature of a symbol is that it is multi-dimensional, not given to easy categorization. The spiritual life is a symbolic life, a sacramental life, the greater part of which lies in the area of the unconscious, and not, as many believe, on the conscious plane or level of the conscience.

### **The study by the World Council of Churches**

In order to examine in more detail the issues regarding homosexuality and the churches I present here some observations regarding the study done by the staff of the World Council of Churches which saw the need to address the issue of homosexuality in the ecumenical context. This led to three staff workshops facilitated by Alan A. Brash, a former deputy general of the WCC. Out of these workshops grew a WCC publication called *Facing Our Differences: The Churches and Their Gay and Lesbian Members*.<sup>24</sup> Brash, a Presbyterian minister from New Zealand, begins with his personal story of coming to awareness of the issues of homosexuality rather late in life. He notes that up to the present time no extensive discussion of homosexuality has taken place within international ecumenical circles. *Facing Our Differences* is a brief, clear and adequate summary of the debate going on in the churches. Brash begins with some clarifications regarding sexuality itself. The concluding paragraph of his chapter on sexuality is one to which most Christians would readily ascribe and certainly one that most directors would find to be basic in the practice of spiritual direction with gays or straights:

Sexuality is an aspect of the whole person, which expresses itself in many ways, of which genital activity is only one. Sexuality is part of our whole personality, and our whole personality is involved in its expression. A useful comparison is verbal communication: when we speak, it is not only lips and vocal cords that are involved but our whole being; when we write, it is not only the work of our fingers but the communication of our whole person. Sexuality is also the expression of our whole selves, and as such it is a great, good and enriching gift of God our creator. **25**

It would seem impossible to engage in fruitful dialogue with anyone with whom we cannot have this statement as our common ground. This includes the director and the directee and only when it is accepted by the directee does advancement in the spiritual life seem a realistic possibility.

As noted in the first chapter, I am uncomfortable making a clear-cut distinction between spiritual direction and psychological therapy. They are not the same but neither are they easily distinguishable.<sup>26</sup> Becoming holy and becoming more fully human is more a matter of a mental distinction than one which can be found in the world outside our minds. Nevertheless, this does not imply that spiritual direction has fulfilled its mission once it has made someone comfortable with their sexuality, no matter the fashion in which it is practiced. Religious commitment will almost always be an issue in spiritual direction. That means that at some stage in the direction the

director and directee will need to deal with the directee's thoughts and feelings about his/her stance toward homosexuality.**27**

Brash is primarily concerned with the churches of the Anglican and Protestant traditions. He admits the diversity which is found among these churches regarding the presence of gays and lesbians. He refers to some of the work of the Anglican Church which might be used as a form of generalization regarding the debate in the churches. This would include the Roman Catholic Church because, although the official position is clearly and forcefully stated, there is little evidence that the discussion among Roman Catholics is now at an end. **28** In November 1987 the General Synod of the Church of England voted for four affirmations regarding sexuality, the third of which is pertinent here:

That homosexual genital acts also fall short of this idea, (total commitment in marriage) and are likewise to be met by a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion. **29**

This affirmation was not well received and further discussions led to another report that the homosexual orientation and its expression is not an alternative form of sexuality. It falls short of the completeness of heterosexual sexuality. But those who believe that they are called to the same-sex partnership lifestyle are not to be condemned and should not be barred from ordination unless they are sexually active.**30** The conversation in each of the churches would be a variation on this main theme but the general picture is one where increasingly the orientation is seen in a less negative light. In some churches it is granted equal spiritual status with heterosexuality, but the dividing lines come in the area of genital acts. Clearly, for some churches the official position still refuses to accept same-sex genital acts as activity which can be integrated into gospel values.**31** Others seem to be more accepting of these acts, at least, implicitly, if their ministers do not practice them.

What is valuable about these discussions and of particular significance for the gay persons who want their call to holiness to be validated by religious institutions is the clarification that is taking place. Misunderstandings are being cleared up so that they cannot be used as arguments against the right of gays to pursue their relationship with God in terms of their own sexuality. Let us look at one example of a misunderstanding. Brash briefly summarizes present scholarship which holds that the sin of Sodom is not anal intercourse between two men but rather a form of rape.

