

Peace in the Valley Anthology



Members of the LGBTQIA+ community and allies share their experience with faith, religion, spirituality, and acceptance.

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Edited by Kat M. Harris and Shauna D. Harris

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DOVER & THORNTON-HARRIS PUBLISHING



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First Electronic Edition: January 2022

ISBN E-book: 978-0-578-35983-0

ISBN Paperback: 978-0-578-35984-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022901143

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This anthology is dedicated to those in the LGBTQIA+ community, all the youth and adults, that were ever made to feel less than or unloved. Those who were shunned, abandoned, beaten, abused, or murdered because of who they were and who they loved.

Those reading their holy scriptures cover to cover to prove that the God of their worship loves them. I am here to tell you, they do. Your lives and sacrifices will not be forgotten.

You are enough, worthy and you are loved, just as you are.

We also thank the souls, the allies that stand beside the LGBTQIA+ community as they fight for acceptance, those who support and love them as they are.

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Foreword

Faith is a personal choice, whereas sexuality isn't. To reconcile the both is a uniquely personal journey. If one can't reconcile oneself, that's fine too. Inner peace and serenity is utmost.

Ejel Khan

Coordinator and Founder of the Muslim LGBT Network

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Introduction

As a young gay non-binary person, I struggled at times with my love of God and God's love for me. We often hear stories, songs, or sermons that either tell us of God's undying love or hate. The latter is many times reserved for the LGBTQIA+ community. What I have found through research, attending seminary, and reviewing varying texts, this notion of God not liking or loving the "other" or non-heteronormative ideals is simply not true. This untruth is not limited to Christianity. Most religions are built on the love of creation and kindness.

In the age of increased suicides among youth and an increase in the murders of transmen and women, the editors thought it was best to compile the experiences of LGBTQIA+ persons and allies to combat the hate and disdain that exists within houses of faith and religion. So many grow up feeling rejected by everyone in their families, circles and often hide who they truly are. The common denominator for many that go through travesties is religion. As a means to combat this, I thought it would be a great idea to ask members of the LGBTQIA+ community and their allies to contribute their thoughts, prose, bible study guides, prayers, sermons and art to help spread the word about acceptance and love as it relates to faith and self.

I hope something within the following pages touches your heart, spirit or mind and you'll join the love fest and spread healing and acceptance to all you meet. I pray that if you are considering ending it all, that you would reach out to someone first. That you will read something in the following pages that will let you know that you are needed, wanted, and loved.

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Wings of Desire
VELA

Model: Caroline Gerbeckx (SR & Company)

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A Poem about God
Andru Defeye

They want a poem
I said God is a black Trans woman

They said no a real poem

But I have seen her come back from the dead and love those who have
killed her

And that is the realest poem about God there has ever been.

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Friendship, Friending = LOVE

Arneitha McCall-Johnson and Gladys Mannas-Stevens

Friends are God's Blessings,
no doubt about that.
sent from above to help walk your Track.

Friends are God's Blessings,
shaped by the master above,
comes in All Colors, Sizes & Genders with Love.

Friends are God's Blessings,
Don't turn your back,
You need Friend Power to
Walk this Track.

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Does God Exist?

T. Apples

I often ponder the question my cousin asks of Christians, prove God exists. So, I was given homework in therapy that had me remembering some very hard, horrific, and brutal times. (Therapy helps)

I've witnessed & experienced physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, and mental abuse. I still have hope & joy. I have loved, lost, been heartbroken, broke some hearts, and lusted and yet I still have the capacity to love. I have been at the bedside of several loved ones as the Dr said prepare for the worst and I am still able to talk to all of them. I still believe and can smile. I am many times frozen in events of pain with darkness closing in, yet I am still here. The light always pierces the darkness.

As a Christian who is different, I have been condemned and cast out and said hell awaited me. Yet I still praise, have a song in my heart and have faith that I will be the loudest Hallelujah just inside the gate of Heaven.

Moral is I may not ever be able to prove that God is real to my cousin, but God or Spirit has sure enough proven that He/She/They is real to me. The belief that there is better sustains me. The hope that in the end all will be well, pushes me to love and help despite. Everyone's story is different as are their experiences. Continue to be kind, loving, patient and TOLERANT.

No one has all of the answers & most of us are doing the best we can with the life given. You know if the right wingers are correct & I don't get into their heaven it's okay because God, has been good to me. Might not have answered every want or ask but even in my deepest lack, I had.

A TENDENCY MISTAKEN FOR RAPTURE

Colin James

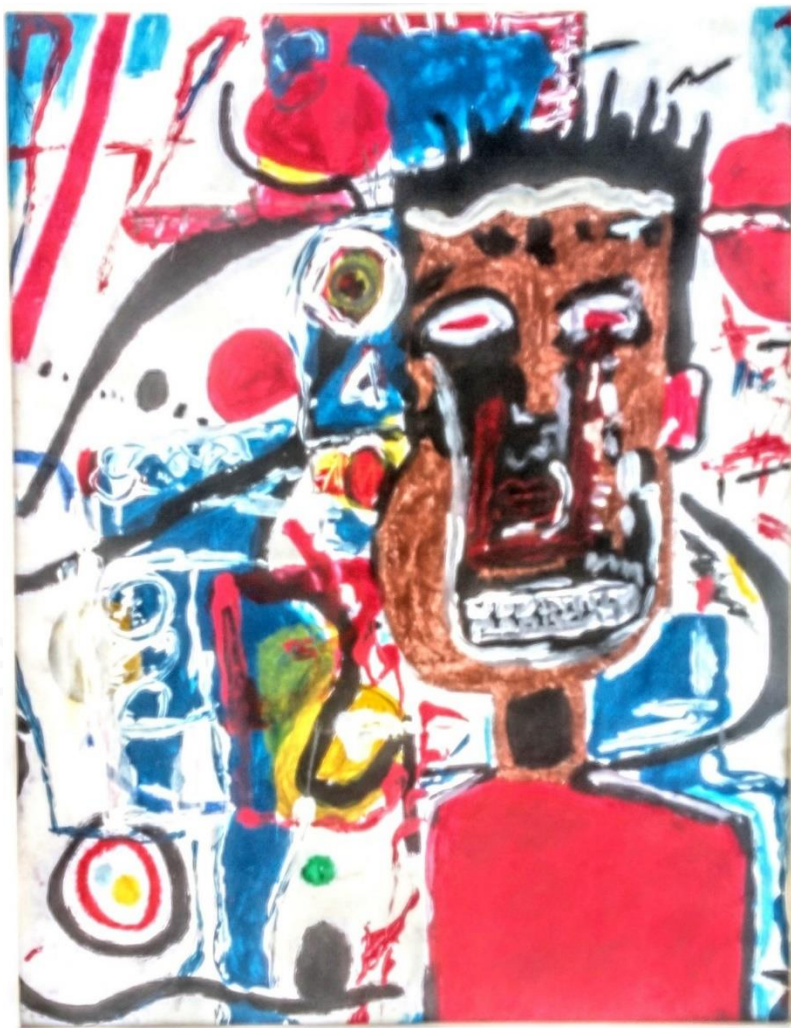
Sure it's free, but the attendant
has pushed us so far back
all us modern enthusiasts
resemble an archaic avant-garde.
Here the most explicit
are the least fortunate.
My friends primp in their false teeth.
If only a wrinkle could harness power.
I see you came prepared
brought your "I want".
And the camera so does love you.
Don't open up too much, dear.
Keep it esoteric for the masses.

Tyler's Lament

Kel M.

In the beauty of the lilies, I kneel down to pray
I see the young black boy, broken as tears stream down his face
He's called a faggot, asked questions about subjects that are too advanced
for his age
All while the word watches the stream of his torment and pain
Will Jesus help him?
Will God care?
Where are Buddha and his peace now?
The word GAY shaved into his head
Those who are supposed to protect, instead beat, and ridicule him
The world watched as he folded into himself
It's hard not to get weary when the world seems to punish you for being
different
Tyler
A boy wearing a red shirt
With the new age scarlet letters shaved into his head
GAY
We must find a way to save him and those like him

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Tapestries (An Artist)
Andre Pace

More than what you see
B. Maximus

The cross is a symbol of Christ's love. He died for everyone, not just for people who are heterosexual. His love is inclusive. He died for all of us, and His blood covers us all. In our efforts to be more Christ like, we cannot forget the inclusive piece. We need to go beyond our initial first impression or preconceived notions and be open to knowing people for who they really are.

Think about how often BLACK and LGBT persons are judged and how many times people see the color of their skin or who they love and don't bother to look any deeper before forming an opinion about you.

We are all more than our skin color or sexual preference. Unless someone is willing to go beyond what they think, they know based on what they see, they will never be able to appreciate you for the beautiful creation you are.

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Hiding Behind the Mask

Shauna D. Harris

“God loves you,” they say with a pious smile. Until your back is turned. Then they rip you apart with razor tongues and vicious glee. “Love the sinner but hate the sin.” But they decide which sins to hate, and which deserve forgiveness. “Jesus accepts you just as you are.” Unless your dress is too short, or you violate their unwritten rules. The messengers’ pervert the message, twisting and shaping it until they can use it as a weapon to flay all that they consider less than, all while exalting themselves as the perfect reflection of His love and grace.

The house of God is a minefield, filled with unseen traps to destroy those who step off the convoluted path laid by narcissists and hypocrites. So, I hide. I put on a mask to hide my true face, filled with shame as I desperately try to mimic the messengers. If the ones chosen by God to spread His word – people with their own sins to atone for – can’t accept me, then how can God? Maybe I am irredeemable. So, I hide. I put on a mask to hide my true face. I sit in the pew, and I listen. I sing the songs and say the words, but I don’t feel them. I watch the people around me, joyously consumed with God’s love and the euphoria of the Holy Spirit, and I am numb.

I’m too busy hiding and holding my mask in place. I have to concentrate, or it will slip, and they’ll see. They’ll see the unlovable, irredeemable me hiding behind the mask that mimics their face. They’ll yell and scream and condemn me to a hell they neither own nor control. But I can’t take that chance, so I focus on the mask while I sit in the pew and feel nothing.

I have questions. The things they preach don’t always make sense and I can tell by the way they speak that they don’t understand it either, but they speak with total confidence, secure in the knowledge that they are the chosen messenger. But I have questions. I question the contradictions and inconsistencies, the senseless brutality coupled with commands to love and forgive, the calls to chastity mingled with jubilant debauchery. I have questions because I want it to make sense. I want to believe like they believe, with no hesitation or reservation. But I can’t until my questions are answered. And I can’t ask my questions because it will bring the condemnation, I am so anxious to avoid. So, I sit silently

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with my mask and unanswered questions. And the shame grows.

Eventually it gets to be too much. The weight of the mask and the shame and the questions becomes too much, and I can't fake it anymore. I will never be like the messengers and the effort to try is destroying me. So, I walk away. I walk away from God and His house filled with His messengers and I put down the mask. I feel bereft but I also feel lighter. Slowly the shame starts to fade but it never goes away. The messengers and the judgment are everywhere, even inside my head.

And I still have questions. So, I look for answers on my own. I don't settle for "have faith" or "trust God." I ignore the pat phrases that mean nothing and are meant to pacify me while hiding their own ignorance. I look for real answers that make sense to me. And as I do I get closer to God as I understand Him. And I feel His love. The love doesn't require the mask or pretending to be something I'm not. The love doesn't require hiding pieces of me to fit into a mold that was never meant for me. God, stripped of all the requirements and rules and limitations put on Him by the messengers, love me just as I am.

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Hear my cry
Sojourner

Last year I wrote a poem about finding one's voice
I was trying to be heard
Because I did not say it like others wanted
Or my approach was not what the masses expected
My cries went unanswered
The how is very important but the words or pleas uttered from the depths
of someone's pain is more so
If we get hung up on the how
We can miss the cries for help
I'm thankful to God who hears every whisper and unutterable thought
As a prayer
I prayed for the gay to be taken away.
I'm still me
I'm still fabulous
Still sweet with sugar in my tank
Guess this is how I was meant to be

Fate
Insatiable K (For Mu)

I am triggered
I am not well
Shock waves and tremors roll through me
Memories flood my mind
Tied to a bed and beaten for trying to escape hell
Slumped over in a church because the pills you took did not work
Escaping the only way, you knew how
Drugs and alcohol
Accepting love from the wrong people because the “right” ones did not
protect you
Praying daily for God to save the day
The only time you looked truly peaceful was when you were in your
final bed
How to escape a fate you didn’t ask for

Peace

TT

I find serenity in you
The sunlight changes my outlook
As the waves ebb by my troubles
Wash away
The breeze soothes away pain
God is Spirit
Spirit is everywhere

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Surah 70:40 Sunset
Photo by T. Thornton

Aequitas (For Nadezhda Tolokonnikova)
Alan Garrigan

“The criminals of the vision are a totally different matter”
Pier Paolo Pasolini

In Countless stars
Sonorous and mystical
everywhere a voice

A soundscape silhouette
A flash of guns
From the pitch black

Allegretto

The realisation of truth
Beyond the recognition
Of capital ghosts

Calcium
Drew Pissarra

We've all done it or at least I have:
The pursuit of someone stupid pretty,
that man who somehow entices from calve
to collarbone, all while being shitty
and shallow. Okay, maybe that's too strong.
He didn't mean to be mean or bewitch
or lure me to follow his siren song
of the bone. Ye gods! Speaking of which...
I went to the museum to see the gods
with their marble bodies whiter than bone,
and found their fig leaf covered goods at odds
with their near nudity. I stood alone
and stared up at a flawless face turned hard
by the very hand that loved what it carved.

MASCULINE

Jaime Cepero

Who was it decided
The cheekbones my father gifted me
and the hair of my mother all curly and wild
Crossed wires in the mechanics
Under your backwards snap back?
Who was it?
Cause it sure wasn't me - never that.
I was taught a mans hands
fill with fire when he speaks
On the things that he feels
and wants and needs
His lips break into a smile when he laughs
His arms open up to the people he loves
His style should ebb and flow and sway
With the breeze of his mood
Or the tone of his day
So give me back my lengthy words
And the way I cross my legs sometimes
I want my skinny jeans back
I want my rolling eyes
I want my grooving hip
and my tank tops in summer
And you can come the fuck up
off my grandmamas humming
And my sisters eyeliner in the mirror at night
I'm want ALL my shit back
And most importantly bruh
I want that cherished word back
The one that you stole
The one you continue cover and keep
Under axe body spray In your green cargo shorts
Getting rusty and brittle
and eroded from age
Give me back my word, man.
It was never just for you.

Triune Me

TT

I am the child of poverty, trauma, and God. Daily like a phoenix rising from the ashes of hate, racism, homophobia, and depression. When I enter a store knowing I can't touch an item or remove my hands from my pockets, it chips away at my psyche. Listening to stories about others who look like me or share my experience buy being told by the orator that I'm a good one" and the story is to showcase the actions of the "bad ones".

I live in fear of my life and the lives of those I love because today may be the day that we are labeled the bad one. I believe in God, equality and freedom for all. Yet in my country, I am not free. I am called a heretic and treated unfairly

I live my life in triunity.

I am me. I am the me they want to see and the me that deals with the broken and split pieces. Working with people that I know hate people who are like me, sometimes overshadows the good of those who support, encourage, and accept others for who they are.

Small Town Church Values

La Toya Hankins

I credit my hometown for my concept of how a church should honor its community of members. Pretty remarkable, considering I grew up in a town with less than 300 African Americans who divide their religious convictions among five churches. Southport, NC, is home to two Baptist churches; my home church, Friendship Missionary, is located less than half a block down the street from First Baptist. Two blocks down the road from First Baptist is Mount Carmel AME Church. The town's AME Zion believers have two choices that are farther apart. St. James AME Zion sits on top of a hill near the heart of the black community, while Browns Chapel is a few yards from the town's city limits in Jabbertown. According to a 2021 population count, 276 people in my hometown identify as African American. That is a church for every 55 people. In contrast, we have three stoplights for a town of 4,176 people or a stoplight for every 1,392 people.

