



FACE . . .

On Being Christian and Homosexual: Set Free in Christ

DOTTIE LUDWIG

Eagles' Wings
North Heights Lutheran Church
St. Paul, Minnesota

"SO, IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST, THERE IS A NEW CREATION: EVERYTHING OLD HAS passed away; see, everything has become new" (2 Cor 5:17).

This verse aptly describes me. I was a lesbian but now I have different desires, orientation and behaviors because Jesus has changed me. I believe he can and wants to do the same thing for any person who will let him.

Let me define the difference between the words *homosexual orientation* and *homosexual behavior*. Orientation refers to sexual feelings of attraction to someone of the same sex, and behavior is *erotic activity* with someone of the same sex. The Bible, in condemning homosexuality, deals with behavior not orientation. Therefore, in using biblical principles, we must separate thoughts and feelings from behavior, sin from sinner, and temptation from action. I believe that people struggling with homosexual feelings should not identify themselves as homosexuals unless they begin to have erotic relationships.

While I do not believe that homosexuality is inborn or genetic, neither do I believe the orientation is chosen. Every person has a legitimate need for same-sex love and affirmation. This need should be met by the same-sex parent in the early years of childhood. If this need is not met, either in reality or in perception, detachment from the same-sex parent occurs, leading to gender emptiness. Peer rejection, sexual abuse, or other traumatic events further reinforce gender confusion and isolation. These legitimate needs for love become eroticized at puberty and love is confused with sex.

Perhaps my personal testimony will give some insight. My mother died when I was 3 ½ years of age, and my only memory of her was when she died. I lived in several different places in the years following her death. I always felt like I was never really wanted. Male figures in the places I lived molested me, which taught me that sex and attention were the same thing. My first memory of hunger for love

(continued on p. 340)

TO FACE

On Being Christian and Homosexual: Living Responsibly with What Is Given

ANITA C. HILL

*Wingspan Ministry
St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church
St. Paul, Minnesota*

WE ARE MISSING THE LIBERATING MESSAGE OF ST. PAUL IN GAL 3:28 (“THERE IS no longer Jew or Greek...slave or free...male and female”) when today we separate heterosexuality and homosexuality as though they are not part of the same continuum. They are not opposites; they are different ways of expressing the same thing: human longing for intimacy and relationship with God, self, and another.

The dualism of our western culture has us constantly searching for the either/or. We live in a system that has placed spirit above body, male above female, white above black, reason above emotion, heterosexual above homosexual. These dualistic splits are key to the pressures to conform to a heterosexist myth that claims only one kind of orientation to be acceptable before God.

Gay and lesbian people in our church are asked (in sacrificial fashion) to live out the dualistic split in our own flesh – we are not allowed to act from the core of our beings when it comes to the sexual expression of our love for a person of the same gender. This situation must be named offensive to God and God’s people.

The church’s integrity is at stake regarding its response to gay/lesbian people of faith. What has been the lived experience of the “love the sinner, but hate the sin” stance? In my experience, people are rarely able to separate the hatred for the sin from lesbian and gay people who, for them, embody sinfulness and evil. Homosexuality has become, at this end of the century, the sin set apart as worse than all others. Gay and lesbian Lutherans have been excluded from the sacraments, denied office-holding, psychologically abused, put-down, told to “go minister to your own” and “stop trying to take over ‘our’ church.” Such judgments harm not only the people who are judged and excluded, but also those making the judgments. The scriptural injunction to “judge not, that you be not judged” is not an arbitrary rule. We are being warned that judgmental attitudes harm all of us in community.

(continued on p. 341)

from another woman was in high school. I wanted a next-door neighbor to give me attention and wished she were my mother.

I honestly did not know I was gay, but following nurses' training I found myself strangely attracted to another nurse. One night, while I was staying overnight at her house, she reached out to me in a sexual way. I responded, yet remember thinking, "This is wrong." I was not a Christian and my need for love was greater than my guilt, and thus began a twelve-year journey into lesbianism involving six different relationships. While still involved in the last relationship, however, I said, "This behavior is sin and I can no longer be involved." I believe God heard that as a confession of my heart and honored it. Four years later when I became a Christian I finally felt forgiven. Over the next seven years God dealt with the roots of my lesbianism and fear of rejection. I am no longer lesbian nor am I attracted to women sexually. I am now involved in ministry to help others who want to change and leave homosexuality or lesbianism behind.