To use the word 'Sodom' or any of its derivatives to refer to any form of sexual intimacy other than rape by anal intercourse not only misrepresents this ancient story but also ignores the meaning given to this ancient city by Jesus and so many of the great prophets of Israel. All of them refer to Sodom as the symbol for punishment of a great variety of sins. But none of them refers to sexual sins.**32**

The sin of Sodom is but one example of how ecumenical discussions and debate in the churches informed by scriptural scholarship is freeing gays and lesbian from the narrowness of biblical interpretation which in the past has blocked their integration into their religious communities. In a further chapter we shall deal with the place of Scripture in the spirituality of gays, but for now it is important to keep in mind Brash's observation that the debates in the churches have focused on the interpretation of relatively few biblical texts, especially those from

Leviticus and the epistles of Paul. 'But it is important to note that restricting the discussion of the biblical testimony of these particular texts ignores that part of the scriptural message to which gay and lesbian people refer when they are speaking of themselves.'<sup>33</sup> This restrictiveness has ignored the deeper sense of Scripture which embodies Jesus's concern for the marginalized, the poor, the suffering and all those in need of liberation.

The growing scholarship on homosexuality on the part of religious thinkers and theologians, as well as anthropologists, psychologists and historians is binging about a reconsideration of our understanding of the historical dimension. The story of how the Judeaean-Christian tradition has itself been one of the worst examples of the oppression of gays and lesbians has been told and detailed elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> And within the Christian Church itself the practice and official teaching have not always gone together. Research is continuing to surface evidence that the spirit of compassion and the ethic of love of Jesus triumphed over theological positions in the daily lives of people. A good example of such research would be John Boswell's *Same Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe* <sup>35</sup> where he presents the evidence for liturgies for uniting two people of the same sex. Brash sums up succinctly our reflections on the history of same-sex relationship when he says:

[It] is sufficient to indicate the radical change in understanding that results when it is recognized that for some people the desire for such relationships is innate and unchangeable, and in no way an act of choice for which they can be held responsible..In earlier centuries people were unaware of that fact. <sup>36</sup>

Although this may explain the treatment of gays and lesbians in the past, it cannot be used for the continuance of such treatment. Change has been taking place. Clearly, it would be naive to presume that the days of discrimination and suffering are over for gays. Still there seems to be a gradual lifting of the burden from the shoulders of gays and lesbians. It is another stone removed away from the tomb (closet?) in which the past has tried to bury them.<sup>37</sup>

### **Homosexuality and pastoral care 38**

In 1982 the Commission on social Justice of the Archdiocese of San Francisco put out an elaborate report on the issue.<sup>39</sup> Chapter Five of the Report, 'Spiritual Lives of Lesbian Women and Gay Men', clearly states the problem about which this chapter is concerned:

It seems to come as a surprise to some people that lesbian women and gay men have spiritual lives at all. Generally accepted myths regarding spirituality and the homosexual person involved misperceptions such that God is not with and among gay men and lesbian women, that lesbian women and gay men do not seek God in their lives, or that their spirituality is largely focused on the filtered through a syndrome of moments of weakness, struggles for a firm purpose of amendment, and a search for understanding confessors who will administer the sacrament of Penance and Eucharist as spiritual aids for a firmer resolve towards venereal abstinence.<sup>40</sup>

Spiritual directors of Christians, and perhaps Roman Catholics in particular, will recognize that such has been the experience in the majority of their gay directees. Few of these people will have experienced their admission of the spiritual life except in a kind of begrudging way. It is a spiritual life in spite of who they are. Most will not have been encouraged to grow in intimacy

with others precisely as gay persons with gay feelings and gay inclinations. And unless the director has been in direction with other directors, they probably will not have been encouraged to enjoy being gay, to be proud of being gay, to rejoice in being gay.

