

Homophobia in the Churches

Ralph Blair

Dr. Blair is a psychotherapist in private practice in New York City. He is Director of The Homosexual Community Counseling Center and President of the Board of Trustees of Evangelicals Concerned, Inc. Dr. Blair's address is Suite 803, 30 East 60th St., New York, New York 10022. He may be reached at (212) 688-0628.

Copyright 1979 by Ralph Blair All rights reserved

The following text, HOMOPHOBIA IN THE CHURCHES, was a keynote address delivered by Dr. Blair at the Strategy Conference on Homophobia in the Churches on May 5, 1979. Two other keynote addresses were given during the weekend conference by Joan Clark (a staff person in the Dallas office of the Women's Division, Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, who was fired recently because she is a lesbian) and by Rosemary Radford Ruether (Georgia Harkness Professor at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary).

This historic first meeting of gay and non-gay representatives of 16 Christian denominations began a process of developing strategies for dealing with homophobia in the churches. The meeting, held in Potomac, Maryland, brought together 60 representatives of national staffs, boards and agencies of many denominations, members of gay caucuses of the church groups, and other organizations concerned about homophobia in the churches.

Attending the conference were representatives of the American Baptist Church, the American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, the Church of the Brethren, the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church, the Mennonites, the Reformed Church in America, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in U.S., the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the United Methodist Church, the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Unitarian-Universalist Association, the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, the United Church of Christ, the United Church of Canada, Evangelicals Concerned, Lutherans Concerned, Affirmation, Dignity, Integrity, Presbyterians for Gay Concerns, the National Organization for Women, the National Gay Task Force, the Quixote Center, the New Ways Ministry, the Commission on Women in Ministry of the National Council of Churches, Men Allied Nationally for the ERA, and Clergy and Laity Concerned.

As a preface to this evening's considerations, I'd like to call our attention to a summary of a life lived in preparation for our meeting here this weekend. The summary was written by David Augsburg (1) of the pastoral care faculty of the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries:

Look at Jesus Christ.

He was born in the most rigidly ethnic culture of all time; born in a fiercely nationalistic nation; born in Galilee, the most bigoted backwoods of that nation; born into a family of snobbish royal lineage; born in a time when revolutionary fanaticism fired every heart with hatred for the Roman oppressors; born in a country practicing the apartheid of rigid segregation between Jews and Samaritans.

Jesus Christ was born in a world peopled with prejudiced, partisan, fanatical, intolerant, obstinate, opinionated, bigoted, dogmatic zealots -- Roman, Samaritan, and Jewish.

Yet He showed not a trace of it.

Read and reread the documents of His life. There is absolutely nothing that you can find to indicate feelings of racial superiority, national prejudice, or personal discrimination.

Those who stand on the side of Jesus Christ reject prejudice whenever, however, and wherever they find it. In themselves first of all; then, and only then, in the world about them.

As true as this summary is of Jesus, it is not often true of those of us who say we follow Jesus.

Definition of Terms

Our three key terms are: "strategy," "homophobia," and "churches."

If at times this weekend's deliberations seem to have an air of an armed camp, perhaps we should not be surprised. We are here to map strategy. "Strategy" is a military term (from the Greek for "military general" or "army"). We're dealing with plans for action and we can easily fall into plans for the waging of a war. Some "liberation" rhetoric and activity can become quite militaristic. There is talk of "our enemies." We can get stuck into "we" and "they" or "us" and "them." Perhaps it would be better for us, as Christians, to think in terms of tactics (from the Latin for "touch"). In being in touch, our point of contact will more likely be an embrace than an assault. Our perspective and procedure will determine whether we will be more apt to slap a cheek in revenge or slap the palm of a hand in friendship. It would be well to pray that that with which we leave this working conference enable us to touch our homophobic sisters and brothers rather than to fight at them. After all, the modus operandi of a Christian can be real love, even for an enemy. We must learn how to be in touch with our beloved enemies.

The second of our key terms is "homophobia." We have heard the effect of homophobia in the slur of a single syllable and in the diatribe of a dozen sermons. We have seen it in a glance and in a stare. We have experienced it in the maneuverings of smoke-filled bishops' chambers. We have read it in what is not written and in what is written over and over for hundreds of pages. We have felt it in the pit of our stomachs and in the split of a skull. It's easier to recognize than to define.

But, if we must define it, let's say that homophobia is an expression of fear of homosexuality. We'll leave for just a moment or two, an analysis of the meaning of that fear.