I believe the Bible to be the infallible word of God, unchanging in its message, relevant to modern issues of life, and authoritative on moral behavior. If I do not take this approach I will find ways to negate what God says and then justify, excuse, or rationalize my desires. The ploy of Satan has not changed since the Garden of Eden, for he continues to ask, "Did God *really* say...?" And we keep answering, "Well, maybe not." Rather we need to come to God and say, "I don't understand this, but I ask you to help me see this issue as you do."

This position is costly in today's society. I have been called homophobic, bigoted, a neo-nazi, etc. Name calling will not prevent me from saying that the only biblically allowed sexual unions are reserved for the marriage bed between male and female. The constraints God has given regarding sexual behavior are for our protection. The most loving thing I can do is care enough to speak God's truth about this issue.

I believe it is erroneous to call oneself a Christian homosexual/lesbian. It would be more accurate to say, "I am a Christian who struggles with homosexuality/lesbianism." We need to encourage all believers to refrain from sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage.

In summary, churches need to become involved in ministry to all impacted by homosexuality. Furthermore, we need to be equipping believers to be part of the solution by developing loving, healthy, but non-sexual relationships with homosexuals/lesbians, offering love and affirmation to meet their legitimate same-sex love needs. Exodus International (San Rafael, CA), Homosexuals Anonymous (Reading, PA), and Transforming Congregations (Fresno, CA) are all resources for individuals and churches who desire to learn to minister in this area of need. They are also resources for those who want help to deal with the roots of homosexuality/lesbianism. God brought change in my life through his word, his people, prayer and a deepening relationship with him. I am only one of many whom God has set free.

"So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Why should lesbian/gay Christians remain in the church in the face of such hatred and judgment, subtle and not-so-subtle? I joined the Lutheran church responding to the welcome and positive outcome of a campus ministry homosexuality study group. My presence in the campus congregation prompted the study in which I participated. I continue to struggle for understanding and reconciliation between gay and non-gay people in our church. For me, work within the church is demanded by my sense of call in response to God's unconditional love in my life.

I understand sexual orientation to be a given, a part of my createdness and not a choice. From this basis, I am responsible to act out of my orientation in ways that are life-building, loving, and honest. I have made a partnership commitment (parallel to heterosexual marriage) with another woman that sets apart our relationship as one based on such qualities as love, fidelity, mutuality, trust, loyalty, forgiveness, gratitude, and a shared spiritual journey and faith community. We share in prayer life and a common desire to serve God to the fullest of our abilities in our church and society. Our sexual relationship is an extension of the love we feel toward one another and is but one part of our life together as a couple joined in our hearts and souls. We experience our relationship as blessed, fulfilling the essence of God's intent that human beings not be lonely in life.

Our church has much to ponder at this crucial time in history. I challenge the reader to address the following questions with prayerful consideration:

- What is at stake for lesbian and gay people if the church does or does not recognize and support their faithful, committed relationships? What is at stake for the church?
- Should homosexual relationships be measured by different moral standards than heterosexual relationships? How should the church respond to couples who desire a ceremony of commitment or a blessing of their relationships?
- Are "out of the closet" gay men and lesbian women truly welcome members in your congregation? Are their gifts recognized and used? What is at stake for your congregation and our denomination if gay and lesbian members are not encouraged to participate in activities of the church in the same ways as heterosexual people?

At stake is whether the Lutheran church will be an inclusive body reflecting the diversity of creation. Lesbian/gay Christians continue to form congregations of their own. Former Lutherans are a major contingent of the membership in these churches. Can we afford to lose life-long Lutherans from our fellowship due to judgment and prejudice? From my perspective, what is at stake is the integrity of our communion to name itself the whole family of God. I believe God is calling us in our time to reflect the liberating message of St. Paul that grace abolishes the boundaries between us.