The Report points out the distinction between lesbian women and gay men that is often part of the experience. Lesbians labor under the double oppression of being both homosexual and being women. The Catholic lesbian will feel unwelcome on many counts: sexism, homophobia the legitimation of male superiority in society, and theology and church doctrine which has been based on male experience. In working with these lesbians it is especially important for the director to be aware of the sources of liberation for these women: liberation theology, the feminist perspectives and certain contemporary theological developments such as theology of friendship. **41**

The Report also pointed out that the gays and lesbians that were interviewed did not see their spiritual lives only in the negative terms noted above. There were also those for whom their sexuality was more a gift than a wound. Their lives often were in a movement between oppression and celebration. One man, a Roman Catholic, spoke of the intense pain he has experienced in being Roman Catholic and a homosexual. For him it is the great irony that the institution, which could help eliminate some of the societal injustice to gays, actually perpetrates it even more, in some instances, allowing for the possible violence against and contempt for the dignity of the homosexual person.**42** He speaks of the great dilemma for lesbian women and gay men in the Church when the Church defends the supremacy of their conscience but condemns their activity as objectively sinful. His final painful but poignant statement will be one that most directors of church-going gays will instantly recognize:

I suppose, after all is said and done, that I could fulfill my destiny with God without the Church, and many times I have left her, but always to find myself coming back. I cannot desert her, for she is the only mother I have. Where else am I to go? I cry at her doorstep, and when she does not hear, I pound on her doors, for I am her son, and I am lonely and I need her comfort.**43**

The Report, although issued some years ago, is still correct in stating the dilemma for the gay person wishing to pursue a spiritual life. Since the Report was published there have been an increasing number of statements from the churches encouraging a ministry to gays/lesbians. Usually these statements recognize the legitimate needs of these people, accept the fact of discrimination in the churches against them in the past, call for a discarding of distorted pictures of them, and exhort the churches to listen to their gay and lesbian brothers and sisters for what they can offer to the rest of us. But almost all these statements also make the distinction between orientation and behavior and urge the celibate life on homosexuals. The Report, on the other hand, found that few of the people they interviewed saw the celibate life as their calling and that their active sexual lives were for them experienced as good and their way to God.**44**

Anyone doing direction with the gay person will meet in the course of their work many gays such as those described in the Report: mature, committed men and women who are active in their churches, and whose lives are of the highest integrity. And although some of us directors might judge their sexual activity as falling short of the Christian ideal, the rest of their lives would not come under the same judgments.**45** Honesty demands that we acknowledge that at times the degree of courage displayed by gay men and women in their search for God in an ambiguous situation is impressive. In fact it is their particular form of marginalization which

seems to give them some particular insights into the journey to God and the experience of the sacred in the world today. I detail this in the chapters which follow.

The Report gives the statements of two spiritual directors working with gays and lesbians in trying to answer the question: is there a spirituality that is unique for gay men and lesbian women? One director says that there is. In this director's words: 'That uniqueness is based on two factors contained in the life experience of lesbian women and gay men: first, coping with the *loss of expectations*, and second, the "*coming out*" process.<sup>46</sup> There is a real loss in the lives of gays and that is the expectations of being heterosexual. It is a loss on their part because they perceive their difference from other males and females, usually rather early in life, and they experience the loss of expectations on the part of family and friends. Unless the loss is accepted and mourned it will be difficult to move ahead in the spiritual life in a positive way. Also, this spiritual director sees the coming-out process for gays and lesbians as similar to the process of individuation that Carl Jung describes. This is the search for the true self by letting go of ego, by confronting one's shadows, and by integrating the anima in one's life. This journey is a difficult one and that is why spiritual direction is important at this time. Any direction must take into account these two sources of spiritual growth, helping the person to deal with the loss of expectations and facilitating the coming-out process. Direction should help all directees in the uniqueness of their journey and certainly the journey of the gay man has its own kind of uniqueness.<sup>47</sup> I deal with the two areas of loss of expectations and the coming-out process explicitly in the last three chapters of the book which focus on the stages of adult development.

### **Homosexuality and social justice**

If the first cause of the denial (often implicitly) of the right of gays to have a spiritual life has been due to the ambiguity of the Christian churches towards them in terms of the morality of their actions, the second surely is located in the matter of social justice, including civil rights.<sup>48</sup> Probably the instance which most highlights the conflict in the area of social justice for Roman Catholic gays and lesbians is the statement issued by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 'Some Considerations Concerning the Catholic Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons.'<sup>49</sup> Richard Peddicord OP, in an excellent study called *Gay and Lesbian Rights: A Question: Social Ethics or Social Justice*,<sup>50</sup> says about this document:

The cornerstone of this document is that insistence that there are times when society ought to discriminate against homosexual persons. When gay people attempt employment which would put them in close contact with children or when they try to adopt children, they should be opposed. Moreover, as a rule of thumb, the civil rights of gays and lesbians are dependent upon their remaining invisible to society at large. For SCC (this document), the Church's negative moral evaluation of 'homosexual acts' is the principle from which all else flows.<sup>51</sup>