The third key term is "churches." This is, correctly, a plural term. But Jesus spoke to his disciples of his building his church (singular) against which even the gates of hell cannot prevail (Matt 16:18). Paul writes that Christians are baptized by one Spirit into the one body of Christ—whether Jew or Greek, slave or free (I Cor 12:13). Paul also reminds us that Christ "is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." (Col 1:18-20) These statements are true of the church (singular), the body of Christ. But we need read only Paul's letters to the young congregations of Asia Minor or of the seven assemblies addressed in the Book of Revelation to see that both corruption and faithfulness can characterize local communities of sinners saved by grace. What are the "churches?" At best they are assemblies of believers trying to be faithful to their Lord, who alone justifies them. At worst they are assemblies of would-be believers, trying to justify themselves, and thereby fully capable of the most vicious forms of homophobia. The "churches" (plural) are those various human institutions listed in something like the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*. They have names like the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, the Lutheran Church in America, the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Pentecostal World Conference, the United Church of Christ, etc. They are called First Presbyterian, Calvary Bible, and St. Mark's. They have colleges, seminaries, publications, and other agencies. And, as we all know, they have their share of homophobia.

Before going on, let's be sure we understand that the Christian churches have no corner on homophobia. It just seems they do because they 're close to home. Homophobia is as prevalent—if not more so and in greater severity—throughout the world, from legalistic Islam to the atheistic regimes of the U.S.S.R. and The People's Republic of China. Nevertheless, let's say, with the Apostle Peter, "it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God." (I Peter 4:17)

Homophobia Examined: Excuses and Reasons

Returning now to our central theme—homophobia we must try to understand it more thoroughly. If we do not, we will not be able to address the problem tactically.

Everyone here could give examples of what he or she thinks are evidences of homophobia. We hear that Anita Bryant is homophobic, that Phyllis Schlafly and the anti-ERA forces are homophobic. We hear that the voters of Wichita, St. Paul, and Eugene are homophobic. We hear that the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. is homophobic. We hear that the Episcopal bishop of Washington, D. C. is homophobic. Perhaps they are. They

certainly do not seem to like homosexuality. Perhaps they *do fear* it. Perhaps it is more to the point that they fear sexuality in general. Perhaps it is more to the point still that they have their *own* reasons or excuses and these they value as much, if not more, than we value ours.

Even some of those church leaders that we say have not gotten rid of their own homophobia as much as we would like, seem to grasp something of the seriousness of what even they call, "the sin of homophobia." For example, Richard Lovelace (2), chief theological architect of the position against the ordination of self-acknowledged homosexuals in the United Presbyterian Church, has written:

The inability of church people to maintain an attitude of compassionate concern for homosexuals while disapproving of the active homosexual life-style may indicate a serious lack of depth of conviction of sin in their own lives, and possibly a failure to understand and appropriate the Gospel. ... If we compare Jesus' attitude toward an uncompassionate pharisaism with His response to sexual sinners, we cannot doubt that He would prefer a congregation of homosexual believers struggling toward a principled religious answer to their condition to a congregation of judgmental homophobes.

Lovelace adds immediately:

This does not mean, however, that the theological and biblical arguments advanced to persuade the church to change its traditional attitude toward the active homosexual life-style are persuasive.

In the spirit of Paul's admonition to the Christians at Philippi (2:4), that "each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others," we might do well to inquire as to why some seem to be so homophobic. What are their interests? What are the reasons or excuses associated with homophobia?

The Bible and Theology

Notice that what Lovelace calls "theological and biblical" concerns are what apparently prompt his own homophobia. There are many who evidently agree with him. But we should be careful not to jump to the conclusion that it is so simple as it may seem to be. Just as some people may employ, though not necessarily fully understand or accept a certain so-called "gay" Biblical interpretation in order to justify a priori sentiments—if not sexual desires themselves, there are some people who may employ another so-called "true" Biblical interpretation, rather woodenly, in order to justify a priori sentiments including homophobia—if not even a denial of sexual desires themselves.