For more than one hundred years, the African American residents of my hometown have joined in holy matrimony, laid rest to those who have departed this earthly plane and gathered to give thanks unto the Lord in one of those five brick buildings. While you may attend another church if you happened to marry, you never gave up membership in your home church until God called you home.

Although we may separate for two hours on a Sunday morning to attend our respective churches, I never heard of any of the residents of my hometown shunning members of their churches who identified as LGBTQIA. I venture to say not only was no one turned out or away because of their sexuality, "noted homosexuals" occupied leadership roles in individual churches. One church's Sunday School superintendent occupied the position for close to a decade, and there was no denial of the way his blood beat. It was an open secret he dated someone who served as the choir director at another church.

Perhaps it is because you get to know the person's entire life when living in a small town that permits understanding and acceptance. One's sexuality shouldn't matter when you come before the throne. If you profess with your heart and confirm through your actions, that should

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determine who should be considered blessed and highly favored, not who you date.

I appreciate my hometown church community for providing me an example of how a church should treat those who love the Lord and those of the same gender. Love is love. No one should face ostracizing because their relationship status differs from others in the congregations. If a few hundred people in a small Southern town can grasp that, why does it seem so hard for some of these bigger city congregations? Small town values indeed.

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Power Faith in Justice
Cesar Ceballos

Bodies
Rev. Esih Efuru

Previously published within Union Presbyterian JustAct 2021
Newsletter Issue 1

piled on
piled on
shackled
piled on
piled on
bones
piled on
piled on
flesh
piled on
tears
piled on
fields
piled on
pain.
bodies
carted and bruised
vomit drips from weary mouths
upon diseased torsos and cracked hymens of girl ghosts left to haunt
those
who were just left to rot
underneath the feet of slave shoremen bodies
wearing tar like Max Factor
to make sure the lies don't show through the truth
bodies
on the block like turkeys on sale last week cheap like oatmeal in the box
soul shredded like cheese on your grits while you eat and laugh about
how long it took that N***** to die this time
 running in dark fields
eyes scratched with leather whips
clutching at their rags to keep from freezing and dying as slave

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bodies
sore from leeches in the river water
skin cracked and burning to be free
bodies
on the cross
while you say Amen and eat your pie
and steal my legacy
bodies
slapped while praying
bodies
sprayed while staying
bodies
beat while singing
bodies
shot while wishing
bodies
fighting a war for your lies
bodies
coping with substances
due to the absence of your why
bodies
bodies...
...plagued
inside your cages
while you write prescriptions of persecution and call it law
bodies
from the soul of first civilization begin
to remember
the bodies
that bore
our best
and built
our brevity
bodies
from the bowel
of our press
begin
to realize
the bodies
that braved

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our beatings
and survived
bodies
from the bench
of our becoming
begin
to speak
to the bodies
that are waiting
to answer
you
bodies
are building
bodies
are birthing
bodies
are bold
bodies
are being
created
to stand
to see
to say
to you
that
YOU
could never
destroy
the essence of
what
our bodies
really are
for all of
those bodies
that were shed
were the railroad
that carried
the weight
of our majesty
and traveled through time to deliver

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the message
that our
bodies
behold
POWER
and that within
our souls
there IS
a knowing
that will KEEP US...
there is a trusting
that has fed us...
there is a love
that knows us...
there is a FORCE
that rises through us... and there will be a time
where
bodies
will
take our bodies
BACK

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Enslaved Heart



Black Lives Matter
Photos by T. Thornton

Spectrum in the night
Vincenzo Cohen

Like a spectre
I'm off to the streets of the night
burning in the arson of sex..
There will be a soul that will take me far away
from the horror of promiscuous orgasms?
Faint illusions of power..
Arcane company of felines
empathic friends
bearers of divine messages..
and in the delirium of art I believed
miserable consolation of me
unholy chasm of lucrative fornicators
and kingdom of unclean wickedness.
In the mist of the ether
the soul screams far away
towards worlds of rapt shadows
in hermetic postures
and figures wrapped in laconic looks..
Borders on the imagistic..

**Pauli
K.H.**

For Pauli Murray, an inverted sex instinct Christian pioneer

I invoke your name, your wisdom, your spirit
Pauli
Our stories, though similar, yet so different
I wonder if you questioned if God loved you at all
I wonder how you felt when you knew that “girl” or “woman”
Did not quite fit you
I wonder if your empathy and emotion ruled your life choices
I wonder if the women you loved, publicly and privately
Loved you just as much as you loved them
I wonder if the inverted sexuality caused you many sleepless nights
As those you loved struggled to see you, as you saw yourself
Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt was your friend
RGB used your thoughts and stances to fight for justice for women
I wonder
I ponder
I am excited to know that someone existed that was so like me
Pauli

Inverted Sex Instinct

?

Marwa Alqatari

Question marks
Forbidden to lay
In their beds
on our tongues
In their homes
Outlining
Our humble existence
Your answers
Meticulously crafted
Designed to the tea
From a saint
That forever hated me.
From stories of myths and monsters
That hid under my bed
“Meant to be” chosen
Over humanity
Over identity
Over you and me
Over choices we wear
Drawings we print
On our skin.
Over uncertainty.
I know this sounds crazy but
Empty spaces never made me feel lonely.
Every floor made it so inviting
To pierce my hands through it
And plant my seed
And fill the room
With what could be.
I know nothing
And you continue
To know everything
While you enjoy
Being found

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Being chosen
Sequestering doubts
Under the rug
I will pick what festers
And plant my garden
And at night
I'll tuck them in
Under my tongue

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Just As I am

Anon

Just as I am without on plea
But that God would accept me
As I am, in my fullness
Not the norm, just me
Oh, Lamb of God I pray
Accept me

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'boxtop' acrylic, graphite, spray paint + charcoal on canvas. 36" x 24". 2020

Nathanael Gregory Myers

The Rhythm of Christ

Laurinda D. Brown

While she was in the cradle, someone's rosary used to dangle in my face. When she leaned forward, the bottom tip scraped my forehead, and, depending on how my pillow was situated, grazed the slant in my nose. Strung from a 24-inch gold chain, she showered in it, dined in it, fucked in it, worked in it, lied in it. Yes, lied in it. Although we'd been together many years, lies - mine and hers - had infiltrated the trust that, looking back, never truly existed. Perhaps it explains being on the receiving end of glory nearing the mountaintop and then opening your eyes to a crucifix where the left side is bent just enough for me to see the imperfection and ignore it while grinding away to Maxwell's "Know These Things: Shouldn't You?"

That necklace ended up in the pawnshop. I used child support money to help save it, but somewhere in the midst of her fuckery, the cross was no longer important. For years, she pleaded for us to attend church together. With the exception of a time or two and then the deaths of my parents, I obliged. But the repeated question, "What were you crying about?", invaded a sacred space that was already twisted with hypocrisy and guilt.

Days before I met her, I was keeping company with another female with whom I never intended to go any further than the bedroom. Growth makes you admit shit. At 3 a.m. during one booty call, WDIA - the hot AM radio station in Memphis at the time - abruptly switched from R&B to gospel an hour early. There were no prayers or truncated scriptures. The programming jumped right into the trills of a piano joined first by syncopated taps of a bass drum and then a voice that, by the end of the first stanza, owed me nothing.

Without a word to my hostess, I got up and put on my clothes. I moved slow so I could hear who the song's artist was, for now it was my anthem. "And that was 'Angels' by Richard Smallwood," the announcer said. While at Howard a few years earlier, I was introduced to Richard Smallwood's music through WHUR on Sunday mornings and occasional gospel concerts on campus and around D.C. This song, though, was new to me. For reasons I still can't explain, the words and music created a

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rhythm within me that only Christ could explain. Only He knows why I feel and listen to it on repeat at any given time.

One morning in 1999 when I was taking my mother to chemo, I played this track. Folded into the passenger side clutching her abdomen in writhing pain from pancreatic cancer, she asked, “Who is this?”

At the time, the only two things we knew and understood about that type of cancer was Momma stayed in constant pain, and she was dying. Chemo comforted her but at the expense of nausea and no visits from sick folks. Time was running out for apologies, and, when she was alert enough, she didn’t want to hear them anyway. With five young grand babies and the oldest barely out of kindergarten, Momma focused on memories...hers and ours. “It’s Richard Smallwood. The song is ‘Angels’,” I replied.

Her eyes closed and shoulders gently swaying, she bopped her head to the rhythm. It was a motion she’d claimed a couple of years earlier when nothing could keep her from church. Every Sunday – no matter what time she arrived – her usual parking space awaited. During those years, I witnessed more tears and more reckoning from her than I’d ever seen. It was as if she knew God was getting heaven ready for her. “I like that.”

In the coming years, my children adopted a similar love for “Angels,” understanding its value to the soothing of my soul and its relationship to their Ganny. Prior to every play, I put it on repeat. Only one person has ever challenged me on it by saying, “God knows I’ve heard this enough today.” Her access to me became restricted, followed by occasional blocking when I discovered my books under her bed while we were fucking. Don’t worry about the angle from which I saw them. Just know I saw them. She couldn’t pass “Go” and was soon booted from the club - my side chick club. Yeah, I said it. God has a way of telling you, even in the middle of an affair or when someone’s in your cradle, “I’m watching over you.” Have you ever wondered which sin He sees – the one where you’re lusting after the flesh of the same gender or the one where He witnesses you cheating on your heterosexual husband?

Only God knows how many times I’ve overdosed on whatever was in the cabinet. On the night of the Hydrocodone overdose, I made my oldest sit with me and forbade her to call 9-1-1 or tell my partner, adding lacerations to an already delicate spirit who carried my burdens on her shoulders. I destroyed my child for life with that move. Real talk. The faux pas is not buried in my conscience. It sits on my soul and whispers, like we do when we’re trying to whisper, “You did this.” I

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don't care how many apologies I make to my child or to myself it never goes the fuck away. So, you might ask, "What does Christ have to do with it?" Everything.

Our children are on loan to us. God put them in our care for them to be molded in some image - ours, His, LeBron. That process is out of our hands. What is our job is to build them up on the inside? I've done some shitty stuff that has made me question my value and my purpose. I question why God is the go-to after a failed lesbian relationship. I mean, one minute they're riding in that cradle and then the next they want to pray for you because now you're the sinner. How do we navigate those discussions when making and building our children? What words of comfort or explanation do we create? For me, I went to Christ with my rhythm, my shit, my bags. I requested the removal of that bitch, Karma, from my doorstep. I was ready to finally play fair. I needed to for my baby.

When I think back to the pastor who said there was garbage on the pew where my wife and I were sitting one Sunday or the not-so-closeted choir director who pulled the college gospel choir out of my production because I wrote lesbian erotica or the domineering preacher who threatened to take any choir member's name off the roll if they set foot anywhere near the theater, I wonder who gave them the right to judge me? Through my tears and heartbreak, I did.

For a second, I lost my rhythm. Confused and frustrated about which sin would cause me to burn the fastest, I made missteps and fired the jury. That night at Grady as my blood pressure dipped to dangerous levels, the trills of the piano echoed through my spirit. I then knew God had so much more in store for me if I just bopped my head to His rhythm. Not the church's but His. The church hurt was and is real. I still see it like I still see my mom that day on the way to chemo, and I let those angels watch over me and my family so we're all good.

Child of the King
Insatiable K

I peered out of the window and what did I see
A cool, confident, chocolate woman walking down the street
4-inch heels, sundress, and shades
Her head held high, her strut that of queens from the olden days
I can tell she is a master of her craft
A child of the King
A woman of stature, boldness and means

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Definition of Prayer

C.H.

Prayer is a conversation with the deity of your choice. God to me is the creator of the world. God is all deities, religious and not. Pagan and traditional. Prayer is shouting, singing, calling your best friend with good gossip. Prayer does not require reverence. You can say how you are feeling. You can speak silently in your head. You can have hours long conversation or a quick love ya. However you choose to pray, it's your right.

A simple conversation.

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Be



Yohanes Soubirius De Santo

Me
K.H.

Homosexuals are trying to pervert future generations. A lie perpetuated through history. I was perverted by heterosexual men. Men who sexualized my preteen through teen body for their lasciviousness. They assaulted me, raped me, taught me to hate my body more. I'm not healed from that. No right wing. I was not perverted by homosexuals. It was heterosexuals that broke me.

I wasn't turned out by homosexual men. No I was assaulted by men with girlfriend or wives. Leaders in churches, temples, cathedrals, and in the community. Men who pretended to be brother and father figures. Some of the most conservative and pious men groomed me, seduced me and used my young body for their pleasure.

Our pain is ignored.

No homosexuals did not pervert or hurt me. Cisgender men did.

Exhausting

TT

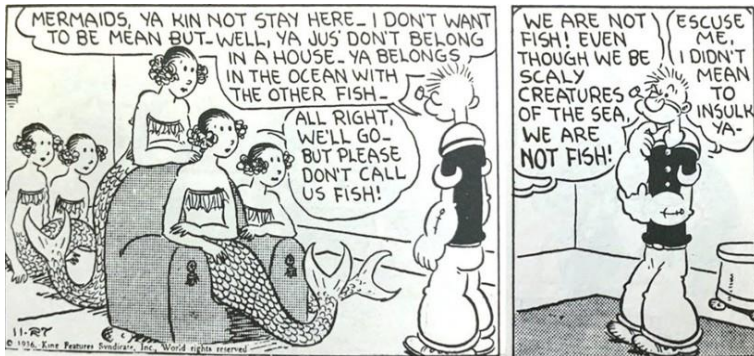
It is exhausting being black in this world
It is exhausting being gay in a straight world
It is exhausting being a woman in a world ran by men
It is exhausting hearing day after day that your mere presence is a sin
It is exhausting changing oneself just to fit in
It is exhausting when you've squeezed yourself into a box and you're
still not considered "one of them"
It is exhausting expecting change when no one wants to bend
It is exhausting being me
Why can't I just be
I live my life selflessly
Helping others to the detriment of peace
Yet it is still not enough
Why can't I just be

Follow You
Kel M.

I might have been a disciple
Studying at your feet
I might have been like Peter
Cutting down who I thought was the enemy
I may have been like Thomas
Doubting if I'd ever see you again
But this much I know
Haven't been told
I would have followed you my brother, my captain, my King
I would follow you my sister
To the ends of the earth
Teaching all the dear ones
Of your power, miracles and works
I would follow you my captain
As you steered us down the path
Full of light and righteousness
Until the day you come back
I would follow you my Queen
Sitting to the right of the Mother
Interceding on our behalf
Not one moment of rest
I would follow you my Queen

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We can all learn a thing or two from Popeye Anon



Thimble Theatre © E.C. Segar (US) and Public Domain (Non-US)

ACCEPTANCE

Popeye is seen as a hero to many in the United States and yet some who honor him do not follow his acceptance of all. In a 1936 comic, he hosts mermaids and refer to them in a derogatory manner. Once he is informed of the proper way to address them he apologizes. Wouldn't it be wonderful if people today would use the correct names and pronouns for those whose name they know? So many use the incorrect pronouns and dead names as a means to torment or belittle others. Popeye did not turn the blame back to the mermaids to prove their reasoning. He did not argue with them, nor did he harm them. He just accepted their title and apologized.



Thimble Theatre © E.C. Segar (US) and Public Domain (Non-US)

SELF –LOVE

Before Popeye met Olive, he was engaged to a man named Lem. Not many people know this or even remember that Popeye enjoyed wearing both women's and men's clothing. In today's world he would be called androgynous or even non-binary. To himself, he just was, and he was okay with that. Lem refers to Popeye as his wifey so one can infer that they were in a relationship. To take it further, in explaining their love and position in Sweet Pea's life, Popeye states that they are both male and female. Amphibious is the word Popeye uses, in this era some use non-binary, and others use androgynous. Those who are intersex can also relate. Each human has both male and female hormones in some capacity within their being. For them, they are united the female and male parts of themselves and became a hero.

Popeye loved Popeye. They stood up for the downtrodden and did not mind fighting for what is right. We can all learn from Popeye. Whether you have a Lem, Olive, both or more, am mother, father or both to a child or children, love you. Acceptance and self-love do not require you eat spinach. It just requires you to be brave. There is a village waiting to support and uplift you. They will cover all sides and will fight alongside you. You are who you are.