Peddicord goes on to argue in favour of the civil rights of gays/lesbians by moving away from the perspective of Catholic sexual ethics being the determining factor in justifying such discrimination. Rather, if we begin with Catholic social teaching which emphasized human dignity, human right, the importance of conscience, and respect for those who follow their conscience, then this perspective supports laws against all forms of discrimination including discrimination against gays and lesbians.<sup>52</sup>

Such statements as the one coming from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith tend to reinforce the attitudes the director finds in many of the directness: lack of self-affirmation, poor self-image, an abiding sense of guilt, and constant questioning about their relationship with the Church, if not with God. Such a public position can only make many Catholics wonder whatever happened to the loving Christ of the New Testament, when what is supposed to be his Body in the present world can speak in a way so divergent from its very own proclamation of the good news. It comes across as bad news from many Catholics and makes it difficult for them to hear the good news which may be there. And not only Catholics, but all Christians, are affected by such a statement. It is a public declaration which only heightens for them the ambiguity they find in their own churches.

By employing the work of the theologian John Courtney Murray on the relationship of Church and State, Peddicord argues persuasively that ‘support of gay and lesbian rights legislation and (or) municipal ordinances is well within the parameters of Catholic moral teaching’.<sup>53</sup> He concludes this significant work with these words:

It is inconsistent for members of the American Catholic hierarchy to call for justice for gay people and then attempt to block the legislation which would serve to ensure this justice. Opposing the morality of certain sexual practices ought not to entail collusion with campaigns to place social and economic obstacles in the path of an already undervalued social minority.<sup>54</sup>

Vincent J. Genovesi, S.J, in his article on the social implications of homosexuality, gives the best summary statement regarding the civil rights of gays and lesbians that I have found anywhere. He says there is something invidious about claims that gay-rights legislation is not necessary if gays keep their sexual orientation to themselves, that is, remain chastely in the closet. Genovesi challenges this way of thinking so articulately that it deserves a full quotation.

Are homosexuals truly safe, or even free, in their secretiveness when they must always live with the fear of being discovered? And even if this were a safe way to live, we must ask if it is a healthy way to live humanly, psychologically and spiritually. And is it not itself a form of oppression to require as the price to be paid for the exercise of their civil rights that gays and lesbians live in silent deceit, pretending to be other than they truly are? Having to live in such a way would seem to be demeaning and debilitating to homosexuals themselves, and it certainly does nothing to challenge others in society to greater moral sensitivity and maturity. In fact, advising homosexuals to remain invisible only reinforces the vicious circle in which society is trapped; when homosexuals surrender to society’s general intolerance by remaining

invisible, they effectively allow the stereotypical images by which they are portrayed to go unchallenged; in turn, these images feed the very homophobia that results in the intolerance and discrimination that already make so many homosexuals' invisibility necessary or expedient.**55**

## Concluding remark

It will not be the case that every gay man or woman seeking spiritual direction will need to be reassured that they can have a spiritual life precisely as a gay person. But there will be many who will. It will be the director's task to be honest about the issues discussed in this chapter: the mixed positions of the churches and the lack of social justice both in the church and civil society. The gay Christian in spiritual direction will most likely be an active participant in church life. And, obviously, there is no way they can avoid being part of society. While being honest about the various church positions and problems caused by discrimination, the director will often find that s/he needs to nuance church teaching to avoid it being manipulated for destructive purposes and to stress that society's discriminatory practices are based on the sin of those and not that of the gay person. It is hoped that the following chapters will assist the director and the directee to strengthen their conviction that the call to the spiritual life comes from God and that no church or society can take that right away. In the words of Joseph H. Neisen:

Numerous traditional religious institutions have tried to convince lesbians and gays that it is not possible for us to embrace spirituality because of our sexual orientation. On the contrary, our sexual orientation and the religious abuse we have suffered have propelled us to examine our spirituality in much more depth than many heterosexuals can ever hope to.

Ours is not a spirituality that is measured by the number of times we attend a church service. Instead, it is a deep personal examination about the meaning of life, our role in life, how our gayness can be celebrated and how our gifts can be shared rather than stifled.