And what of traditional theological arguments? Even Lovelace concedes that "the church's apprehension of the meaning of Scripture and of its doctrinal formulations is never at any stage totally infallible. It is a reformed church, but it is always in the process of reformation." (3)

I have a little story to illustrate the fact that people who thump the Bible against homosexuals don't know what they're talking about. A year ago I was invited, by of all organizations, the publishers of *Motor Trend* magazine, to participate in a taped roundtable discussion with some anti-gay evangelicals in Los Angeles. The discussion was to be printed in *Inspiration*, their entry into the field of popular religious periodicals. For obvious reasons it never made it into print and *Inspiration* has since folded. At any rate, at one point I was trying to explain that Paul's use of the term *arsenokoites* in I Corinthians 6:9 had nothing to do with homosexuality as we know it today. I was going on about *arsenokoites* this and *arsenokoites* that and finally the former editor of Billy Graham's *Decision* magazine interrupted and asked, "What was that word?" I said, "*arsenokoites*." He retorted: "Yes it does! It certainly does have to do with homosexuality! Arse, arse! They put the penis in the arse!" Well, I suppose I need not explain to you that the etymology of this variant for "ass" and the meaning of the Greek word *arsen* (male) are two totally different tales. I tried to point out that not even all homosexuals put the penis in the arse -- especially lesbians.

Theologian Alan Richardson (4) makes the observation that "Most of the distortions and dissensions which have vexed the Church, where these have touched theological understanding, have arisen through the insistence of sects or sections of the Christian community upon using words which are not found in the NT..." Certainly the attempt to read *into* the Bible a "homosexuality" never discussed in the Bible is a prime example of such distortion. Even evangelical scholars such as Baptist theologian Bernard Ramm and Lutheran theologian Helmut Thielicke recognize this. Ramm has written: (5)

The issues about homosexuality are very complex and are not understood by most members of the Christian church. To them it is a vile form of sexual perversion condemned in both the Old and New Testaments (cf Rom 1:26-28)... Homosexual practices may be part of religious rites or done for the sake of pure sexual titillation. These forms of homosexuality were widely practiced in the ancient world and the biblical condemnations of homosexuality are usually addressed to these versions. Homosexuality as purely sexual titillation was a common Roman vice.... The problem within the average Christian church is that almost all Christians believe that homosexuality is a perverse manifestation of sin and should be so treated. They are completely dense to the psychological factors which have produced the homosexual person.

In addressing the question of how Christians might deal with homosexuality, Thielicke writes: (6)

It can be discussed at all only in the framework of that freedom which is given to us by the insight that even the New Testament does not provide us with an evident, normative dictum with regard to this question.

Thielicke states further that the kind of question it is "must for purely historical reasons be alien to the New Testament." In another connection, but applicable in this case, Thielicke (7) has said: "I believe that even pious ideas are forbidden if their purpose is to fill out gaps which God has obviously left open."

For those who are against homosexuality because they sincerely believe that the Bible says something against homosexuality, it will not do to call them "homophobes" and say, "Who cares what the Bible says?" It is up to us patiently to present as clear an opportunity as possible to take the Bible seriously and to assist any who would wish to know better what the Bible does and does not say. I might add that to do this in no way necessitates a compromising of the highest view of Biblical inspiration and authority, contrary to what some Fundamentalists argue.

Treatment and "Deliverance" Promises

Some people are against homosexuality because they ignorantly believe, or want to believe, that homosexuality is simply and sinfully selected by those who want to display the most perverse rebellion against God. It is said that if only homosexuals would "get saved" they would be "delivered" from homosexuality. There are those, also, whom we might call homophobic because they believe, or at least hope even against their better judgment, that there is a "way out" if only the Christian homosexual struggles long and hard enough. It might be through psychotherapy, prayer, special deliverance, exorcism, divine healing, a "second blessing," Spirit-baptism, "dying to self," or any number of other often-tried and never-true remedies.

It will not do to make fun of them and to pretend that they constitute a small and stupid minority of backwater Fundamentalists. We must have the patience to assist them to realize that there is no cure for what is not a disease and there is no healing or deliverance from that which is not a spiritual affliction. Homosexuality, we must remind them, is no longer considered to be a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, or any other professional or scientific body. But we must not stop there, for many of them do not think that their answer is going to come from secular sciences. They argue that science is always changing. They're right. Scientists who can conclude one thing today, interpreting today's evidence, can interpret tomorrow's evidence in a different way—for even science is not objective but must be filtered through its own interpretive processes. Some of these Christian critics, though, fail to note that theology also changes from generation to generation. We must go on to help them see that there really is no evidence that there is any spiritual deliverance that takes away the involuntary homosexual desires and replaces them with heterosexual desires. We must assist them in seeing that one after another of the so-called "ex-gay" ministries has folded due to the continued homosexual desires and behavior of its founder. We must help them to see, too,

that the history of the cult of celibacy in the churches has so often been a sham, both silly and horrible, and that it is impractical and unbiblical to look for a Christian answer in pagan Greek aeteticism.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence against the need for "deliverance" is the profoundly moving experience of meeting and getting to know other believers, "undelivered" if you will, who happen also to be responsibly homosexual. As "spirit bears witness with spirit" and as we share in the demonstrated fruit of the Spirit, we can come to know that, contrary to what we had been led to believe, we can be delivered from the "need" to change orientations. There is no need to be heterosexual. There is no need not to be homosexual. We are, homosexuals and heterosexuals, truly brothers and sisters "in the Lord."