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GOD LOVES EVERYONE

Rev. Dawn Flynn

Scripture – Galatians 3:26-29 NRSV

I want to talk to you about LGBTQIA people being fearfully and wonderfully made by our Creator God. Up until 10 years ago there is no way you could have convinced me that I was fearfully and wonderfully made for I was living a lie that I had lived for over 50 years.

I was unhappy in my own skin. All the time growing up from age 8 I felt I was a woman trapped in a male body. I longed to be a woman in my dreams and thoughts. When I looked in the mirror I cried and died a little each day. What I saw in the mirror, that is, my body, did not match who I felt I was inside.

I struggled with what I had been taught growing up in church, that is, that we shouldn't mess with nature. God doesn't make mistakes and if we mess with it, we are committing a great sin. My faith told me I could never be a woman but my mind kept telling me otherwise. I had mixed prayers – one night I would pray that God would take the feelings away and the next night I would pray that I could wake up a girl. All my life I struggled and did all I could to be what the 'church' said I had to be – a male.

I married twice and have two sons. Each time I married and had kids I kept hoping that each action would 'make a man out of me'. But it never did. I even went to alcohol to drown my sorrows but that didn't work.

I so desperately wanted the torment to end. In my times of reflection, I decided that my problem was I just didn't understand the Scriptures well enough. I committed myself to go to seminary, learn the Scriptures, and then God would give me the strength to be the man God created. In my search for a seminary, God came to me in a dream and told me that I was truly being called into ministry and God would make it happen and God did. I went to Duke Seminary and did very well but I didn't find my answer. My spiritual soul was still in torment. I decided I just need to answer the call to ministry and serve God's people.

I was appointed to 3 churches over a period of 10 years. The three churches I served loved me and I had seen God working through me to

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bless the churches. But now the church, the United Methodist Church specifically, stepped out and was telling me that God's love for me was on shaky ground because I was deliberately living in sin and I was sick. All because I had given my all to raise as much money as possible for a noble cause, Relay for Life, in a woman less beauty pageant. I was labeled an 'obsessive compulsive cross dresser'. Yes, I had some gender identity issues but they were limited to private times (except for the Pageant. That was the first time I had been in public dressed as a woman) and they had never gotten in the way of my ministry to the churches God called me to serve.

I had been raised to believe that the 'church' was God's hand in the world, spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ to the lost. And that hand was blessed by the Holy Spirit to correctly interpret the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, if they said I was sick and that God's love for me was on shaky ground, then there must be some truth to what they were saying. I was devastated. My secret had come out. The 'church' called a meeting and I was severely chastised and made to feel unloved and unwanted. I was bullied to surrender my credentials and I left in disgrace. I planned suicide believing I had lost all that I wanted to live for – my family, my friends, my church, and God's love. But God stopped me from committing suicide. The Holy Spirit came to me in a dream and stopped me. It led me to a therapist to talk to about my struggles and dysphoria. I did and she opened my eyes that God Loves Everybody. She said I was just being myself, that is, what God had created me to be and that I was fearfully and wonderfully made. For the first time in my life, I was free.

Galatians 3:26-29 says, "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (NRSV). The Apostle Paul says there is no longer male and female. That means that the traditional 'gender boxes', the binary system of genders as society and the 'church' classes people, doesn't work for God. God sees the heart. In God's eyes we are all one if we believe in Jesus.

Now I know that the 'church' was wrong:

1. Now I know that I don't have anything to be ashamed of.
2. Now I know that I am fearfully and wonderfully made by the wonderful, loving Creator of us all.

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3. Now I know that God has loved me from the beginning. I remember in Jeremiah 1:5 God tells Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you;” (NRSV). I now fully understand what God meant: I lived when my mother lost 11 fetuses by miscarriage because of Rh factor incompatibility with my dad. God and Jesus knew I was going to be transgendered when I was still in my mother’s womb. But the church’ couldn’t see that. The ‘church’ couldn’t see beyond their golden halls.

4. Now I know that God has been preparing me, my whole life, for this very time: I now have a special ministry to reach out to those LGBT folks that have been told that God doesn’t love them. To tell them that God and Jesus’ love is for all humankind. Their love is always there and we should not let anyone tell us otherwise, regardless of what label they put on us.

God provided the financial means for me to successfully become the woman I have always felt I was in 2011. I am learning every day that the only way you can successfully be what God has called you to be is to love yourself. I had never loved myself until I embraced being transgendered and becoming my true self. I have never been happier in my life. I have come to understand what God meant when God told the writer of John 3:16 to write “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that WHOSOEVER believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” God’s love is for everyone, not the selected few the ‘church’ deems worthy, and I am proud to be a WHOSOEVER.

Stone Hymn (For Marty)
Alan Garrigan

To endure the cross is not tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of
an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ.
-Dietrich Bonhoeffer-

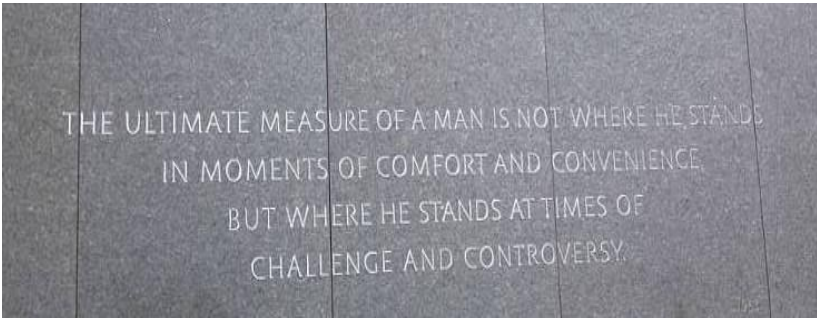
A wordless figure in the clinic waiting and yearning
For resurrection in the candour of gilded dawn illuminate
A presence poisoned and cobalt blue on a Saturnian earth
An elegy that refused to copulate with the twilight of its mirror
An effigy that echoes deep in darkness, arranged as memento mori

Coagulated querencia of mud and dirt, with days unfound,
An abeyant tracing Immolated from totalised time and space
A solitary book with prayers bereft, the shriek of Todeslager sirens,
Displaced years to Golgotha via Crucis made of bloodied night
Given to a dying sun stripped by man's descent to black storm fight

Dried arteries that once ran like rivers, Esthesis, Flossenburg did not
care,
Flung to the omphalos of jet rimmed tide, submerged by the aether
Of that unholy, congealed knowledge, an unknown furnace,
With sacred dream sheet in flames, a systemic human behemoth,
Steeped in the temple of ISIS, the terminus came as cathartic release

Flashes of incongruity turned towards heaven's banquet,
A revelation of dreamlit, Orphic cadence,
Was returned formless,
Ephemeral,
Dead

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Measure of a Man
Photo by T. Thornton

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**Shug Avery's Letter to Pope Francis
Pastor Clifford Matthews Jr.**

Prayer

Dear God in whom we live, move, and have our being, for this and other opportunities to come before your presence. To call upon your name, to experience your grace and to know the power of your love. Help us today to bask in the gratitude that should be ours. Because of who you are and all that you've already done. Dear God, we come before you today. Asking a special blessing upon those who are walking now the journey of bereavement, touch them and let them know the power of your divine presence. Let them sense that you are indeed still God and are working things out in their lives. Hold the families now close in the name of Jesus. Bless those who are struggling now. Those who have lost hope and feel that the world has turned against them. God, I believe that I am talking to someone at the end of their rope. That are thinking thoughts that are not good for them. Dear God in the name of Jesus,

I speak power into their lives. In Jesus name, I declare that they are over comers. They are loved. They are your children. Help them to see their potential and to dare to walk in it. Dear God, we come now praying for this world, for this country. Dear God, we pray that while you continue to work through this world in the midst of this pandemic. We thank you for the lessons we have learned during the midst of this pandemic. We've learned that you are faithful, that you are with us and that there are opportunities that you have for us. We ask that you bless the leaders of our country, state, county and city. Those who aspire to lead, bless them in the name of Jesus. God please go to the hospitals, touch and heal. Go into the homes , strengthen them, and bless the children that are going back to school

Dear God let them be healed. Let them know there is protection, let your grace go with them. I ask that you bless this church named St. Luke. You've been mighty good to her. Continue to bless her as she helps others. This we ask in the name of Jesus.

Sermon

Today I invite you to the New Testament, the book of Romans chapter 8, verse 1 NRSV. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ. Today I want to preach from the subject, Shug's Open Letter to the Pope. Let's go to God in prayer.

Father what I am you brought me. What I know, you taught me. What I have, you gave me. What I am Lord, you made me. Lord I am depending on you. Can't do nothing until you come, this is your servant's prayer. I ask it in Jesus' name. May all God's children say. Amen.

Shug's Open Letter to the Pope. This week as I was working on my sermon series, round the theme the Color Purple. I woke up early as is my custom. The house was quiet. I had my cup of coffee. I sat down in my reflecting and thinking chair. I began to meditate around what the message would be. It was early. The sun had not yet come up. I was in a place in that room, by myself. It surprised me therefore, in the midst of my meditation. A visitor showed up. Entered my mind and begged me to allow her an opportunity to speak. I recognized the voice. It was Sister Shug Avery. She wanted to talk to me about something that she had heard.

Yes, she's been gone awhile now. She's already gone on to glory, but her spirit wanted to talk. She had an assignment that she wanted me to do. She had a letter that she'd written to Pope Francis. She wrote it this week, after hearing his comments. She came to me and said, brother Pastor, if you don't mind sir. Can I have you read my letter? Because I believe I have something to say, that may help somebody. Of course, who could refuse Shug Avery? I said ok, let me have it. She gave it to me, and I studied it. I come today to deliver to you on behalf of Shug Avery and the Shug Avery's everywhere. Her open letter to the Pope.

This past week, the Pope put out a Papal decree. That decree, that some thought would be a message of grace and hope. Was turned into words that hurt. The reality my brothers and sisters, we come up in life. We're told early as children, the little cute ditty, sticks and stones may break my bones, but words would never hurt me. You have to get a little older to realize, that words hurt more than sticks and stone could ever could. Long after the healing of sticks and stones, words have a tendency to linger in the recesses of one's own mind. Causing cognitive distortion. Messing up someone's thought process and leading persons to roads that lead nowhere but to desolation.

The Pope said when it comes to persons that are same gendered and that are in committed marital relationships, the Pope said that that's

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not good. The exact words of the Pope, “Such marriages are not ordered to the Creator’s plan and to acknowledge such marriages, would be, in his words illicit. Shug Avery wanted me to talk to you all today because she wrote him a letter. She didn’t write the letter based upon what he said, what I just quoted. The last thing that he said got under her skin. Here’s what she had to say.

Mr. Pope, I heard you had some words to say to God’s children this week. I heard that you wanted to make clear that you have insight into the Creator’s plans and that you sit in a position that you are able to qualify what is illicit and what is not. Brother Pope, I’m just a simple person. I don’t have the education that you have. I’ve never gone to college. I’ve never gone to seminary. I’ve never led a religious organization. Yes, I am a Pastor’s daughter. But I’ve never gone as far as you have. Yes, I know you know Bible front, and back. I know you’re well versed in the Latin, Hebrew, and the Greek. I know you are someone and that you lead over 1 billion people around the world. You are somebody. So, sir please don’t take this as a sign of my disrespect.

I was always taught by my daddy, always give honor where honor is due. But sir, I just want to tell you that I have a different understanding of what you said. You said, God cannot bless in. Alright, I hear you. But I take issue with that. I will tell you what I think about what you said. You see, I am a woman of color. My people came to this country, not because we were immigrants that came through Ellis Island. No, we made our journey to this country in the hulls of slave ships, coming through the Middle Passage, finding our way into the ports of Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans. Where we were sold as cattle, inspected like horses, and sold to the highest bidder.

There was always a sense in this country, that Black bodies aren’t as valued or as prized as others. In so while I’m not as trained as you are, I understand enough of my history to know that the horrible institution called slavery had its supporters in the church. In fact, the same Bible that you use to talk about the Creator’s plan, the same book you use to say what God wants, is the same book that was used to justify the enslavement of folk whose skin was dark like mine. They turned to sections of the Bible, they talked about what the Bible says. Even sent preachers out on assignment to tell my ancestors to go ahead and listen now because your enslavement, get this now, is a part of the Creator’s plan.

That you were cursed with the curse of Ham. That you are not as equal to other folk. Your dark complexion is the curse of the Almighty.

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And you are to understand, that forever you have an inferior standing wherever you go. Yes Mr. Pope, that same book that you use to talk about plans of the Creator, was used to justify whippings, beatings, violence, sexual assaults, death, mistreatment, unimaginable trauma, all in the name of your good book. So, sir, pardon me if I don't take at face value your interpretive methodology. For sir if I would take your interpretive methodology at heart, sir, my people would never have fought against slavery, and never would have had the strength to believe that God was a God of liberation. No sir. Because that book, that same book, Mr. Pope that you quote, that you say is God's or the Creator's plan, justified slavery. So, my people, browned by the sun, blessed by Almighty God, read the same book that you read, but we dared to believe in a different kind of God.

Yes, we couldn't interpret the Bible like ya'll did. For to interpret it like ya'll did would have only led us to more suffering and death. It will only heighten our inferiority complex. So, no sir, we reject that. We practice what some called the hermeneutic of suspicion. That is to say whenever someone as light as you told us, that God said, we had to check it out for ourselves. Because every time we listened to folk that look like you sir, it led us to more pain and suffering. So, sir, first thing I want to tell you is, I don't read the Bible like you do sir. I ain't trying to change you. I just want you to respect the fact that the book that you opened is not just a prized possession of folk that look like you. But even folk that are brown, like me, we have a right to interpret that book. I ain't mad at you sir. First of all, I want to tell you, I don't interpret it like that. But secondly what really gets me is that I know history sir. I know that the church that you lead, I'm not trying to bother you sir. The church that you lead is old. The thing about being old is that you have a whole lot of history.

Sir I read about the inquisitions and how your church, under Papal leadership, went about targeting Muslims and Jews to force conversion or else they die. Yes sir, I know about that. I know enough about history to know that on the issue of slavery, not only in America but around the globe that your church was slow sir to act and to move. Sir, I also know enough history to know that your church, Popes like you, sanctioned the genocide of Native people because you felt compelled to be on those ships that went around the world. Columbus had some, you really felt it was God's plan to indeed Christianize the savages. You sir, your church sir, was party historically to massive genocides of native people in South

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America, Central America, and in North America. Yes, your church. I have a lot of friends sir. I'm just saying I find it odd when you talk about what God wants and when I read your history, I see you haven't always gotten it right.

So, I know when the Nazis came marching through Europe, your predecessor Pius was awfully quiet. When calls were made for Pius, to do something about the concentration camps and to stand up and to Nazi aggression, and to Mussolini's murdering habits. Pius hid behind his book. That good book right. Pius said nothing, until it was all too late. Yes, I know ya'll tried to fix it up after the fact and argue that if he hadn't done what he had done, the church would not have survived. But sir last I checked, now is always the right time to stand for what is right. Whenever the church, is afraid it will die, if it takes a stand for justice. Let that church die. Yes sir. I ain't mad at you Mr. Pope. I'm just saying I find it odd, that you want to talk about what is illicit and what is the Creator's plan. And what is, not able to be blessed. When I read your history, I see you were wrong a lot of times. You were wrong too often for me to accept your word at face value.

Yes, I told you I'm a preacher's kid. My daddy was a Baptist preacher. In fact, to be honest, my daddy had some of your same views. Yes, he did. My daddy looked at folk like me. My daddy had a kind of judgmental posture, because even thought my daddy was just a few generations removed from slavery. He took your Bible and took your theology and used that book to speak against his own black bodies in the pews. My daddy was part of a large number of African American preachers who adopted, a stance that contradicted its previous posture, to believe that God loved everybody. My daddy, he disowned me. My daddy turned his back on me. Yes, I went to Sunday school, Mr. Pope. I went to church every time the doors were open. I went to Baptist Training Union, and I went to Baptist camps, even though I lived in the segregated South. I went to camp, and I learned about Jesus.