Being gay does not preclude spirituality. Openly embracing one's gayness is a form of spirituality.**56**

## Notes

1 Joseph H. Neisen, *Reclaiming Pride: Daily Reflections on Gay and Lesbian Life* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1994) p. ix.

2 This literature is still small, as is that pertaining to gay theology. Some of the books on gay theology hardly merit the title of theology. This is in contrast to feminist theology and feminist spirituality, which now refers to a formidable body of writings and equally formidable scholars. The hope is that gay spirituality and gay theology will one day achieve the recognition and quality that now characterizes the feminist critique. The makings of a gay spirituality I found in books which deal with homosexuality and religion such as Brian Bouldrey (ed.), *Wrestling with the Angel* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995). But these tend to be anecdotal and pastoral in character. We still await a consistently developed approach that moves beyond the emphasis of this present chapter. However, in the meantime, good books to be familiar with include, Andre Guidon, the *Sexual Creators: An Ethical Proposal for Concerned Christians* (New York: University Press of America, 1986). See Chapter 7: 'Gay fecundity or liberating sexuality', for contributions to the world that gay men make.

3 There are now available many publications which give the positions of the churches with the attendant discussions taking place. Those seeking a brief, matter-of-fact description of the situation of homosexuality in the Catholic Church would find it helpful to read the chapter on homosexuality in Thomas C. Fox, *Sexuality and Catholicism* (New York: George Braziller, 1995). A very good reference book here is Jeannine Gramick and Robert Nugent (eds) *Voices of Hope: A Collection of Positive Catholic Writings on Gay and Lesbian Issues* (New York: Center for Homophobia Education, 1995). The editors have excerpted texts from larger works to provide a resource for those looking for positive and informed statements on homosexuality in a Catholic context. The voices that speak here are not the harsh and insensitive ones. This volume contains brief statements on civil rights and pastoral care for gays/lesbians from Catholic leaders from 1973 to 1995, such writings as various diocesan plans and pastoral letters, and

responses to the 1992 Vatican document on non-discrimination against gays and lesbians . The statement by Cardinal Joseph Bernadin is a good example of how many ecclesiastical leaders find themselves caught in upholding the teaching of the Catholic Church and their desire for pastoral care for gays and lesbians. Bernadin's statement (PP.119ff.) is a clarion call for gay rights and a clear condemnation of discriminatory practices against homosexuals. The dilemma is when he limits intimate sexual relations to heterosexual marriage. He says;

I realize that, when I say this, I upset many who are gay and lesbian. They do not understand how I can support fundamental human rights and at the same time not endorse homosexual activity. Some, in fact become quite angry and accuse me of being duplicitous. To their anger I can only respond with love and ask that, as I respect them, could they not respect me and my beliefs?

4 For a brief but comprehensive and well-balanced discussion of the debate regarding homosexuality from a particularly British point of view see David Leal, *Debating Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1996)

5 For the views of the Christian churches see J. Gordon Melton, *The Churches Speak on Homosexuality: Official Statements from Religious Bodies and Ecumenical Organizations* (Detroit: Galre Research, 1991).

6 For a balanced attempt from a mainly Protestant perspective to develop an ethic as a response to the issues surrounding homosexuality see Kathy Rudy, *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality, and the Transformation of Christian Ethics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

7 One need only take note of two important organizations and their publications to become convinced that ethics is not the same as spirituality: The Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality and its journal, *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* and Spiritual Directors International and its publication, *Presence*.

8 Often the protestant seminarians would come to spiritual direction to the Catholic professors because those of their own tradition were not comfortable taking on the role.

9 In 1994 *The Other Side* magazine published a special issue, 'Christian and homosexuality: dancing toward the light' (300 W. Apsley St., Philadelphia, PA. 19144). The articles take a very positive view of gays and lesbians and their rights in society. What is interesting is that this is a periodical which has evangelical roots and that it is speaking out for gay and lesbian Christians.

10 Sally B Geis and Donald E. Messer (eds), *Caught in the Crossfire: Helping Christians Debate Homosexuality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

11 Leanne McCall Tiger, *Coming Out While Staying In* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1996), surveys the issue of homophobia in the mainline churches from the perspective of a United Church of Christ minister. She brings a psychological dimension to her theological reflections. In an appendix she includes 'Welcoming congregation statements from several denominations' and UCC pronouncements and resolutions regarding lesbian/gay/bisexual concerns.'