Prejudice

Another way in which Christians might tend to be what we might call homophobic, at least another way they may come to be against homosexuality and homosexuals, is by way of preconceived notions of what homosexuality is.

It is a common misunderstanding of the process of prejudice that holds that prejudice is formed in isolation from the victims of prejudice. The argument goes this way: If you don't know black people, you'll be prejudiced against them; if you don't know homosexuals, you'll be prejudiced against them. But why can it not be the other way as well? If you don't know black people, you will be prejudiced in favor of them. If you don't know gay people, you will be prejudiced in favor of them. Theoretically, there is nothing wrong with this reversal. However, in the real world, we all hear stories and many of them are not very nice. If *that* is what a black man is, then "No Thanks." If *that* is what a lesbian is, then "No Thanks." Those not very nice stories constitute the "contact" many of us have had with "different" people and that sort of "contact" is called gossip and the bearing of false witness in the Bible. Those who are responsible for the spreading of such gossip and false witness are condemned in the Bible in no uncertain terms.

There is another kind of contact that prejudices us against others of the same "kind" and that is the sort of contact which can best be described as "unfortunate." Since, for example, blacks and homosexuals are human beings and are sinners just like everyone else, there are those you might wish to meet and those you might just as well not meet, e.g. a woman who insults you and who happens to be black or a man who robs you and who happens to be gay. Such "unfortunate" contact can influence how we see others of the "same" group.

If we are to assist Christians to have a better understanding of the tremendous variety of homosexuals and of gay life-styles, we must do what we can to counter their thinking that all homosexuals are interested in the "Models and Masseurs" column of the *Advocate*, that all homosexuals are promiscuous, that all homosexuals are leftists, that all homosexuals favor abortions, etc.

Civil Religion and Americanism

Homophobia has been given an almost obligatory status in vast segments of American Christianity, in what we may call the civil religion, and especially throughout the Bible Belt. We must take seriously the fact that its forms are strikingly similar to those civil religious formulations which have been used to oppress and even to kill unwanted minorities (racial, religious, economic, sexual, etc.) throughout history. Listen to this quotation: We must "seek firmly to protect Christianity as the basis of our entire morality; and the family as the nucleus of the life of our people." (8) Is that the familiar ranting of the anti-gay, anti-ERA, Fundamentalist preachers on TV? Those were the words of Adolf Hitler!

After studying the failure of German churches to do anything against the emergence of institutionalized anti-Semitism during the rise of the National Socialist movement in Germany, historian Richard V. Pierard concludes: (9)

Christian historians can only view with sorrow what transpired in Germany, but they do have the obligation to warn their fellow believers of the dangers inherent in linking the church with the political and cultural ideals of any state or political movement. What inevitably results is a watering down of the gospel message and the muting of any prophetic voice. Christians in the United States particularly need to take to heart the historical experience of their brethren in pre-1933 Germany, because the American civil religion has such a deceptive quality about it that Christians in this land often are taken into cultural captivity completely unawares.

I would like to quote from an excellent essay by Calvin College professor Paul B. Henry. Henry, too, writes of that "deceptive quality" of the American civil religion when he states: (10)

Because American civil religion relies so heavily on Christian metaphors for its expression, evangelical Christians are frequently beguiled into equating the civic creed with the Christian religion itself. Appeals to the Judeo-Christian traditions that broadly inform our national political conscience are interpreted to suggest that America is a "Christian" nation. ...

The syncretizing of civil religion and historic Christianity shows itself frequently and blatantly in the relationship between some rightwing fundamentalist Protestantism and right-wing political fanaticism, though there are functional equivalents to be found in Roman Catholicism and Jewish Zionism as well.

Unfortunately, it is so often true that, as Henry goes on to say:

The "remnant" who refuse to serve the "beast," assured of the "righteousness" of their cause, recognize no restraints in combating the enemy.