I heard about him, but as I got older. Yes, Mr. Pope, as I got older, I made some mistakes. Now I know, you sit in a position called ex cathedra. I know when you sit in that position, you are considered the victor of Christ or the representative of Christ on the Earth. But Pope can you take off your robe and your pontiff hat long enough to just be human? Can I ask you a question? Have you ever done anything that you should not have done? Have you ever walked in a way contrary to what you thought you should have? I know I did. Mr. Pope, I was trained better. As I got older, I just had something about me. I thought I could

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find it out there. I went out there. I took my pretty brown, black body out there. I had the gift to sing, I moved from the choir to the juke joint. I sung and moved my body, I pleased men and women. I did it all. I was Shug Avery. I did what I did.

Because of what I did, my daddy disowned me. I tried to talk to him. I tried to show him. But he was so committed to seeing me as less than. I get it. But one day, Mr. Pope, I was Harpo's and I was singing my song. It was on a Sunday. Just down the road, my daddy's church, there were having service. I never will forget it. All of a sudden, I heard, somebody started singing. Yes, then they talked about speak to me. I kept hearing it. And all of a sudden, I can't explain it Mr. Pope, all of a sudden, I stopped singing at Harpo's juke joint, and I found myself being pulled towards the sound of the church. Yes, I did. In fact, as I journeyed from Harpo's, I took over the lead of the song. I started singing about maybe God is trying to tell you something. I came on into my daddy's church, many of the folk from the juke joint came in behind me. Behind me was a train of folks who didn't go to church on Sunday. But when I came in, they came behind me. I got to the altar. I stood before my daddy, and on that day, he took off his glasses. He came down from the pulpit and I held out my arms, and he grabbed me. For the first time in years and held me. I cried like a baby. But I told him, see daddy, even sinners have souls. Daddy, sinners have souls too.

Don't think I left that place and never returned to singing my music. No don't think Mr. Pope that I became some great gospel singer. No sir, you see, what I was trying to tell my daddy is this. God will meet you where you are. I'd told my daddy that even sinners have souls too. Yes Mr. Pope, I heard what you said, and I want to tell you now what I found out for myself. You said that God can't bless sin. Let me tell you what I know for myself. I'm going to let you hold on to that. I'm going to let you put that with your biblical interpretation and your historical faults. I'll tell you what I do know for myself. Maybe you're right. Maybe God can't bless sin, but I'll tell you what God can do. God can bless the sinner. Yes, God can. Mr. Pope, I want to tell you what I know for myself. I know what Paul said in the book of Romans. That when I came to Jesus, just as I was, weary, wounded and sad.

When I came to the Lord, just as I am. I tell you when I said yes to Him, and he grabbed me like my father did, and held me in his arms. He promised never to let me go. That's why Paul could say now there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So, Mr. Pope, I'll let you hold on to your Thomas theology I'll let you hold one

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to your Augustinian interpretation. But just know, that both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas were bound up in their own sexuality. I'll let you hold on to that sir. I want to tell you today. I want to say it loud and clear. I serve a God who specializes in blessing sinners. I can't talk for you sir, but I believe there ought to be some folk out there today upon reading my letter that can testify thank God, He blesses sinners. Because I believe there's a whole lot of us who didn't always get it right. I believe there's a whole lot of us, who haven't done everything we should. I believe there's a whole lot of us, that have made some mistakes.

I'm glad to tell you when we look back over our life. What we see over and over again is that God blessed us. We understand now the question asked, by the singer Walter Hawkins. He asked the question and said I don't know why God keeps on blessing me. Even though I still do wrong. I want to tell you Mr. Pope, God specializes in blessing sinners. So, I don't need your judgment. I don't need your words. Because every morning when I bow, I'm glad I bow towards a God who's better than you. Every morning when I get up and I talk to God. I'm glad God talks back to me. I'm glad that my God, he walks with me and talks with me and tells me that I am his own. I'm glad Mr. Pope, that I serve a God who doesn't stand off and judge me. I serve a God who loves me just the way that I am. So, Mr. Pope, you keep on writing your words. I don't really care about it because I'm not a part of your church anyway. I believe on that great getting up morning, when all the saints shall gather around the throne, there is going to be a whole lot of folks that you wouldn't bless, that will stand up and give God glory.

There will be a whole lot of folks that you wouldn't touch that, will be singing all hail the power of Jesus name. Let angels' prostrate fall. Bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all. I believe sir on that morning, when the dead in Christ shall rise, it will be a whole lot of folks, who didn't love like you loved, who didn't look like you look, who didn't interpret like you interpreted, will be raising their hands saying holy, holy, holy. So, Mr. Pope, keep on writing your words. As for me, I want the world to know that I'm glad that I serve a Savior, who loves me just the way I am. Jesus, what a friend of sinners. I'm glad I serve a Savior, who loves me unconditionally. I'm glad I serve, somebody who won't do me like you do. I'm glad, I serve somebody, whose love is persistent. Whose love is consistent. Whose love is unconditional. Whose love is strong. I'm glad I serve a Savior just like that.

That's all Shug had to say. I'm glad too, that I serve a Savior

[illegible]

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Anne Frank Statue Photo
Photo by T. Thornton

51 Revolutions around the sun 2020-2021

Kel M.

Aerion Burnett
Aidelen Evans
Aja Rhone-Spears
Alexus Braxton
Angel Haynes
Angel Naira
Asia J. Foster
Barbie Pugh
Bianca Bankz
Brayla Stone
Dominique Lucious
Dominique Rem'mie Fells
Felycya Harris
Fifty Bandz
Jaida Peterson
Kee Sam
Keri Washington
Kier Solomon
Lea Daye
Lexi
Royal Starz
Serenity Hollis
Shai Vanderpump
Shakie Peters
Tierramarie Lewis

51 suns in the span of two years
dimmed
Unable to shine because of hate, jealousy,
or misplaced affection
51 lights no longer shine
Dead named by some
Reviled by others
They are still someone's mother,
daughter, sister, friend
They deserved a chance at happiness and
more revolutions

#TranswomenMatter



Bree Black
Brianna Ulmer
Brooklyn D. Smith
Chae Meshia Simms
CoCo Wortham
Danyale Johnson
Diamond Sanders
Dior H Ova
D'isaya Monae
Dominique Jackson
Marquiisha Lawrence
Merci Mack
Mia Green
Monika Diamond
Nina Pop
Pooh Johnson
Prynce Daniel
Queasha Hardy
Remy Fennell
Riah Milton
Skylar Heath
Taya Ashton
Thomas Hardin
Tiara Banks
Tiffany Thomas

Mama E Sojourner

God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform

On any given Sunday if a hymn needed to be raised, Mama E would lead it. See Mama E joined our church with TJ. TJ is a born leader, called to preach and a member of the LGBTQIA community. Mama E supported TJ and never cast him out. However, their long-standing church's pastor would spout homophobic sermons from the pulpit, and they decided to leave. Mama E joined Unity Fellowship Church of Charlotte and all that entered the doors became her kids. A mother to all she met. She embodied Proverbs 31: 28

Her children arise and call her blessed.

He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm

Through hardships and triumphs, Mama E was there. Praying, singing, and loving on all who crossed her path. She was our biggest cheerleader. She talked to parents who disowned their kids and stood up to the bullies of the community. She was TJ's champion and now she's an angel. Her motto was There is no failure in God.

Continue to watch over us Mama E. We will miss you on this side of glory. Mama E took her ride on God's chariot. The angels slowed their chariot, stopped and let Mama E ride.

In memory of Mama Edna Lattimore December 2021



No Worse
Shauna D. Harris

I'm no worse than the thief on the cross
I'm no worse than a drunkard who charted the ark
I'm no worse than an adulterer and murderer combined
I'm no worse than a harlot with a conscience
I'm no worse than an over zealous tax collector
I'm no worse than a wise man who hoarded wealth and women
I'm no worse
I'm a voice crying out in the wilderness
Rage is a part of life
Pain is a result of strife
I want to be loved
I want to be accepted
I want to be saved
What to do
Life is precious in God's sight
We're no worse
We're no less
We are the least of these

You Are Valuable

Kat M. Harris

You are more valuable than the most prized possession.

You are more valuable than the gem between your thighs.

You are more valuable than the contents held between your eyes.

You are the treasure.

You are the gold, the whole of you.

Not just one or two parts of you.

Jesus loved you so much that he suffered and then died for you, and he knew you not.

You are valuable.

You are the diamond forged through time, circumstances, pain and yes even shame.

You are valuable.

Platinum pales in comparison to you.

It is alright to shine and be soft at the same time, gold is the same and it is often prized above all metals.

You are valuable.

You are the cream.

You are the vessel crafted in love and full of light.

Let not darkness dim your shine.

Shine valuable one so that your glow will make all of those who don't deserve you flee.

You are valuable.

You are valuable. You are valuable.

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**The Chairman/ Artist jury
Andre Pace**

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My Biblical Discovery of Inclusion and Diversity

Reverend Mykal Shannon

**Previously published in OtherWise Christian 2Stories of Resistance
In the Beginning*

Let us open our minds as we take this journey of examination and possibilities... As a member of the gender expansive community, I (like many) have been gutted by the opposition rendered us in the context of faith. I am a black transman living authentically, in the bible belt of North Carolina. As founder and pastor of a new liberated and inclusive church, Dynamic Faith Ministries, I find myself visiting some of the dark places my faith has traveled. It was not from lack of faith that these dark clouds arose, but misinformed faith. While I do not currently agree with the information given to the LGBTQ family from mainstream evangelicals and the church...the damage has been done because there was a time, I believed every word of it.

I have been ridiculed in my press to be transparent in my own understanding and expression of me and of my God. While I am able to take this hit now and not let it capsize me, that was not always the case. I had to seek the Divine for myself and often times by myself to finally land in a place of peace with who I am and how my creator views me.

It took me a while to realize all that this journey would entail as I was pushing to the other side trying to find my way to love and something more than “tolerance” had to offer. I needed to get clarity around some of the push back of who we are according to the sacred texts (or so I had been told); in particular, the story of Adam and Eve in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. Out of all that was and is used against us from a biblical perspective, it is this story that held me captive longer than I care to admit.

This story that so many are familiar with has negatively impacted interpretations of who we are as a gender expansive people; non-binary, gender-variant, same-gender loving, and trans folx. Many are very familiar with the "clobber" scriptures that have traumatized us, simply because some tend to feel like there is no biblical credibility for our existence. Well, I beg to differ. I want to bring attention to something that is repeated by those that use the bible to do harm. I (and many others) have witnessed time and time again as gender expansive people. This

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statement, “God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve!” As simplistic as it may sound it hit the core of my (then) limited understanding of God and I carried around this secret doom. After all, as the story goes, God started out with Adam and Eve, and this seemed factual enough to counter all that I had managed to overcome thus far about this “questionable me.”

This clobber statement or biblical, evangelical push back and homophobia seemed as though it might have merit, especially for a person who grew up in the church, was a pk-preacher’s kid, this was detrimental. If I believed nothing else, I believe the stories of the bible, I was taught as a youngster in church.

I was introduced to the church at an early age, around 7. My father led us into the Seventh Day-Adventist faith which was a very strict religious practice. Many churches have in common the introduction of the bible to young people through the bible stories. One of the first stories you learn about (and for me,) could actually retain early on, was the story of Adam and Eve. I would say before the age of true cognizant understanding, you simply believe, especially in the confines of church, everything that you are taught. Daniel in the Lion’s Den, The three Hebrew boys, the story of Nebuchadnezzar and so many more.

I had not yet equated to the fact that my feelings and understanding of myself as being a little boy (in a female body) were going to be problematic in my faith walk and with the masses, including my family. It wasn’t until my late teens that I realized there were some issues with me and my body that were not going away. Something wasn’t lining up. I had begun to have serious secret crushes on a few of my female friends. So, I instituted this learned and practiced behavior; I learned the art of pretend. Of course, I felt I had no choice. I knew enough to know that to my family and the rest of the world; I was a girl. I was the only one who saw the picture totally different. To make matters worse, I was a girl who liked girls...at least that’s what everyone else saw.

In my early twenties I left home and had accepted my fate. The world saw me as female. I did my best to wear the role as expected and began dating women, in secret. If any relationship became long term and we decided to live together, this (to the rest of the world) was not my lover but my, ROOMMATE. It was an uncomfortable stance, but I felt I had absolutely no choice in the matter.

As time passed, the church had become just as uncomfortable because here is where all the pretending was perfected. There were young

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men who liked me in church. I learned how to smile just enough to give the signal that reciprocity was on the table and the stage was set. Not that it really was but I knew the role. I had watched this practice many times among my straight friends, and I had mastered it too. The coercing of my Mom and the other women in the church who did the proverbial nods in our direction anytime a young man showed an interest, just intensified my need to do a “pretend” performance that would render a standing ovation. I had to protect my secret at all costs.

This acting game was a significant part of my life to keep my secret from being exposed. I realized the church had a stance on some of what I was feeling about my affection for the same sex. I didn’t know what to call all that I had come to know about myself (since before starting school)but I had figured out that not only would my parents be upset but so would my church. If my church family was upset, then God would be upset too. One thing I understood if nothing else, you didn’t want to upset God. You were writing yourself a speedy one-way ticket to hell and that stigma was something a pk didn’t need.

In my late twenties I decided that I was tired of lying about my same gender loving relationships and the fact that I was gay. Lesbian didn’t really fit for reasons I would discover later but the pretending had gotten old and frustrating not to mentioned rooted in some of my bad decision making in trying to cope. I decided to leave the state. I knew I needed to tell my Momma my father had passed from the big C, cancer a few years back. She was all we had left and I owed her my story of honesty whether she accepted it or not. I figured I would tell her once I was settled in my new place in Charlotte and all would be said and done. It seemed easier to have this conversation from a distance and it gave me a false sense of completion for this chapter of my story. I thought some things would come to an end but they were only beginning.

The day before I was to leave, my ex-lover (Roommate) in a drunken stupor, outed me to my Mom. This was also another reason I decided it was time to go. I was in an abusive relationship with an alcoholic trying desperately to be accepted, loved and wanted and to hold a secret that was slowly beginning to unravel. I had to close this chapter and I had to do it fast and be on my way. After all, my Mom’s unspoken worry, “what if the church found out” was speaking volumes through her actions of rejection and constantly reminding me that I did not get “this” from her. Well, those types of statements opened up an enormous Pandora’s box. I had issues with my non-present bio dad and if what I’m going through, I didn’t get from you...are you implying that I got it from

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my father. Needless to say, further down the slippery slope I would go. I couldn't believe I had thought all this would be solved with the simple change of my geographical location. Not!

The day before I was to leave my hometown of Cleveland, Ohio and head south, I am at work cleaning out my desk. My Mom calls upset and speaking to me through clenched teeth and asking if all she had just heard from my "supposed-to-be" roommate was true. I had never felt more cornered and shamed in my life. My secret was out so I had to admit that it was true. It didn't matter as much because I was leaving but I wanted to relay this news about who I was when I felt safe and settled in a new space. It was the only way to keep my family and friends who didn't know about me unexposed from what I was learning about me...that this was some kind of evil spirit and quite catchy. The subliminal distance folks would portray when the topic came close to anything relating to those who were labeled, "funny" (with a twist of one hand) or queer, (when it was a bad word) was toxic. I felt like maybe I was contagious.

Once I was settled in my new life in North Carolina, I began to experience the disdain the church had for the gay community even more. I looked online to get what I had hoped would be clarity with a sprinkle of acceptance somewhere in the mix. For those who have a story similar to mine, help was still a long way off.

I learned and experienced the worst ostracism from an entity that had been a part of my life ever since I could remember. I thought I was free, relocating and starting life over. I was free to be me and no more ROOMMATE titles for my lover. I didn't realize the impact of being not only disassociated from church but being told I was wrong, bad, sick and needed to be fixed would internally derail me.