12 I am fully aware of the limitations of using such labels as 'conservative' and 'liberal', but they are the ones used by Messer. I believe there is enough truth in what these labels refer to that I am justified in using them also.

13 Geis and Messer, *Caught in the Crossfire*, p. 177.

14 Geis and Messer, *Caught in the Crossfire*, p 178. Dean Hamer and Peter Copeland, *The Science Of Desire: The Search for the Gay Gene and the Biology of Behavior* (New York: Simone and Schuster, 1994), is a study of Dean Hamer's work on a genetic link making homosexuality inheritable. Although Hamer and his colleagues have not yet discovered the gay gene, their discussion of the various issues of genetic manipulation and their rejection of 'nature versus nurture' can be enlightening for those in spiritual direction. A genetic link does not mean everyone with the gene will be gay, or that all gays have a gay gene.

15 Geis and Messer, *Caught in the Crossfire*, pp. 180-1.

16 Geis and Messer, *Caught in the Crossfire*, pp. 181-2.

17 The relationship of the love of God and the love of neighbour is found throughout the New Testament. The great commandment and the second one after it are found in Mark 12:31; Matt. 22:29; Rom. 13:8ff. And Gal. 5:14. The two commandments cannot be separated (1 John 4:20ff). For a detailed discussion of the meaning of love in the bible see the articles, 'Love', in Alan Richardson (ed.), *A Theological WordBook of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), pp. 131-6. See also John L. McKenzie SJ, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1965).

18 Geis and Messer, *Caught in the Crossfire*, pp. 183-5.

19 Geis and Messer, *Caught in the Crossfire*, pp. 186.

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

21 Geis and Messer, *Caught in the Crossfire*, pp. 187. An intelligent discussion of the Hawaiian case is found in *The Advocate* (4 February 1997), pp. 22ff. The case has not yet been finally resolved. For a follow-up on the case see *The Advocate* (27 May 1997), p.71. Although homosexual couples in Hawaii cannot marry, they have won reciprocal over-60 benefits. The reaction in many states to the possibility of same-sex marriages means that those promoting the rights of gays to get married have a difficult battle ahead. There are clear differences among the Christian denominations in the United States. For instance, the *New York Times* (22 July 1997) reported that the chapel at Harvard university is now open to having commitment or blessing ceremonies for gay and lesbian couples. In the same article it quotes the policy of the United Methodist Church: 'Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.' More discussion about gay marriages is found in *The Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review* (Fall 1997). See Andrew Sullivan, 'Marriage is a basic civil right' (pp. 25-8) and Chai Feldblum, 'Keep the sex in same-sex unions there is no better work than John Boswell, *Same-sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

22 It was pointed out to me that a consideration of the Holy Spirit in the spiritual journey is lacking in the conservative approach to the issue.

23 As spiritual direction moves into the more advanced stages, it will take on more a spirit of worship than of counseling, problem solving or moral theology.

24 Alan A. Brash, *Facing Our Differences: The Churches and Their Gay and Lesbian Members*, Risk Book Series (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995).

25 *Ibid.*, p. 16

26 It all depends on the therapist and the director in the concrete. Even the distinction notes earlier, that in therapy I lie down on a couch and pay a fee, has been blurred. Payment is frequently part of the direction practice (although usually not as much as therapy) and we could lie down during the direction if we so desired. In fact, many spiritual masters of the past, such as Ignatius of Loyola, recommend various positions for prayer, one of which is lying on the floor.

27 As already noted, the focus in direction will be on the actual feelings, thoughts, and judgements of the directee rather than the morality of his/her position. That latter is the more appropriate matter for confession (in those denominations which have the practice of confession).

28 For a comprehensive study of gays and lesbians in the Catholic Church see Robert Nugent and Jeannine Gramick, *Building Bridges: Gay and Lesbian Reality and the Catholic Church* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 1992). They examine the experience of Roman Catholic homosexuals from four viewpoints: educational and social concerns, counseling and pastoral issues, religious and clerical life, and evolving theological perspectives. See Jack A. Bonsor, 'An objective disorder: homosexual orientation and God's eternal law', *Horizons*, 24 (2) (Fall 1997), pp. 193-214. Bonsor re-examines the Thomistic understanding of natural law and in light of this examination calls for a rethinking of the Catholic Church's position on homosexuality.