Indeed, homophobic Christian leaders have lied repeatedly concerning what they knew to be the truth, for example, about the "ex-gay" movement or about the fact that many outstanding evangelical leaders are themselves homosexual. Some have urged the strongest violence against homosexuals.

One can see a truly phobic example of exactly the sort of thing about which Henry and Pierard warn in a recent sermon by Jerry Falwell, television preacher from the Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. Falwell says: "What frightens me is that homosexuals seek out young boys." He says: "Little children are exploited and their bodies are ravaged by human animals." He says: "Because God will judge the nation given over to homosexuality, I believe the United States will be destroyed if we permit homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle. ... Can we believe that God will spare the United States if homosexuality continues to spread?" He says nothing about the spreading of gossip and false witness throughout the United States. Speaking of the large Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade on Fifth Avenue, Falwell again sounds his alarm: "That frightens me because when they come out of the closets, they are a much larger group than we expected." That *frightens* him, and he means to *frighten* the 16,000 members of his church (the second largest in the country), and he means to *frighten* his habituated followers who tune-in to his "other gospel" every week over 327 television stations and daily over 450 radio stations. He means to *frighten* them into homophobic *action!* (11)

Another recent example of this anti-gay, homophobia tied to civil religion and Americanism is that of the refusal of the president of a state university in Tennessee to recognize the student gay rights organization. According to President Robert O. Riggs of Austin Peay State University, official recognition of the group would "implicitly endorse homosexuality," which he said "is contrary to the Judeo-Christian ethic which undergirds our community, our state and our nation." (12) At the same time, a major "New Right" lobby has been established in Washington, D.C. to combat gay rights. It is called "Christian Voice" and already has enlisted eleven members of Congress, including several Senators. It claims a million dollar campaign fund and expects to have a million "evangelical" supporters in its first year.

It is up to us to try to do what we can to support those basic values which characterize large segments of responsible citizenry from throughout our pluralistic society. There is nothing to be gained from a knee-jerk reaction, whether that is the left knee or the right knee. We must be careful within the so-called gay community not to speak with one voice when we have many divergent voices. We must not give the impression that there is only one gay life-style. We must not be threatened into silence when what we see passing for "homosexuality" are simply the politics or neurotic excesses of some people who happen to be irresponsibly and irrationally homosexual and who want us to call them our "gay brothers and sisters." At the same time, we as Christians must continue to do everything in our power patiently to underscore the vast difference between the legalism of civil religion or idolatrous Americanism and the gospel of Christian faith.

Defense Mechanism

Having said what we have said thus far, about trying to address other Christians who may be against homosexuality or homosexuals because of their mis-reading of the Bible or theology, their misconceptions about the so-called "cures," their lack of good experience with homosexuals, and their erroneous linkage of civil religion and Americanism to Christian faith, we turn now to what is probably, at bottom, the real source of the problem of homophobia. It is possible to instruct those who have been poorly taught or who have believed false information, if they really do want to understand and overcome their irrational fears. What is *not* possible, is to overcome homophobic defense mechanisms by frontally attacking those defenses. Better biblical interpretation, better understanding of the "ex-gay" movement, more meaningful contact with decent people who happen to be homosexual, all of this is not going to cut any ice with those who are using homosexuals and the gay rights issues, etc. to defend themselves against their own deep sense of guilt, inadequacy and insecurity. Much of what would appear to be a person's difficulty with certain Biblical texts, gay liberation viewpoints, or the lifestyles of certain homosexuals, turns out after closer inspection to be nothing more than a cover-up or rationalization for scape-goating and put down, in order to pull oneself up. In fact, the better our argument sounds, the worse it will be, for then, the more the homophobic individual will have to fight against it. If we are not to waste time trying to convince those who do not believe that they can afford to be convinced, even if they be convinced against their will, we must be able to assess to some extent, when we are dealing with those who are honestly ignorant or misinformed and when we are dealing with those who are using their homophobia as a defense mechanism.

In his book, *Surprised by Joy*, the brilliant British writer, C. S. Lewis, has given us a sparkling analysis of homophobia, and he did so without really intending to do so, for he wrote this long before our current discussion of homophobia, even before the term had been coined. Bear in mind that even Lewis was not rid of all homophobia. Speaking of the horrified reaction of church people to adolescent homosexual activity, Lewis mused: (13)

There is much hypocrisy on this theme. People commonly talk as if every other evil were more tolerable than this. But why? Because those of us who do not share the vice feel for it a certain nausea, as we do, say for necrophily? I think that a very little relevance to moral judgment. ... Is it then on Christian grounds? But how many of those who fulminate on the matter are in fact Christians? And what Christian, in a society so worldly and cruel ... would pick out the carnal sins for special reprobation? Cruelty is surely more evil than lust and the World at least as dangerous as the Flesh. The real reason for all the pother is, in my opinion, neither Christian nor ethical. We attack this vice not because it is the worst but because it is, by adult standards, the most disreputable and unmentionable, and happens also to be a crime ...