The scriptures the saints used would haunt me. The message of the "church" and it's rejection of me became louder than my own voice...louder than my own experience and screaming over what and who I knew I was. I spent the next 10 years running from my faith walk. I denounced church. If God didn't want me, hey, I wasn't gonna insist anymore. I stopped looking and hoping for a church that would accept me. I put away all of my religious books and my bibles.

I packed everything about my faith walk in a box and put it as far back in my closet as I could. I was sure this was yet another closed chapter. After all, I was becoming quite familiar with rejection, loss with prematurely closed chapters of family, friends and with God. Here I was in a new place feeling butt naked but determined to somehow take a

stand.

I received constant hate mail from my Mom denouncing me before the Gods and being worried about my “fall from grace.” I will never forget one of her declarations that was so absorbed with fear and disdain...” don’t tell the rest of the family about any of this, I don’t want everyone to know that you’re going to hell.”

After my 10-year wilderness experience, I began to study more and had found an affirming church down the street from my apartment. I took many of the verses that are used to shame us into the background of life and I began to do my own research, one by one. I was so excited to discover that much of what I had been taught about how the bible viewed me was a mistranslation. I went through with a fine tooth comb the scriptures about a woman not lying with a woman, about the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and being left to your own devices and taking away the natural way we should behave sexually towards one another. I got through all of them with an affirmation of declaration about who I was...all accept the statement that I could not seem to refute no matter how much I studied and confirmed who I was with God and the bible. I just couldn’t shake the truth in the words, the significance that kept rising to the surface every time I would dismiss it as nonfactual. It was that familiar story, In the Beginning, about Adam and Eve.

Let us examine the creation story in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. This story shares the author of realities, day-by-day establishing of the heavens and the earth. We are told that All the Creator made was GOOD. So the heavens, the earth, the waters, the creatures of land and sea, the sun, moon, stars, and separation of the waters; all good! Then of course, as the story continues, we are presented with the creation of ADAM, (human) and EVE (life); no doubt it was ALL GOOD!

So, I find myself with the story of the very first people created according to God’s word. The one I had believed for about 3 decades or more. I made it through everything else that was thrown at me but here is where I could not find any resolve. Nothing. So who doesn’t believe in Adam and Eve, right?

People will tell us to nullify our existence in this gender variant community...that “God did not make ADAM AND STEVE, but ADAM AND EVE.” Out of all that faith spaces have traumatized us with, this vicious calculation of why we do not belong can most definitely become a trigger and it had been for me, until this recent epiphany. This rude evaluation of my origin or lack thereof, lingered in the very-back of my mind as a silent and damaging “truth” for many years. "God made

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ADAM AND EVE NOT ADAM AND STEVE.” It rendered so much doubt about who I was that I lost my way and had some major identity issues that led to abusive and destructive behaviors, and even homelessness. I had no rebuttal; this is how the story is told in the sacred text and at that time, it didn’t include me. I could not see myself and this was problematic on so many levels. If I couldn’t see myself then the church folks must be right. Maybe I was wrong, bad, sick, and needed to pray myself into straight submission. Maybe the pretend thing was where I needed to be? This was my haunting no matter how transparent I was about me; it was still there in the back of my mind...what if they’re right and I am wrong.

I kept trying to reassure myself that God would work this out when I made it to heaven if there was a problem. Help is on the way. However, the God I had discovered, of many names, gave me a revelation not long ago, and it has rendered in me the ability to stand; knowing that I am beautifully and wonderfully made just as I am, and just how very present I am in the creation story.

In the beginning, much of what represents our reality and exists today was put into place during that time; in the six days of creation. So here is something to consider: There are many things that were created that I believe were not mentioned in the first two chapters of GENESIS if we are to take this story at face value.

Take sound for instance. We know that it is real, and it exists but there is no mention of it in the creation story. The process of deductive reasoning opened up in my spirit. If this was the case about sound..., could it be the same for that non-existent me in this creation story.

According to the creation account, when light was created, there was no mention of the speed of light which is “about 670,616,629 mph. If you could travel at the speed of light, you could go around the Earth 7.5 times in one second.” (online: Space.com) This was proven by a Danish astronomer, Ole Roemer in 1676. (Online Who Determined the Speed of Light, Oct 1, 2014) So while we understand that light was created, the story never mentions all that has been established in the creation of this light. It is the same with creatures. There is always a new discovery of a type of creature or insect that emerges. We as a society may not have discovered many things until much later; and even now, there are still more things to be discovered... but that does not mean that they were not already established during the original creation process; nor does it remove credibility or the right for them to exist now. Well, with the application of deductive reasoning, I too am solidified. I was not

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discovered until later, but it doesn't make me any less valuable or real. Let's take a look at the moon. The moon was created according to Genesis 1:14 to give light to the night and for signs and seasons. That was all that was mentioned. It was discovered by Sir Isaac Newton in 1686 that the moon and the sun are responsible for the tides in the ocean. (Online The Moon: The Light That Rules the Night.com) It was not mentioned in the list of what was given the moon to do in Genesis.

That it was also in charge of the movement of the waters to keep them from becoming stagnated. This information was discovered by Newton, which goes back to my theory that not all that was created was mentioned in Genesis. Some information was part of the discovery process much later. I think about the chair and table, paper even that was inside the creation of the tree all the time. It took discovery to figure this out!!! How about that? The tree was already created to provide wood, so the chair was inside the tree in the beginning. Even though it seems like it, we are not discovering new things for the very first time. They were already created and designed to be common knowledge through human discovery somewhere along the cycle of life. All that was initially created by the Divine was not mentioned or referenced in the creation story. Later discoveries do not lessen merit or worth. What I had to realize is that the CREATOR was truly INCLUSIVE and DIVERSE!! Because discoveries are new to us as humanity, or appear as different and not within perceived social, cultural or religious norms...does not mean they are new to our Creator. They were waiting to be discovered. They were waiting to be acknowledged, included, and affirmed.

How about the eclipse? An eclipse occurs when the moon passes between the earth and the sun, and the moon finds itself supersaturated and its light obscured. This is considered a spectacular phenomenon, but I have to suspect that this was already put in place. An eclipse happens in any one given area once between 360 and 410 years (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_eclipse). I have witnessed a partial eclipse one time in my life so far, and it was so supernatural. The first solar eclipse was originally documented in 1375 BCE by the Babylonians but again, it does not mean that it did not already exist. (Online: TimeandDate.com)

The capability for this phenomenon was inside the existence of the sun, the moon, and the earth. Diversity, inclusion, and collaboration taking place in Genesis simply leaves me speechless; and also pleasantly surprised. It may be new to us (our discovery), but it was crafted into the DNA of the moon, the sun, and the earth during the week of creation.

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Sounds like merit to me!!

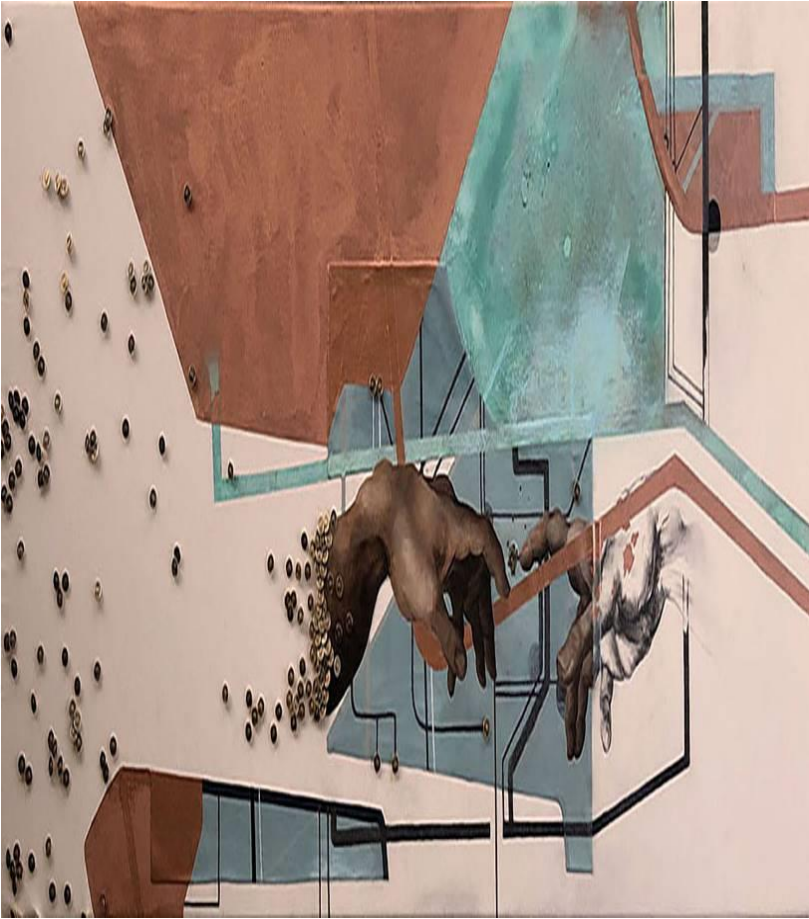
I really need a drum roll right here! If this can apply to what God has created already, then why not to the gender expansive community? Today we say, "hey, I was born this way" but it is even deeper than that. In all actuality, just as the chair was "born" inside the tree, waiting to be discovered; I was BORN into the fabric of the human race -- just as I am, in the story of creation... waiting to be discovered.

So, I salute and respect all of God's folx in the creation story: ADAM AND EVE ADAM AND STEVE SHELIA AND SUSAN The Mx community The Bi Nation Trans Folx Pansexuals Metrosexuals Asexuals, and all the gender-variant individuals not listed here... and those that have yet to be discovered.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION, take your place because we were there too, all of us, In The Beginning.

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**'Z-Axis' acrylic, graphite, vintage sailor buttons, wax, copper, chalk
pastel + collaged canvas. 27" x 74". 2015-2020
Nathanael Gregory Myers**

Evocation

Vincenzo Cohen

Drawing the mountains outline
by following the wave of emotions
by falling down lightly on the carpet of leaves
on top,
in the autumnal fall.
Where are you?
that I no longer see
I dream of you in the night
and the sweet breath of your warm bed is missing so much
I chase the wind
among the murmuring soundy woods
chants rising from altitudes
unattainable calls
absences that are felt,
so present.
I loved you more than anything
more than myself.
more than life...
I still miss you so deeply
that the sea,
the deepest ocean could not know...
I look back
I feel like I'm sensing your shadow following me.

Prayer for my Segregated Heart

Arneitha McCall-Johnson and Gladys Mannas-Stevens

Segregation the action or state of setting someone apart from other people or being set apart. Oxford Language Dictionary

There are many types of segregation and includes separation from others in your heart.

Unsegregate my heart Lord Jesus

I am your child, in a world with millions of human beings.

I live in MY neighborhood, with people “like me,” Go to lunch with people “like me” and “avoid”-ever so politely- people of other ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientation. You must be “like me” with dreams, fears, faith, and interpretation of God’s Word “just like me.”

Oh Lord, teach me what compassion means:

Open my Eyes so I can see a potential friend based on who they are versus their gender, sexuality, or style of living.

Open my Mouth to speak words of Joy, Support & Love based on who they are and not based on someone’s interpretation of God’s Word.

Scripture teaches our greatest duty is to Love.

Open my Ears to hear the dreams of others regardless of their skin color, texture of hair, style of dress, or gender- God Made Us All.

Open my Arms to link up and support Sisters & Brothers based on their need for support, even if they are not like me.

Move my Legs to Walk in God’s world with human beings also in God’s world using the paths of Love and Friendship.

Unsegregate My Heart, Lord Jesus, I pray!

Prayer
Mother Wilhelmenia B. King

Our dear heavenly Father. We come to You this day to petition on behalf of Your children. Those in despair, marginalized, even feeling thrown aside. Lord, first we say “thank you” for you have been better to us, than we could have ever been to ourselves.

You have taken care of us, provided for us, loved us every step of our lives. Father, it is at this time that we come on behalf of those who may not know that. Some that have been so pushed back, pushed down, pushed aside, that now they are at the point of actually believing that no one cares.

Some dear Lord, are at the point of giving up, letting go, asking what’s the use? Today, Lord, we come with words that we hope are words and prayers of encouragement.

Amen

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**Byrd
Anon**

When I found my new church home, I had to attend New Member's Class. In that class was Deacon Marvin Byrd, later known as Chef Byrd. He was fun and I could tell, he was a gentle soul. After class I asked him if he knew a friend of mine and he said that in fact, she was his sister-in-law. Needless to say, we became kindred spirits. I often struggle to come out, especially being within the African American Missionary Baptist Church. There was something about Byrd that made me feel safe and accepted. One day we were shooting the breeze, having "men" talk. Not your standard man conversation because he was being a gentleman. I told him, there's no need to hold back because I'm a man, just like you. He shook his head and we proceeded on. In that moment, I was affirmed. My mind and being were accepted without the standard, well you're a girl. You have girl parts. I was accepted. I was accepted by an upstanding Deacon in my church. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines affirm as a verb, an action word. To declare positively; assert to be true or to validate and confirm. From then on Byrd became my brother, father figure and uncle rolled into one. He was my Church roaddie. Anything that needed to be done at church, we were one of the firsts to volunteer. He taught me so many things, how to install tile, fix things and he told me about construction and life. We accepted each other, faults and all.

Later through our mutual love of cooking we took the helm of the church kitchen. There we hosted Easter breakfast and the first member cooking demonstration for the city of Charlotte's Village Heartbeat initiative. It still holds the record for the most attended sessions. We became Two Chefs Near the Cross because you could always find us near or at church. We were there for the love of helping others and fellowship. We were going to start a food truck business. Heart healthy food delicious soul food. Made with love. God has other plans for Byrd. He wanted him in the heavenly realm.

I pray that each of you find a Byrd. Someone who will affirm and accept you as you are. Without question or doubt. Someone who will encourage you, uplift you and pray with and for you. I was in my 30s when I met Byrd. It may take you a shorter or longer time. Don't lose hope. I'm sharing two of Byrd's recipes with you all. Salmon Patties and

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his pineapple ginger salad dressing, a big hit during our presentations.
Make it with love!
Love makes everything taste better.



Salmon Croquettes

Chef Marvin O. Byrd

Ingredients:

- 1 can (14.75 oz) pink salmon
- 2 tablespoons Dijon Mustard
- 2 tablespoons olive oil (can substitute butter / coconut oil)
- 2 tablespoons of mayonnaise

Preparation:

1. Open and partly drain the salmon
2. Place salmon in a mixing bowl, and mash with a fork
3. Heat olive oil in a no stick pan over a medium heat
4. Add the mustard and mayonnaise to the salmon and mix well
5. Form four salmon patties of roughly equal size
6. Pan fry the patties about 3 minutes on each side over a medium high heat
7. The patties should be nicely browned on both sides and heated through

Nutrition: Each patty has 240 calories, 1.5 grams of net carbohydrates, and 22.5 grams of protein

Pineapple Ginger Dressing

Chef Marvin O. Byrd

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon honey or agave
1 teaspoon fresh grated ginger
½ cup pineapple juice

Preparation:

1. Combine all ingredients within a blender
2. Blend until all ingredients are incorporated
3. Taste and add sweetener or vinegar as desired in 1 teaspoon increments
4. Serve cold

Note: Can be frozen for later usage. Thaw in fridge and blend ingredients

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All Faiths Celebration
Cesar Ceballos

Prayers T. Apples

I thought of you today. I hope your day went well. My prayer to the creator of all things is that you'll have peace and joy. Peace from all that troubles you and joy to fill you cup past overflow.

II. oṃ tāre tuttāre ture svāhā

Save me from persecution. I do not want to suffer anymore. I am tired of being referred to a reprobate, sinner, and stain against humanity. Mothers are supposed to love and care for their children. Save me.

III. oṃ maṇipadme hūṃ

Peace attends to me. Calm my weary soul. Fill me to the brim with love and compassion for myself and others.

IV. Namo Amitufo

Strength to make it through the day. Strength to ascend this earthly plane. Strength, to let everything go. Strength.

I am strong. I am mighty. I am not what people say I am. I am beautiful. I am handsome. I am magnificent just as I am.