29 See Brash, *Facing Our Differences*, p. 24

30 *Ibid.*, p. 26. The Lambeth Conference of 1998, a meeting of the bishops of the worldwide Anglican Communion, endorsed a resolution that declared that homosexuality activity is incompatible with Scripture and that homosexuals should best not be ordained (reported in the *New York Times*, 6 August 1998).

31 This is the position of the Roman Catholic Church. For instance, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), when it refers to homosexual acts as being contrary to natural law, says: 'Under no circumstances can they be approved' (2357). The next paragraph (2358) also states: '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 is to be avoided.'

32 Brash, *Facing Our Differences*, p. 38.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

34 See Boswell, *Christian Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*. For a study of same-sex love outside the Judaeo-Christian tradition, see Christine Downing's analysis of the experience of homosexuality in ancient Greece in *Myths and Mysteries of Same-Sex Love* (New York: Continuum, 1990).

35 (New York: Villard Press, 1994) This is the hardcover publication. The Vintage Books edition is in paperback.

36 Brash, *Facing Our Differences*, p. 53.

37 For more on the relationship of homosexuality and the Church see: Keith Hartman, *Congregations in Conflict: The Battle over Homosexuality* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996). This is a series of case studies. It has the value of making very concrete what the author claims in his preface: that homosexuality is the most divisive issue in the Church today, that it stirs up strong emotions, and splits congregations and denominations. It brings up the most basic issues such as how one tells right from wrong, what is the meaning of the Bible and to what extent the Church is doing God's will in the matter. Directors working with gay priests and ministers would find the book helpful. Jeffrey S. Siker, in his *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), has gathered a group of scholars, each of whom make their own contribution to various aspects of homosexuality as it is being discussed in the churches today. An appendix contains statements on homosexuality from various Protestant churches. John J. McNeill in his book, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Kansas City: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1976) tried to do by himself what Siker did with several authors, namely, look at the issue of homosexuality and the Church from Scripture, tradition, moral theology, the human sciences and pastoral ministry. Gary David Comstock, *Unrepentant, Self-Affirming, Practicing* (New York: Continuum, 1996), provides a forum for gays and lesbians who are involved within organized religions to give their views about their religious communities. Richard Hasbany (ed.), *Homosexuality and Religion* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1989), has the advantage of adding the Jewish perspective to that of the Catholic and Protestant. Gareth Moore, *Body in Context* (London: SCM Press, 1992) supports gay people against contemporary Catholic opponents.

38 *Open Hands: Resources for Ministries Affirming the Diversity of Human Sexuality* (3801 N. Keeler Ave., Chicago, IL., 60641) is a quarterly which is a resource for congregations and individuals seeking to be in ministry with lesbian, bisexual and gay person. Each issue focuses on a specific area of concern within the Church.

39 *Homosexuality and Social Justice: Report of the Task Force on Gay/Lesbian Issues* (San Francisco: Commission on Social Justice. Archdiocese of San Francisco, July 1982).

40 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

42 This became a public issue at the time of the Cardinal Ratzinger report, which is treated below.

43 *Homosexuality and Social Justice*, p. 79.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

45 And it is their whole lives which must be considered. Celibate chastity cannot be reduced to non-use of one's genitals. Leanne McCall Tigert points that all people should be considered chaste by an ethics of love. She quotes Norman Pittenger and James Nelson: 'An ethics of love mandates against selfish sexual expression, cruelty, impersonal sex, obsession with sex, and against actions done without willingness to take responsibility for the consequences. Such an ethics always asks about the meanings of acts in their total context - in the relationship itself, in society, and in regard to God's intended direction for human life', *Coming Out while Staying In*,

pp. xxi-xxii. Those gays and lesbians who understand that chastity for them also implies a non-genital celibacy may find encouragement in the brief, but positive articles, 'Celibacy: the gift of being gay' by Matthew Kety OCSO, a Cistercian monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani, in "NURTURING THE GIFT: gay and lesbian persons in seminary and religious formation", *CMI Journal*, 11 (August 1988), pp. 14-16.

46 *Homosexuality and Social Justice*, p. 81.