"Most disreputable" and "unmentionable" and "a crime" as it happens to be, it is so very convenient when in one's insecurity, he or she needs to put down somebody else. There is hardly

a target better suited for putting down than a homosexual, a "faggot," a "queer," a "pervert." Who, especially in the past, could stand up for a "homo" and get away with it?

Some people, unfortunately, never read beyond Romans 1, but don't forget that the chapter divisions were not made until A.D. 1250 and the verse divisions were not known before A.D. 1551, so go on, read Romans 1 and then go immediately on to Romans 2. In the very first verse of the second chapter of Romans, the Apostle Paul wrote: "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things." Paul was following Jesus in this. It was Jesus who had said: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Matt 7:21)

Jesus and Paul understood the anatomy of a put-down. In our insecurity, we tend to attack that in others which reminds us of what we feel uncomfortable about in ourselves. If we feel threatened by our own sexuality, we will attack the sexuality of others. If we believe we are inferior in this or in that area, it is what reminds us of this or that area which we will attack in another person. If something is not seen as a threat to what I see as my own interests, I will not be motivated to attack it. We try to justify ourselves by pointing out a flaw in another person when we see in that flaw a reminder of our own flaw. Now note that this is as true for homosexuals as for homophobes.

If we expect to be effective in converting such insecurity-produced homophobia, we must first find a way to alleviate the insecurity. In order to do this, the beliefs that the homophobic person holds about his or her own inferiority must be changed. To some extent, as we have already suggested, this can be done through education, therapy, association over time with friends, etc., but there is an even more effective way to do this and it seems to me that it is this way that is the *special ministry* of those of us who are Christians. More on that in a few moments.

Failed Strategies

There is much discussion and debate this weekend on what we see as the most effective strategies to take in response to homophobia in the churches. Someone with a wonderful sense of humor has suggested that all organists go on strike during Holy Week and someone else has said that little cards might be handed out to the elderly as we help them cross the street: "You are being assisted by a gay person. Have a nice day." Well, seriously, some believe we should go this way, others believe we should go that way, and others are not sure what way we should go. Some of us have been working for years in the various civil rights and liberation movements

(e.g., blacks', women's, gays', the anti-war movement, etc.) and we have already tried this or that and frequently we have been disillusioned by what seems in many cases to be the disappointing results. As Christians, we really should not have expected it to have turned out much differently. Hans Küng, the German Roman Catholic theologian, reminds all of us of the *failure* of what he calls the "technological evolution" and the "politico-social revolution" to achieve what we need for our welfare. He is correct in recognizing that what the modern world has to give up is the *"ideology of technological progress, controlled as it is by vested interests, which fails to take account of the true reality of the world and with its pseudo-rationality creates the illusion of a manageable world."* (14) Certainly included are not only the so-called hard sciences but the fields of advertising and public relations as well. Küng goes on to say that what we must abandon is *"faith in science as a total explanation of reality (a Weltanschauung), in technocracy as a cure-all substitute religion."* A few months ago, the head of America's Roman Catholic bishops told his colleagues that it is not that God is dead but that the false gods of secularized Western culture have died and that many people "have yet to discover the one true God." (15) Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco reminded his fellow bishops of the "conspicuous failure" of the false and surrogate religions of the 19th century such as Marxism, Darwinism, Positivism, and Freudianism." We might add to this the failure of the civil rights movement to secure blacks against the negative effects of racism and the failure of the Anti-Defamation League to abolish the effects of anti-Semitism. Anyone who thinks that these efforts have been effective should think again for it would be insensitive to the insidiousness of racism and anti-Semitism to say that a few Court decisions, some counter-productive Affirmative Action programs, and other gestures constitute a real solution. Other gods have recently died. To name a few: the Human Potential Movement, the "flower-power" generation, and *Robert's Rules of Order*. More recent "new solutions" are on their last legs. Efforts come and go and bigotry seems to stay around. We who are interested in mitigating the effects of homophobia would do well to avoid the naivete of those who think that candidates who run on platforms promising plans of social salvation, even gay rights, are to be trusted to pull them off. If voters, or legislators, or executive actions can decide today to grant me my rights, tomorrow they can decide to take them away. If we can railroad this or that through Congress, the General Assembly, the Board of Elders, the Council of Bishops, the committee or whatever, at what cost will it be for us tomorrow or the next time? And, in the meantime, what really have we accomplished?