I am mighty. I am pure. I was created to be who I choose to be.

I am love

V. स्नेह

Sneha I seek from you, acceptance and patience. Sneha.

VI. Vatsalya

Baba I am me. You helped to create me. Love me for me as I treasure you for you.

THE RHETORICAL GARDENER

Colin James

Two young marrieds, binocular clad
evidently not birdwatchers,
patrol a room plush with plants
peering through and as green as
homage to the aspidistra.
They watch their neighbor's house.
An older man, retiree
is sowing his lawn unfashionably.
Is that a kilt or something else
pronounced European influencer?
He visits home every spring
returning still quite drunk,
wanders around his property.
Plants rows with his enormous eccentricity.
This summer's sunflowers will
grow even taller than once
was considered remarkable.

What I can say

Anon

I cannot tell you about the Christian faith.

What I can say is its members are very judgmental.

I cannot tell you about Judaism.

What I can say is, there's not much room for gender fluidness.

I cannot tell you about atheism.

What I can say is, the members are some of the nicest and least judgmental.

I can't tell you much about Buddhists.

What I can say is their chants helped Tina Turner escape a dismal and brutally toxic environment.

I can't tell you much about Muslims.

What I can say is that they have their extremists, but the majority are very welcoming.

I can't tell you much about religions or their teaching.

What I can say is that love truly outweighs all. Love people where they are and maybe the religion will follow.

**Sweet
Sojourner**

You know that lil boy you hang with Chere?

Who maman?

The cute one with the pretty eyes.

Yes ma'am, Tony.

"He has sugar in his tank."

"Sugar?"

"Yep, and he needs to be careful."

I pondered what they meant in my eight-year-old brain. Sugar in his tank. Maybe she meant his train that he brought over to play with, earlier in the week. It was a sweet train.

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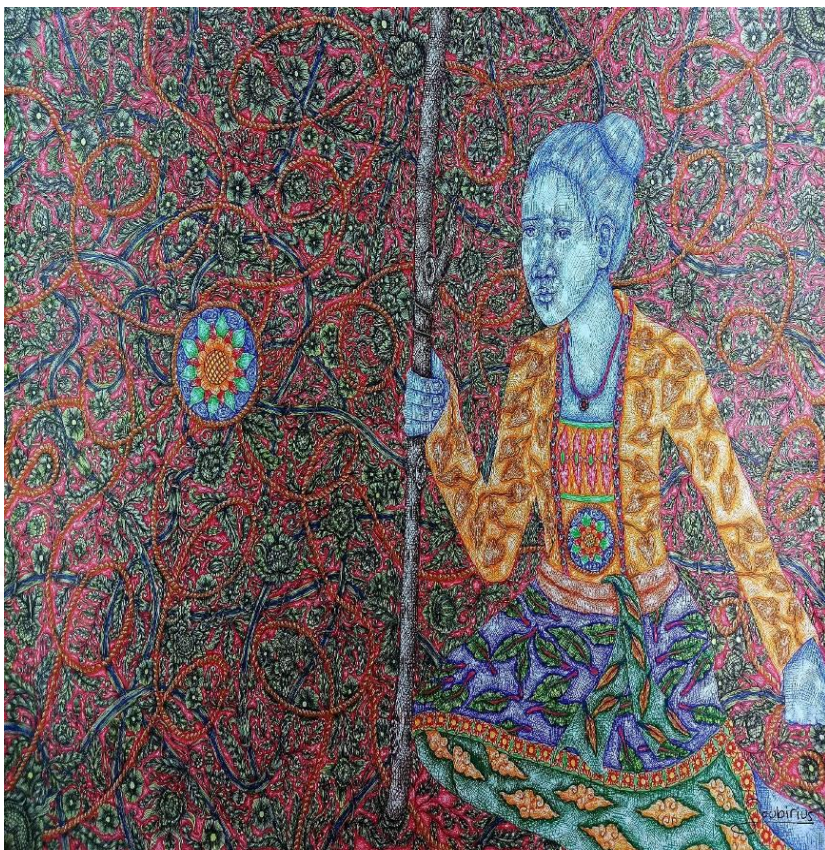
STEVE

Gladys Mannas-Stevens

I looked at Him,
He looked in Me,
I looked in Him,
We smiled, paused as we pondered new Love,
Love not like “old Love”
avoiding meeting at the doorway of our hearts.
Old Love sort body, money, and STUFF.
New Love sort me at the doorway of my heart- “tap-tap” - may I come
in?

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Growing Up Under Pressure
Yohanes Soubirius De Santo

Thoughts on God

Mother Wilhelmenia B. King

1. First of all, there is a loving God who cares for all of His creation. A God who loved them from the very beginning of their being, Jeremiah 1:5 Before you came into the world, before you were delivered, God knew you. One who knew you before you knew yourself. He made plans for you, plants not to harm you, but to prosper you. To give you hope and a future. He set you apart for His purpose, Jeremiah 29:11. He gave his only Son for your sakes, John 3:16.

God gave Jesus Christ that we might know real love-love unconditional-not love that said, “I’ll love you only if you do this or that, look like what I want you to look like, do everything I say like a puppet”; but love that declares you are mine. I give my all for you. You belong to Me, and no one can snatch you out of My hand, John 10:28. Call on Me, I will answer you when all have left. “I’ll be there. While you are still speaking, I will hear.” Isaiah 65:24. That’s love.

2. Now, all of this sounds really good: love from the beginning, before I even came out of the womb, I knew you. I set you apart for the good purposes I had planned for you. You think “nobody wants me to do anything or give me anything without something in return”!! Well, you are absolutely right!

God does want you to do something, to give Him something in return. He wants you to TRUST HIM. He wants you to believe in Him by faith. As your trust grow, and as your faith increases, and you see how trustworthy He is, how He keeps His word, how He never lies to you- never leaves you alone- your love for Him will begin to grow in your heart, and your faith will grow-even when others turn back, when they tell you not to trust in Him, after all you can’t see Him and who believes in what they can’t see? Something inside will urge you, John 16:13, the Holy Spirit, who leads us and guides us in all truth about Jesus Christ, will urge you to try Him. To see if He is really real, trustworthy, faithful to His word and you will see for yourself.

3. Do not think, by any means, that the Sun is going to shine every day, not a cloud anywhere, that everything is always going to be goody, goody. NO!!! That is not authentic, not the way life goes. Just as soon as you begin to think, “Maybe I’m not alone, maybe He does love

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me,” the enemy, which is judgment, condemnation, and doubt, begins to creep into your mind, to tell you what you’re NOT and begin to make you think, “what’s the use.” Sadly, sometimes even parents don’t want to accept their own children as they are, “after all you’re different, surely God didn’t give us anyone like you.” And you begin to feel yourself spiraling backwards.

4. Don’t!! Give Him a chance to show you just how much He loves you.

5. Have you ever heard the story about the man that was on the one side of Jesus when He was on the cross? Luke 23:29-43. He was a thief, and a robber. He admitted that the soldiers were justified in crucifying him and his cohorts for their deeds. He asked Jesus to remember him when He went into His Kingdom. Jesus’ reply, “Truly I tell you, this day you will be with me in Paradise. “No judgment, no condemnation, or accusing, God the Father, Son or Holy Spirit, are not in the business of accusing, judging, or condemning. They are in the business of loving unconditionally no matter what. They are in the business of loving, and **THAT MEANS YOU!!!**

6. Finally, my invitation to you today is give Him a chance, nothing ventured, nothing gained. I promise you. He loves you, just as you are.

Above all, love yourself. He sure does.

Happy New Year

B. Maximus

What if everyone is doing the absolute best that they can with what they have?

Would you choose to look at them with compassion instead of disdain? Would you be less apt to judge and then treat others how you want to be treated?

Everybody's best is different so what if they are doing their best?

If you feel like you can do better, then reach for the galaxy.

If you are operating at your absolute best and folks are hurting because of your best you may need to reevaluate your best. But if you are absolutely okay with who you are then do you.

If you're unhappy, do what you need to do to be happy.

Just don't hurt anyone in the process.

If your relationship sucks, leave. If you want to expand, then do just ensure all adults are privy to the rules.

If you want to pursue a dream, go big or stay home.

NEW YEAR, DO YOU, BE HAPPY and STOP SETTLING.

If you're grown, be grown. Get your own house, car, job and then you can do what you want to do 24/7

If you're lonely, reevaluate you and what you have to offer.

Everyone falls but pick yourself back up.

If you're a parent, kids come first. Sorry just the way it should be. If they get on your nerves, remember not everyone is blessed to know what it's like to be a parent

If you want folks to stay out of your business, don't broadcast it. If folks don't act, learn, behave, or do what you want them to do, remember they are not you. Be blessed, stay safe, treat each other well and Happy New Year

I'm still saved
M.H.

Judged for appearance
Sentenced to hell by humans who obscure the true meaning of love and acceptance
They ignore the golden rule for “sin” that is not on their list
Well, sorry to tell you.
I'm still saved!
Doesn't matter if I love all gender expressions
It does not matter if I believe I am a woman, although my anatomy differs from my brain
I'm still saved!
Salvation is a gift that God does not take away
The Bible tells us this
Saved by the Creator divine
Not by the humans that try
To disparage persons like me
Just trying to live our life freely



Compulsion

Anon

Open the door
The voice whispered to me
Come to me
I tossed and turned
Rationality hit me
Though the cool and rough waves beckoned me
I wanted to feel the cold water against my hot skin
I wanted to jump among the waves
The feelings were not my own
I am allergic to the cold
I love the water
The voice implored me to find peace
Peace has escaped me of late
My mind filled with images of me taking the steps, opening the door,
and jumping into the sea
The voice compelled me
Makes me want to end it all

The Duality of me Sojourner

I am as sensuous as Herod's stepdaughter
As calm as Moses parting the Red Sea
What lies beneath the skin startles even me?
I am neither male nor female
I am simply me
Society calls me non-binary
I am a blend of all things good
I am a perfect reincarnation of the creator
Even Popeye refers to himself as "amphibious" and a mother
Why can't I be the same
Made in God's image I am male and female
I am all things and none of them at the same time
She
He
They
Them
We
I am divine, magnificent
Just as I am
I am neither weird, nor queer, or asinine
I am simply magnificent

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Rose-breasted Grosbeak Roughly Male on Right Side and Female on Left Side



Rose-breasted Grosbeak gynandromorph. Photo credit: Annie Lindsay.

Gynandromorph (Intersex) Grosbeak
Used with the permission of the Powdermill Nature Reserve
Carnegie Museum of Natural History

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**God at Work Church Sign, Boston Mass.
Photo by T. Thornton**

Religious Teachings

Shauna D. Harris

Forgiveness is a critical part of freedom

Peace begins by having harmony within yourself

Rage is a part of life

Pain is a result of strife

Life is supposedly precious in Allah's sight

Resist oppression by forgiving those who wrong you

Whatever happened to love thy neighbor

Thy includes the lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer,
asexual, intersexual

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Prepped and Prepared
Rev. Elder Kevin E. Taylor

PSALMS 23:5 NIV//You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

WHEN GOD GAVE IT TO ME, THIS SINGLE WORD--
PREPARE: make (something) ready for use or consideration--I
THOUGHT I FULLY UNDERSTOOD.

WE LOVE TO SHOUT, "GOD IS PREPARING ME" and as we talk into 2022 and whatever is coming next, it seemed reasonable enough to work with. BUT THEN GOD SAID "WHERE IS MY KEVIN?! WHERE IS THAT FAT, BLACK, ASTHMATIC, AUDACIOUS GAY NERD FROM THE PROJECTS?! I WANT HIM TO PREACH THIS!" What are you doing if you don't do what you do when I give you what I give you the way you do it?!

So, I immediately unpacked the word. PRE-PARE: PRE (in advance) PARE: to reduce, cut away, trim

Then, what I received loud and clear was STRIP AWAY AND GET YOURSELF READY! FOR WHAT IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN FOR YOU, IN THIS SEASON OF HOW DO WE MOVE ON FROM ALL THAT HAS OCCURRED, GOD SAID I AM PRE-PARING YOU.

SO that job that was attached to money but not passion, that relationship that was attached to not being single but wasn't a whole lot of joy or happiness, that thing that you were holding onto because you were afraid that without it you would have nothing and be nothing, I AM CUTTING THAT AWAY, REDUCING THAT EXCESS, TRIMMING AWAY SOME PEOPLE, SOME PLACES, SOME THINGS AND SOME THINKING!

YOU PREPARE A TABLE FOR ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES. When God took me there, I thought about the fact that paring has to do with fine cut of beef and also with fruit and the ways that we have to cut off some things in our meal that only had the purpose of ensuring that the product made it to the table. THAT WAS ITS JOB!

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THE HUSK OF THE CORN COVERS IT WHILE IT GROWS AND WHEN IT IS TIME FOR IT TO BE COOKED, THE HUSK PROTECTS IT BUT IF YOU GRILL IT OR BOIL IT, AT SOME POINT, THE HUSK HAS DONE ITS JOB! THE FEATHERS ON A CHICKEN COVER IT WHILE IT GROWS AND AT SOME POINT, WHETHER IT IS BEFORE YOU BUY IT AT SHOP RITE OR TRADER JOE OR BEFORE YOUR GRANDMAMA BRINGS IT INTO HER KITCHEN FRESH OUT OF THE CHICKEN COUP, THOSE FEATHERS MUST BE REMOVED! THEY HAVE DONE THEIR JOB!

GOD IS PRE-PARING YOU TODAY, THIS LAST DAY OF 2021, FOR A NEW THING, A NEW PERSPECTIVE, A NEW MINDSET AND SOME THINGS HAD TO BE CUT AWAY, TRIMMED DOWN, REDUCED SO THAT YOU COULD BE READY BEFORE YOU KNOW TO BE READY!

YOU NEED TO BE READY BEFORE YOU KNOW TO BE READY!

SEE, LET'S UNPACK SOMETHING REAL QUICK. One of things that might have become really real for some of us who thought we were making it even when we were faking it, we thought we were in control, is the discovery that at best, WE ARE ONLY GOD'S SOUS CHEF. God is the executive chef in the kitchen, and we are second in command in the kitchen. BUT (SOMEBODY SAY BUT), we have the powerful, purposeful task that we have AS A SOUS CHEF of only handing to the executive chef those things that BELONG IN THE DISH!

LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, YOU ARE IN CHARGE. YOU SIMMER. YOU STEW. YOU FRICASSEE. YOU FRY. YOU ROAST, BUT...LORD GOD BUT, I HAVE THE CAPACITY OF PREPPING EVERYTHING THAT I WANT IN THE DISH. I GATHER THE INGREDIENTS. I CUT AWAY THE FAT. I SHUCK THE CORN. I SNAP THE BEANS. AND THEN I STEP BACK AND I WATCH YOU WORK! BUT I HAVE GOT TO BE WILLING TO BE THE SOUS CHEF AND TO DO THE WORK TO CUT AWAY STUFF THAT DOESN'T BELONG IN THE DISH!

I AM PREPPING AND YOU ARE PREPARING.

YOU ARE TAKING ME THROUGH THE LIFE LESSONS I NEED IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THAT A PINCH IN THE DISH ISN'T A MEASUREMENT. IT IS AN INTENTION. I NEED TO BE ABLE TO EYE IT AND TELL WHETHER IT IS ENOUGH FOR

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WHAT I PRAYED FOR, WHAT I ASKED FOR, WHAT I BEGGED FOR IN THE MIDNIGHT HOUR! YOU ARE TALKING TO ME, TALKING ME THROUGH THE MASTERPIECE CREATION THAT IS MY LIFE AND IF I AM LISTENING, YOU COOK IT UP WELL AND WHEN I AM NOT LISTENING, CANNOT HEAR, YOU CLEAR YOUR THROAT, YOU LOOK AT ME FUNNY AND IF I AM NOT LISTENING, LORD, YOU SMACK MY HAND. THIS THING YOU ARE CREATING IN ME, FOR ME, WITH ME, HAS MY PERMISSION BASED ON WHAT I GATHER TO PUT INTO THE DISH AND YOU ARE PRE-PARING ME BECAUSE SOMETIMES I KEPT TOO MUCH IN ORDER TO HAVE SOME FOR SOMEBODY ELSE. I ADDED SOMETHING THEY LIKED EVEN THOUGH I AM ALLERGIC. I BOUGHT SOME STEAK FOR THEM EVEN THOUGH THIS IS NOW A VEGAN HOUSEHOLD. LORD, YOU ARE PRE-PARING ME BECAUSE WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO DO FOR ME NOW, FOR ME NEXT IS TO SHOW ME HOW TO MAKE THE DISH OF MY DELIGHTS AND NOT A MEAL TO MAKE SOMEBODY ELSE HAPPY AT MY TABLE!!!