47 *Ibid.*, pp. 80-3. I am very much in agreement about these two points being significant in the spiritual lives of gays. I would not single them out as the two most important areas that make their spiritual lives unique, but I would not deny their centrality. There is one point about which I am not in agreement with this spiritual director's statement. This director says that the ideal director for the gay and lesbian is a director the same orientation. I can see some immediate advantages to that. But there is also the danger that the homosexual (like the heterosexual) director could lose objectivity in such a situation. The most important thing about any director is their humanity and how healthy they are as human beings. We must always remember that we are more alike than we are different. Our humanity is more significant to any of us than our sexual orientation. I hope it is obvious by now that in saying this that I am in no way denying the uniqueness of the gay experience. Their vocation rests on the fact that gay people experience the spiritual realities of their lives through their own gay prism. The sense of otherness which propels so many

gay men and lesbians to search for transcendence in their lives and to connect with the sacred in their unique way is detailed through a series of anecdotal stories by several gay men in Mark Thompson (ed.), *Gay Soul* (HaperSanFrancisco, 1994).

48 Andrew Sullivan makes the interesting comment that 'Until we have tackled those religious reasons at their core, the political opposition will be impossible to fully dislodge. Until we have fought the theological battle through every scriptural verse and every natural law argument and every liturgical rite we can forget making real headway in the secular sphere The battles are distinct, but until we have won one, we will be able to fight the other only to a draw', *The Advocate* (14 October 1997), p. 93. In this article, 'Winning the religious war', Sullivan says that the gay civil rights leadership has ignored religion and so has only ensured its political marginalization. He sees this situation changing.

49 See *Origins*, 22 (6 August 1992), pp. 173, 175-7. We should not underestimate the influence that the official Catholic Church statements have on other church-going Christians.

50 Richard Peddicord OP, *Gay and Lesbian Rights: A Question: Social Ethics or Social Justice* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996).

51 *Ibid.*, p. ix. For a valuable critique of this document see the article by Vincent Genovesi 'Social implications of homosexuality', Judith A Dwyer and Elizabeth L. Montgomery (eds.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought* (Collegeville: the Liturgical Press, 1994), pp. 447-53. Genovesi looks at the assumptions which are being made by the statements put out by the Catholic Church as well as society's discriminatory practices regarding such issues as homosexuals in the military and the teaching profession. He sees some advance in the gradual acceptance of domestic partnerships and agrees that the churches need to find some way to support stable homosexual unions. He calls for greater scrutiny of such policies which would forbid gay couples to adopt a child, to have a foster child or to have custody of children. He says justice demand that we consider the child and what would be a situation of nurturing love for the child regardless of the sexual orientation of the adopting parents.

52 *Ibid.*, p. ix.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 185. Those who wish to keep abreast of the political news regarding gay and lesbian civil rights might wish to join the Human Rights Campaign. *The HRC Quarterly* contains that kind of information (HRC, 1101 14<sup>th</sup> St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, D.C. 20005). For instance, the Summer 1997 issue carried articles on the influence of the religious right, the Southern Baptist Convention boycotting of Disney because of its 'gay-friendly' policies, and how the Federal Government moves to address the problem of hate crimes against gays and lesbians. For those interested in studying both sides of the issue of public policy regarding gays, see *Same Sex: Debating the Ethics, Science and Culture of Homosexuality*, Ed. John Covino (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997). The essays present opposing views regarding issues of morality, identity, and history.

54 *Ibid.*, pp. 185-6. William D. Lindsey in his article, 'The AIDS crisis and the Church: a time to heal', in A. Thatcher and E. Stuart (eds), *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 347-66, makes the interesting observation that the American Catholic Church takes a fundamentalist position regarding homosexuality while being more liberal in its social policies. He notes: 'Can the American Catholic Church ally itself with American fundamentalism without appearing to endorse aspects of the agenda of the Christian Right that are entirely alien to traditional Catholic notions of the good society (e.g. universal health coverage)...The Catholic who wishes to promote *all* aspects of Catholic social teaching cannot help being bewildered, since hardly anything in the social and economic views of the American fundamentalist movement reflects the outlook of Catholic social teaching' (p. 359).

55 'Social implications'. Although Richard D. Mohr's book, *A More Perfect Union: Why Straight American Must Stand up for Gay Rights*, is clearly written from an American perspective, it is a good example of how denying rights to gays and lesbians undercuts the rights of all the citizens of a country.

56 Joseph H. Neisen, *Reclaiming Pride: Daily Reflections on Gay and Lesbian Life* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communication, 1994), entry for 22 May.