Now all of this, you might call it "pessimism,"—I call it realism—all of this might lead you to think that I am advocating that we sit and do nothing. Not at all. If I did not believe that *something* could be done, I would not be here today, I would not have started Evangelicals Concerned, I would not be writing and speaking on behalf of gay rights and a more enlightened and accepting attitude within the churches and in the larger society. But what I am saying is that we must be very careful that we do not set ourselves up for expecting too much. The only way we can be disappointed is to expect too much. When we do that, we set ourselves up for the distracting and incapacitating frustration and sense of failure which follows. Rather, if we expect what we can realistically expect, we will be engaged in the reality of our struggles and with the

reality of our opponents. In this way we may well be able to make it as hard as we can for people to exercise their homophobic reactions, but they will still be there to do their dirty work in subtle ways, here and there.

A Christian Tactic

Before formulating what I believe to be an effective and Christian tactic for dealing with homophobia, I think that we must pull into perspective something that is indispensable to our fully understanding what is going on in homophobia. It has to do with something that is not really taken seriously in secular culture and something which even some churches find uncomfortable to talk about. I'm quoting from an interview with James Dobson, Associate Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Southern California School of Medicine: (16) "One of the most striking 'blind spots' within humanistic psychology involves an inability to recognize a basic flaw in human nature ... which Christians call inborn sin. There is an undeniable bent toward selfishness, aggressiveness and deceit in the temperament of mankind. It can't be explained by environmental influences or cultural considerations." Sin is why we are not going to be able to eliminate homophobia by ourselves. It is too deeply ingrained in our sinful preoccupation with what we see as our self-interest. On our own we do not have what it takes to weed it out at its roots. What can contribute to its being rooted out is the most radical tactic I know about, and it is to that that we turn in conclusion.

The conference Proposal stated that we would "strategize for change within the context of gospel values" and I cannot improve on that proposal, for it is right on target.

As we have already suggested, a Christian's tactic should be love—that real caring for the real welfare of another even when the other is an enemy. But how are we to love even our enemies? How are we to love even those who through their words and actions contribute to the everyday difficulties which we must endure simply because of sexual orientation? As theologian Emil Brunner has put it, any of our imperative behavior must be seen in the context of the Divine Indicative. How we can afford to love is directly related to the way in which we are loved. "We love because God first loved us" (I John 4:19) I believe, therefore, that we should develop our tactic out of the Good News of a biblical-theological understanding of the state of affairs, present as well as future, between God and the rest of us, and consequently, among the rest of us.

Perhaps there is no better summary of both the Indicative and Imperative in this regard than that of Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians (5:16-21). Paul writes:

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he

has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Alan Richardson explains that the idea of reconciliation is present also in Ephesians 2:12-17, "when it is affirmed that Christ, 'who is our peace,' has broken down the middle wall of partition—a metaphor drawn from the Jerusalem Temple—between Jew and Gentile, and out of the two has created 'one new man,' and has reconciled them both 'in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.' Reconciliation between man and man [woman and woman], even abolishing that most bitter of all racial hostilities, the Jewish-Gentile division, is a consequence of the reconciliation of man to God." Richardson continues: "The whole conception of 'peace' ... very prominent in St. Paul, belongs to this cycle of ideas; Christ by his death has brought to us the peace of God (e.g. Rom 5:1; I Cor 7:15; Gal 5:22; Eph 4:3; Phil 4:7; Col 3:15; II Thess 3:16, etc.) and hence we are enabled to live at peace with all men (Rom 12:18; cf. Mark 9:50)." Richardson notes, too, how Paul taught that God "has reconciled all things, on earth and in the heavens, through 'the blood of his cross' (i.e. through his death)—including the spiritual 'powers' or 'world-rulers' (Col 1:20; cf. II Cor 5:19). Richardson notes that the metaphor is that of making peace after war, "being readmitted to the presence and favor of our rightful Sovereign, after we have rebelled against him." As Biblical scholar Joachim Jeremias (18) puts it, "Justification is forgiveness, nothing but forgiveness for Christ's sake." He adds: "It is the message of Jesus concerning the God who wants to deal with sinners which Paul takes up and expounds in his doctrine of justification by faith. This message, unique and unprecedented, was the center of Jesus' preaching." (19)