SEE, LORD JESUS, TO PARE DOWN IS ALSO TO REMOVE THINGS AND SOMETIMES YOU HAVE GOT TO LEAVE ROOM FOR GOD TO SAY ... THAT'S ENOUGH! To pare down is to reduce and somebody knows that somebody, something, somewhere in your life that got you THROUGH 2021 is not supposed to make the journey into 2022 with you! People are so upset that Mother Betty White died today and didn't make it to 100, but we just watched her live out here 100TH YEAR because when she turned 99, she headed into her 100th year and folks missed it! We weren't paying attention because we wanted the NUMBER to reach 100, but she already did, and she decided IT IS FINISHED and she pared away the need to satisfy people who just wanted to watch her live out her greatness, but they never got started on their own!

I WANT SOMEBODY TO HEAR ME: YOU PREPARE A TABLE FOR ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES!!! See, let me tell you something. Stop acting like the ENEMIES in your life are some dark and hateful foes who are trying to invade your world like unwelcomed aliens. THE DEFINITION OF ENEMY IS a person who is actively opposed or hostile to someone or something. You better stop acting like, living like you don't know who your enemies are because you eat with them and GOD IS PRE-PARING...LORD JESUS...GOD IS PRE-PARING SOME OF THEM RIGHT NOW, RIGHT IN FRONT OF

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YOU, TO MAKE A PLATE AND THEN EVACUATE!

I heard this song playing in my head as I was working on this last sermon of 2021. It says: **LORD PREPARE ME TO BE A SANCTUARY. PURE AND HOLY, TRIED AND TRUE. AND WITH THANKSGIVING I'LL BE A WILLING SANCTUARY FOR YOU!** Lord Jesus, when I heard that, I got it. **LORD, PLEASE CUT OFF, SCRAPE OFF, PEEL OFF, PULL OFF, BOIL OFF, BLESS OFF, SHUCK OFF OR SHAKE OFF ANYTHING THAT STOPS ME FROM BEING A PLACE WHERE YOU DON'T JUST COME AND VISIT BUT A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN LIVE IN ME! LORD, PRE-PARE ME TO BE A SANCTUARY FOR YOU!** Psalms 91 says that the one who dwells in the secret place of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty! If you are **SANCTUARY FOR GOD** and God can trust you to **PREP** and **PARE OFF** that which isn't needed in order for your blessings to be seeded, then God will say **I CAN REST HERE. I CAN SETTLE IN HERE. I CAN UNPACK MY POWER HERE. I CAN REVEAL MYSELF HERE!**

I wish somebody would hear me this last night of 2021, **GOD IS PRE-PARING YOU!** You don't even know what's coming. You can't even imagine how good it is going to taste after all this slow roasting and basting and after that top layer of fat got under that heat and all those flavors and seasonings and sense of yourself got together and you just need to **GET READY TO TASTE AND SEE THAT GOD IS SOOOOOOO GOOD AND IT HAS BEEN STEWING AND BREWING AND SIZZLING AND NOW THAT YOU ARE PREPPED AND PARED DOWN, YOU ARE ABOUT TO GET LIGHTER AND BRIGHTER AND CLEARER AND NEARER MY GOD TO THEE!!!!**

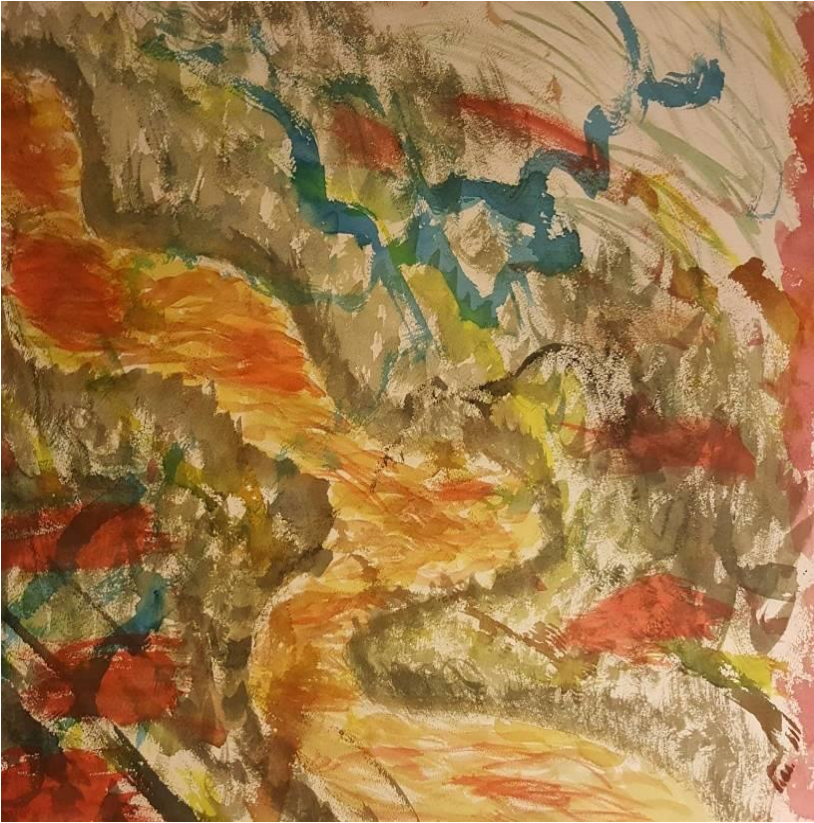
SOMEBODY, SAY IT: PRE-PARE ME LORD.

Take away. Strip away. Pull away. The layers and the language I use that make me not believe. The fears and the faults I still hold against myself that you long ago forgave. The stuff and the stuck in me that makes me think that no matter what I do, I will never be enough for me or for you. **LORD, PRE-PARE ME...** before I make a declaration or a resolution, **YOU CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART AND RENEW IN ME THE RIGHT SPIRIT.** Before this new year and before those new blessings can land on me and live in me, **PARE AWAY THE OLD THINKING THAT IS STILL OCCUPYING MY ABOUT TO BE NEW MIND!**

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Tears of Joy on River Togetherness
Cesar Ceballos

Dispelling the Myth that Homosexuality is ‘Un-African’ **Rev. Kwame A. Ahaligah PhD**

In Ghana, the perennial anti-gay and homophobic sentiments have once again become a matter of intense and very emotional public debate. Spurred by reports that LGBT+ community have opened a community space where they can socialise, plan and advocate for their freedoms and liberties, many politicians, the clergy, the media, and general public bayed for its immediate closure, while calling for the arrest and censure of members and allies. In Ghana homosexuality is not illegal. The only relevant act that Ghana’s laws criminalise, according to Lawyer Ace Ankomah is “unnatural carnal knowledge.” In this case, “non-homosexual anal penetration (performed by men on women, whether consenting or not) is just as criminal” as a penetrative homosexual act. Anal sex and blow job are in fact illegal in Ghana not homosexuality per se. This notwithstanding, a team of police officers raided and closed the community space in Accra on 25 February 2021, barely a month after it was commissioned. The major narrative that characterises these homophobic sentiments and actions is that same sex attraction is un-African”, meaning, it is alien to African cultures and a form of neo-Colonial imposition.

Minister of information, Kojo Oppong Nkrumah has called for specific laws to be enacted against any form of advocacy for LGBT+ rights. Sam George, the MP for Ningo-Prampram intimated that the European diplomats who attended the fundraiser for the community space be expelled from Ghana, but in like manner also called for parliament to criminalise both LGBT+ practice and advocacy. Mr George aims to introduce an anti-gay bill to parliament for this purpose.

Speaker Alban Babgin himself referred to LGBTQ advocacy as “pandemic” and worse than the COVID-19, and “must be fought by all of us.” Like many of his compatriots, the speaker of Ghana’s parliament appeals to African culture and religion in his anti LGBTQ advocacy. During the vetting of Adwoa Sarfo, the minister of gender and children affairs, she unequivocally intimated that “the criminality of LGBT is non-negotiable, and our cultural practices also frown on it.” Ironically the loudest advocate against LGBT+ rights in Ghana is Mr Foh-Amoaning, a lawyer and Executive Secretary of the National Coalition for Proper

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Human Sexual Rights and Family Values. What is common among these leading anti-gay activists and many Ghanaians is that they see themselves as defenders of precolonial African morals and sexual decency. Even so-called avowed pan-Africanists have been caught in this error that sees same sex love as completely alien to African cultures. My question; is homosexuality un-African? I intend to dispel these myths and not to postulate on what is right or wrong sexual orientation.

Is Homosexuality Un-African

I have listened with awe how (even) some university lecturers and professors who were interviewed on the topic erroneously categorised same sex desire as a Western or foreign import. It is not clear whether this is due to ignorance or postulated for pure political expediency, or both. What it does is cause Ghanaians who are gay a lot of distress, to say the least. In many cases the rhetoric of neo-colonialism is evoked to support the myth that same sex desire is alien and unacceptable to African cultures and religious beliefs. There is however a plethora of historical sources and academic literature that show that same sex desires, relationships and non-binary gender expressions and identities were common to precolonial African cultures.

In fact, it is rather the colonisers and fundamentalist Christian missionaries who legally enforced homophobia in Africa. Activists, and Africanist scholars, such as Bisi Alimi, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, Thabo Msibi, Adriaan Van Klinken, Stephen Murray, Will Roscoe, and Deborah Amory among others provide wide ranging evidence that homosexuality has been a “consistent and logical feature” of pre-colonial African societies and belief systems.

In the 18th and 19th centuries Asanteman, (Asante Kingdom) for example, male concubines, who were also sex slaves, existed. These men dressed and acted like women. The Dagaaba people did not assign gender based on anatomy, but rather on the energy one presents. In Dahomey, castrated males or eunuchs served as royal wives in the upper courts of the Kingdom. “These eunuchs were regarded as more female than male and occupied influential positions in the courts, thus granting them extensive power over the Kingdom”. In pre-colonial Benin, homosexuality was seen as a phase that young boys eventually grew out of. In Northern Nigeria, the Hausa term “yan daudu” refers to effeminate men who are considered wives. Similarly, among the Nilotic Lango of Uganda, men, known as mukodo dako assumed “alternative gender” status and were treated as women who could marry other men.

The book *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands*, makes it quite clear

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that African cultures are no stranger to same sex desires or relationships. Homosexual behaviour and relationships were not uncommon in Africa. There is overwhelming evidence to show that in pre, and post-colonial African societies same sex relations and diverse appreciation of gender identity existed. It is rather homophobia (intolerance) that is itself a Western Christian import.

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Hasan II Mosque
Photo by T. Thornton

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Is It Worth It? **Elder Alonya Smith**

Scripture: Proverbs 16:18-20 New International Version

(18) Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. (19) Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud. (20) Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers and blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD.

Matthew 16:26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?

Pride refers to a foolishly and irrationally corrupt sense of one's personal value, status or accomplishments. In the world we live in today, many judge their success by what THEY have done and the material possessions they have gained. One's pride can separate him from God. Is it worth it?

I'm not saying, not to go after your dreams, but don't allow your dreams to keep you out of being in right standing with the Lord and condemn you to a life of eternal hell.

What profits a man to gain the whole world, but lose his soul? We have to get to a place where God is first and foremost in our lives.... I read in His Word that if I seek first the kingdom of God and all of the other things will be added unto me. If I'm about His business, he'll be about mine.

We must deny self.... get self out the way.... PRIDE...that me, me, me spirit.... all ME can do is get in the way and block our blessing.
Is it Worth It

I also read where He said He would not withhold any good thing. It is God's Will that each of us prosper, but prospering should not be defined by the material possessions that we have.

Is it worth it?

When Jesus said to the disciples what profits a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul.... that was a rhetorical question...and we know rhetorical questions are one's people already know the answer to but want to hear your response.

You have ole Peter who had to say something and get rebuked at the same time.... Jesus is telling them...hey this is what's going to take

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place...I'm on assignment...Peter says oh no Lord. Jesus blatantly says.... Satan get behind me.... you're worried about human concerns, not the concerns of God.

Is it worth it?

We all have a cross to bear. It's easy to forget that all we have is a result of God's Grace. In Deut. 8 18 reminds us that it is God who gives the ability to produce wealth, yet so many people have the attitude and thinking that their wealth comes primarily from their hard work.

When we chase after earthly blessings as the primary motive of our lives and apart from the will of God, we forfeit the being of our souls. As a result, our souls start lacking the love, compassion, peace, gentleness, patience and self-control that comes only when we abide in Christ.

Is it Worth It?

Proverbs 10:22 says, "The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it." So, anything the Lord blesses us with can only bring Joy.....

Rejecting Christ for the things of this world will cause one to lose their soul. Esau despised his birthright, choosing stew instead; Judas sold the Savior for a few pieces of silver; Demas loved this present world and forsook the ministry. All three men thought they were gaining something but actually lost everything.

Is it worth it?

We have to get our priorities straight.... Deny our self, move self out the way.... let go of the pride

We should want what will last in the latter days Is it worth it?

Let's get in Right standing with God and the material possessions will be added by His Grace.

Amen

Pneuma (For Timothy Morton)
Alan Garrigan

“Do not weep; do not wax indignant. Understand” -Baruch Spinoza

I feel a great
But often effaced
symbolization of death,
an ecstatic moment of release
An experience unclouded
By great personal fears
An insignia that colours
The great shadow of the psyche
In spirit, son and father
Through creation and destruction
Two cleansing forces,
A truth to evoke rising visions
All this representational courage
Can be traced back
To one primordial image
One figure of truth
One world
One voice,
One distance
One Breath

Let Us Live

T. Apples

What do I say?
I see blood all around me in my mind
I feel bullet wounds, nooses, machetes, and violent hands
On me
They kill me over and over again
What do I say?
What can I do?
I pray like mama and grandmama taught me to
I wait on the Lord, but it doesn't
Seem like he's coming or answering
Instead of peace, I feel angst
Instead of calm I experience panic attacks
I can't breathe
I'm not running away in fear, I'm running for my life
I run, march, sway and pray to experience
The American Dream like the other folks
That want to block my way
They say dance, they say move
I move, they say live I try to
God I'm tired
Mama I'm weary
Pastor how much more can I bear?
America it's time to stand for what is right
Peace runs from be
Because I am a person of color
With a constant target
On all sides, top and bottom
Let me live
Let us live

I Wear A Mask
Gladys Mannas-Stevens

I Wear a Mask!

I wear a mask of don't seek your history, ancestry, enslavement

I wear a mask of servitude,

I wear a mask of not being "good enough,"

I wear a mask of not speaking "King's English,"

I wear a mask of being not as smart as.....

I wear a mask of not feeling tired from doing hard labor

I wear a mask in the fields of plantations that created a worldwide economy (Cotton Is King).

I wear a mask cleaning other people's home,

I wear a mask of caring for other people's children,

I wear a mask of abuse by other people's men.

Yes, I wear a Mask, how about You?

Ignoring The Humble-Brag Of Emphasis
Colin James

Both fought well,
the elder and the minor,
knocking over chairs
ricocheting like punitives.
Defraying dependence.
Any painting containing crockery
would be passed on.
Perhaps a withering coastal region
justifying erosion not even,
global warming is for real

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The Marshion Are Cousins
Andre Pace

For the Children of the Baptist's God
Tyler Everett Kibbey

I am a child of the Baptist's God. The Father may reject the Son without altering his parentage, without abdicating his filial piety. I say again- I am a child of the Baptist's God, the God of cleansing, muddy waters in the hills and hollers of Tennessee. Yet the river's baptismal font cannot cleanse the iniquity of my birth, this knowledge unknown to Adam, that I am incapable of matrimony in the image of my mother and my father. This perdition. On that hill, in my younger home, I cry "Out, damned spot!" I wash my hands of its queer metaphysic and find no relief in the allegory of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Yet, what is this talk of filial piety when the son is barred, and the Son sacrificed for a matter of their birth beyond choice and beyond redemption. As if the gates of heaven too early closed, and here I lie, a saint too soon deposed.