Now if, indeed, God was in Christ reconciling the whole world to Himself—that reconciliation was as much for Jerry Falwell and Anita Bryant as it was for Ralph Blair and Rosemary Ruether, as much for Phyllis Schlafly as for Georgia Fuller, as much for Jesse Helms as for Adam DeBaugh. And if so, who is Ralph Blair that he cannot be reconciled with Jerry Falwell or Rosemary Ruether that she cannot be reconciled with Anita Bryant? Are those in the Fundamentalist right-wing excluded? Does the reconciliation apply to Christian socialists? Does reconciliation apply only to men? Only to women? Only to feminists? Only to ERA opponents? No. If anyone of us has been reconciled to God, it is not because of our so-called good works or correct politics or dogmatics but only because of the fact that God was in Christ reconciling us to Himself. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (Eph 2:8-9)

But how is it that some who preach a "justification by faith" nonetheless practice homophobia? Well, Lovelace himself, as we have seen, says that this "may indicate a serious lack of depth of conviction of sin in their own lives, and possibly a failure to understand and appropriate the Gospel," no matter what they preach. Maybe this is illustrative of something of what Jesus meant

when he said: "Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." (Matt 19: 30)

An explanation for why homophobia will not be eliminated in our experience is that which is expressed by Oscar Cullman in his "D Day / V Day" distinction and by Werner Kümmel in what he has written as the "already *I* not yet" of Promise and Fulfillment. (20) Jeremias explains that "justification points to the future. It shares the double nature of all gifts of God: they are present possessions and yet objects of hope. Justification is a firm present possession (Rom 5:1, etc.) and nevertheless it lies at the same time in the future." (21) He states: "Justification takes place in the tension between possession and hope. But it is hope grounded in a firm foundation." Thus it is not rationalization based in wishful thinking, or deliberations of the New York City Council, or rhetoric based on the empty promises of bishops, but—no matter how much it may not seem to be in evidence fully—it is grounded in God who was in Jesus Christ reconciling the world to Himself. And this Jesus Christ is the one of whom Hans Küng can write: (21)

...cannot be classified either with the ruling classes or with the political rebels, either with the moralizers or with those who have opted for silence and solitude. He belongs neither to right nor left, nor does he simply mediate between them. He *really* rises above them: above all alternatives, all of which he plucks up from the roots. This is his *radicalism*: the radicalism of *love* which, in its blunt realism, is fundamentally different from the radicalism of an ideology.

Küng continues:

Jesus' words therefore did not amount to any sort of pure 'theory': he was, in fact, not particularly interested in theory at all. His proclamation was wholly related, oriented, to practice.

Thus, there can be a realistic resolution of homophobia when there is resolution of the problem of alienation and insecurity. When we realize and accept the fact that we are not alienated anymore, when we resolve to say, "Yes" to the God who was in Jesus Christ reconciling us to Himself, to ourselves, and to each other, then, we who have been so loved can afford to love.

It is in this gospel context, at bottom, that we can confidently shout a resounding "So what!" to all expressions of homophobia aimed against us. Homophobia is, after all, included among all of that which absolutely cannot endanger us. We can say with Paul: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:38-39)

References

1. David W. Augsburger, *The Love-Fight* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1973) pp. 136-137.
2. Richard Lovelace, *Homosexuality and the Church* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1978) pp. 66-67.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
4. Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958) p. 217.
5. Bernard Ramm, *The Right, the Good and the Happy* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1971) pp. 109-110.
6. Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964) p. 284.
7. Helmut Thielicke, *Between Heaven and Earth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) p. 108.
8. Cited in Richard V. Pierard, "German Protestants and Hitler," *Fides et Historia*, Spring, 1978, p. 25.
9. *Idem.*
10. Paul B. Henry, "Fundamentalism in a Pin-Stripe Suit?" *Christianity Today*, October 6, 1978, p. 12.
11. Jerry Falwell, *How You Can Help Clean Up America* (Lynchburg, Virginia: Liberty Publishing, 1978) pp. 71-72.
12. *Advocate*, May 3, 1979.
13. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955) pp. 108-109.
14. Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976) p. 43.
15. UPI, November 14, 1978.
16. in interview, *Inspiration*, October, 1978, p. 18.
17. Richardson, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-216.
18. Joachim Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965) p. 57.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
20. Cf. Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950) and W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment* (London: SCM Press, 1957).

21. Küng, op. cit., p. 262.