What choice have I but to accept my forsaken lot, to do naught but fall with passion: woe to the refugees of heaven, their bodies piled upon the pillaged frames of oak and birch and sassafras- a crass desecration. The hallowed dead. Cling to your concrete God, father. It will cry for you no more than I, should you come to find yourself drowning in the blood of the lamb. The willow weeps only in its ageless remembrance of a transient creation, as do I.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

That summer, we pitched a tent by the lake – drinking liquor by the fire, sitting in his lap and singing off-key, this is what defined the year. The fear, the love, the both in tandem tightly held, selfish and afraid. I learned about his hopes, his dreams, and that too much love cannot be made in the dark corners of the wild. The stars paused in their never-ending dance to gaze upon our embrace – they must have thought that we were mad, but they knew nothing of our pagan threesome with the supple earth. Yet we knew. And we knew that we had been damned. His fingers lingered above my throat and retreated before my encroaching gaze, as if he were surely Tantalus-cursed and dazed by the apple's shameless approach.

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“I will seek him whom my soul loves.”

Turkish mosques and minarets rise above the mountains of Near Eastern habitation. The morning mist gilding the Golden Horn in a mirage of opportunity. Shisha smoke mingling with the clouds of the metropolis the Bazaar brimming with life, clad in garments more colorful than nature should allow. In ruins, we made love to the morning call to worship his cyan eyes more beautiful than the Blue Mosque set against the sunrise. The spice markets lingered on his lips – his hips covered by only my hands and the ancient songs of a foreign faith.

Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army with banners.”

Is this how Mary felt? To have loved a god among men is a subtle passion removed from sin. Is this how Mary felt? An angel of temptation, guarding the gates and keeping the faith. Is this how Mary felt?! To worship a sun among stars, to waste her sight on a blinding vision bereft of reason. I ask again, is this how Mary felt? Alone in her companion, having wasted the night on dreams of redemption. Unholy. Starlight pooled in his skin as rain the hands of spring, defying all that came before and all that will come again in the wake of his absence. Let me proselytize to beauty, shedding tears in prayer to a softer worship. Receiving his sacrament, I held the light which pooled in his skin on high in my heart – I offered up my soul, thinking he was a god.

“Whither thou goest, I will go. Where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people.”

The gentle treading of the supplicant reverberates upon the Spanish road. Here, I witnessed a being clad in naught but moonlit-cloth and the gentle ombrous thread which cloaks the pilgrim in that hour. He walked in eloquence quiet, caressing the celestial pearl as the sea, which is want to drown the sailors who oft’ trespass there. Taking my hand, he led me to refuge. Our desperate union lasted little more than the time it takes to walk across the whole of Spain. Though we did not walk, we ran! Sleeping in open fields, drinking with the lost and the damned, seeking the indulgence of our absent God. The road was carved long ago and will likely last at least a little more. Yet this eternity knows nothing of parting and love’s finality. I knew it then as I know it now, how hands held must soon aside and hide the acolytes to love, that lonely god.

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I say again I am a child of the Baptist's God. The Mother may bear the Son and still raise no hand in defense of his damnation. And I say again I am a child of the Baptist's God, the God of distant love, shedding no tear for the young man hollowed by His creation. Terrifying tumult that it is, I am mortalized by the trials of my life, forgotten by all but the scars made in my haste to reconcile with love. Limited by language, that gnashing of teeth, I doubt that these tribulations will capture the true and utterly divine pain that binds me here, so far from whence I came. Perhaps the Baptist's God might find in Himself a merciful proclivity for violence, or yet still more kind, perhaps I may find in myself a forgiveness. Not of others, not of the Baptist's God, and not of myself, but a forgiveness which nevertheless precedes peace. I was spotless before the muddy water cleansed me of my innocence, and guilty only thereafter.

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Remembering Archbishop Sojourner

Photo property of the estate of Archbishop Carl Bean

Freedom
He preached God's love and acceptance
Humble spirit who believed that if God is all
Then God created all and knows us all
God is also Mother and Father
God is Everything
His congregants will tell you that UFCM gave them a home
He became Papa Bear to many

He founded the Minority Aids Project when many turned their back
He officiated funerals, sending those who died back home with dignity

He embodied the saying
If God is all, I am ok to be myself

His legacy will live on



Love
B. Maximus

Love is never glad when others go wrong.
Love finds no pleasure in injustice
Love rejoices in the truth.
Love is full of hope
Love is full of patient endurance
Love never fails
Love is always slow to expose
it knows how to be silent
Love is always eager to believe
the best about a person.
Love is full of hope
Love is full of patient endurance
Love never fails

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Acceptance is Truth and Spirituality
Cesar Ceballos

Angels

TT

Angels exist on Earth. I see them in handicapable bodies that cannot handle their grace.

Angels that protect us in the shadows, in abusive homes and churches.

Angels that pray for our safety and protection, not our damnation.

They accept us as we are, as we see ourselves.

Angels

They hold the hands of those slain by either their own hands or others they ferry to heaven's door.

Then those taken to the door become angels and they protect us.

Some stay in heaven and rest. They praise God and intercede on our behalf.

There are angel's that watch over you.

That watch over me.

Angels

Questions for Jesus T. Thornton

*Yes, Jesus loves me.
Yes, Jesus loves me.
For the Bible tells me so.*

Do you love me, love us?
Love the transgender, lesbian, bisexual, the gay and all the others
non hetero normative?

Do you Jesus?

We listened to our mamas and big mamas cry out to you. We
wiped their tears when the Spirit came upon them. We lifted them up
when the male leaders told them they couldn't preach or speak from the
pulpit.

Jesus loves me this I know.

I thought you loved me Jesus. Did the love change when I, a
growing lad decided that I was attracted to another lad? I thought the
only sin I would not be forgiven was the blasphemy against the holy
spirit. I've never done that.

They say that murder is a sin. In fact, do not kill is one of the ten
and yet those who kill transmen and women are given passes or slaps on
the back. Job well done.

*For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong. They are weak but
He is strong.*

Do you truly love the children? They know at earlier ages who
they are. Who they truly are? Even when the outside does not match the
inside, do you love them? Do you strengthen them like you did for
Samson when they take their own lives to escape the torment and voices
in their heads, school, or homes?

Do you shepherd them to heaven before they feel the sting of
death? We want to believe you love us. We want to share this love but
it's hard when the majority of those called and ordained in your name,
spew hate and degradation.

So, do you love us Jesus?

Truly love us.

Show it.

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Save the little ones who believe they are evil because they were told that. Save the transwomen and men that are killed because they recognize who they truly are. Strengthen those who want to work in the vineyard, who are thrown out of or banished from homes and sacred places.

Love us.

Condemn us not.

For the Bible tells us so.

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Prayer

C.H.

Strengthen me Lord
This life is too hard
Steady my hands
Allow this hit to be like my first
I want peace
I reach for it with every drink, sext act, every overindulgence
Strengthen me like David versus Goliath
Like Jesus on the cross
Like Samson, who slayed the enemy and himself
I don't want to take anyone's life but my own
I am tired
Strengthen me Lord
The woman who bore me
Would rarely call me by my name
I became verbs
Words used to describe other things
Bitch
Whore
Dumb
I ran away once
I was hogtied to a bed and beaten when I was returned
Strengthen me Lord
Now that I'm older I still crave a mother's love and affection
When the pain is too much
I return to the drugs which dull the pain
Strengthen me Lord

My Sentence
Marwa Alqatari

Sitting captive in my disguise.
I choke and stumble upon each lie
I weigh my crime upon their shoulders
It expands and stretches as I get older
And I question if sanity is to blame
That crossed its legs upon my name.
It's more of a curse than a blessing,
To see everything blasting in my eyes,
Overwhelmingly tearing all that I thought i knew.
A perpetual rebirth, where death's the price.
And I wonder if it's all worth fighting for,
To ache some hearts and kill some souls,
As I shape-shift relentlessly.
As I break bones and sprain my knees.
To become something they don't recognize,
To change my image within their eyes.
To only become a burden, an anchor, hanging from their chests.
Is the world to blame, for one to not become the same?
I don't know.
I don't even recognize myself anymore,
I'm romanticizing holding my breath,
For people not to agonize upon my test.
I want to be a better daughter,
I want ease the mind of my father.
I want to be better than this,
Yet, I've turned to be pins and needles.
A demonic creature.
I swear, I'm not as bad as you think,
Only if you'd give me a chance to explain
Why I am not the same.
Why the world isn't the way you've left it.
It's worth opening eyes for us to lean on each other's backs,
Instead of you watching me fall within my cracks.
As I lose everyone, I thought I knew.

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I don't believe you're this evil,
To pave a road as one turns blind,
As they wait to see what you make of their lives.
Have you asked yourselves if it's fair,
To strip one down and leave them bare?
To cram your ideas inside their heads.
Don't you know they're not the same as yourselves?
Don't you ever think they might get back what you stole,
And rise from parents housing souls?
For life goes on forward,
One can't thrive from falling backwards.
I don't want to perish,
By existing with strings hanging from my limbs,
Then how would I know if I'm dying or living,
If I'm lowering my head and pleading submission?
I'm earning to know what I can give.
You might call it selfish ambition,
But I'm desperately dying to live.

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I HATE THE DARK
JM

I hate the dark.
This place is so small...but safe.
No windows...but the light feels worse.
I hate the dark
This place is unbearable...but please let me stay.
Stay right next to my winter coats
and forget about who I really am.
I hate the dark
This place smells like musk
It's hard to breath, I can't see
I'm ready to COME ON OUT
I hate the dark,
I'm finally free,
Living my truth,
Visible for all to see



Genesis (Bereishis) 1:3
Photo by T. Thornton

You are who you are
Kel M.

Don't be discouraged
Do not be dismayed
Your faith journey is your own
It's a personal walk
It's a personal path
Wherever yours leads
Know you are loved
You are accepted
You do not have to change

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Throwing the bible set me free.
Rev. Elder Claude Bowen

Mental freedom and spiritual freedom are not the same animal, related yes, yet totally independent of each other often repeatedly crossing paths without becoming one, until both are realized, feed, allowed to stand alone then marry. At least that is how I explain becoming one in spirit in, mind and body.

It was an ordinary Sunday morning and as usual I kept a low profile prior to service. I did not mingle much before service which for some people mostly clergy and leadership was a sign of arrogance. Sadly, not even my colleagues understood how uncomfortable I really was around people. They did not understand, nor did they attempt to discover what that was about. At any rate, the morning moved forward like it always did. I have no idea what the subject of my sermon was that Sunday and today cannot recall anything I researched in preparation for my sermon. I cannot remember the songs the choir sang or who did the morning prayer. I vaguely remember Elder Alfreda Lanoix calling my name as the introduction of the morning speaker.

I do recall getting up adjusting my robe, standing at the pulpit, opening my bible, taking out my notes and looking at them. What was written suddenly made absolutely no sense to me and my chosen scripture was not in harmony with what was going on in my head. I just remember picking up the bible and throwing it into the middle aisle.

I knew how to take a text and make it relevant. After all that was part of my training yet taking a sacred text that was not sacred or revered by and not about me, was disrespectful. My ancestors and their journey were not captured in my chosen text, so I picked up the Bible and threw it in the aisle. The gasps were loud and the stares of how dare you were lethal. Some people got up and left. They never heard me say, “if you lied on someone this week, you did the same thing.

“If you borrowed money, you never intended on repaying, you did the same thing.”

“If you judged another person, you did the same thing.”

“If you condemned and gossiped about anyone, you did the same thing.”

“Cheating on your spouse is the same thing, talking about friends

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and loved ones in a negative manner is the same thing.”

Sadly, some were too stunned to move or hear my words. I remember the deafening silence and felt the daggers while at the same time felt the need to go on, I felt somebody in that room would be set free. I believed there were others that had wanted to do the same thing yet feared the wrath of a revengeful God might manifest; a lightning strike, sudden earthquake just about any sudden catastrophe one could imagine would surlily take place. None of that happened and I no longer lived in that fear. No, they did not hear any of that and many of those that stayed did not either. Maybe they could not hear it because they were not ready to hear, hell I was almost 60 and was just connecting the dots.

I don't remember how I ended the sermon or anything after, it's all a void and probably because most people avoided me, some out of outrage others because they were still sorting their feelings. I do remember driving home alone and listening to Lorez Alexandria. My collar and robe thrown in the back seat. I guess it was a quick exit, yet I did not feel any regret at all.

Rev. Henri Eason and my spouse Rev. Alonzo Cody were the only people at the house after service. That was not unusual because the three of us hung out often which went back in time long before any of us knew what Unity Fellowship church was, we ran the streets together. What was unusual was no one asked me or my spouse had we cooked.

Rev. Alonzo was always supportive yet had no questions, Rev. Henri came in with questions and the statement, “that's why you the Elder, you ain't afraid to stretch it.” We laughed, talked, drank and after a few puffs were had the deep discussion took. I realized during our discussion that I had given a test without any lesson. Some people were totally confused and of course some very mad. I had work to do, or did I?

My understanding of my Creator was of a compassionate, loving, and intelligent source of good and positive energy. I therefore continued with how sad it was that we were taught to have more respect for the human symbols of God/Creator, than we did for the source itself. I personally prefer Infinite Presence yet grew tired of explaining why.

Being aware of how the indoctrination of religion through the human interpretation and often misinterpretation of ancient text made preaching difficult for me. I discovered I was more teacher than preacher early in my ministry yet attempted to mold my thoughts into the acceptable delivery of what I was repeatedly told was the Black Church experience. It did not fit and soon I would realize that I was not in

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harmony with whatever that was or was meant to be.

In that moment, I was declaring my release from scripture and its hold on me. I had stepped into my understanding of a personal truth; the bible became a reference book rather than the stronghold of absolute truth. I accepted the fables, allegories, and myths as examples of truth from a culture of male hierarchy that told a story of that cultures journey (from a male viewpoint) to discovering and experiencing God/The Infinite Presence, yet not the absolute truth. The bible is words about God, yet not God, therefore it was impossible to be all there was. It was impossible for the texts held to be so sacred to capture all that the Infinite was, is, or what will be discovered. I had taken the liberty to define The Infinite on my own based on my life experiences. What sustained me was often similar to what the text said, similar to what I was taught, yet The Infinite was definitely not jealous, judgmental and by nature (if that even fits) revengeful. A loving, compassionate, and all-powerful source of life could not be that limited, at least not for me.

I tried to justify in my mind that throwing the bible based on it being representative of what God/Infinite Presence is, rather than my truth would immediately be understood. The bible held no special place in my consciousness.

I had also given myself permission to understand Jesus to be a mythical character created to teach love and a personal relationship with a Divine Source of all there is. Jesus was not my savior, the teachings attributed to him taught me that I was my own savior and the Infinite Presence had placed itself within me; a sacred place that the doctrines of religion would rob me of with all the conditions attached to God, conditions that kept me in a cycle of believing I was not worthy. The person Jesus became a master teach like Buddha, Mohammed and all of life's great teachers and sages. All human thinking just enlightened through their life experiences. I was on the same journey, possibly different path that they had taken just in another space and time. The irony is it was impossible to teach this in a 20-to-30-minute sermon/lesson. Like a well, people need priming, and I did not prime the pump, I just gushed. What is even more ironic is throwing the bible even with my revelations attached to the act did not set me free, no it set me on the road to freedom and the backlash for the first time in my life meant absolutely nothing to me. I could not retreat into yesterday. That meant my truth was still not being lived. Walking close to the light and walking in it are not the same. I had much to discover. I also realized that my journey could not be thrown in the face of what others believed. Learning

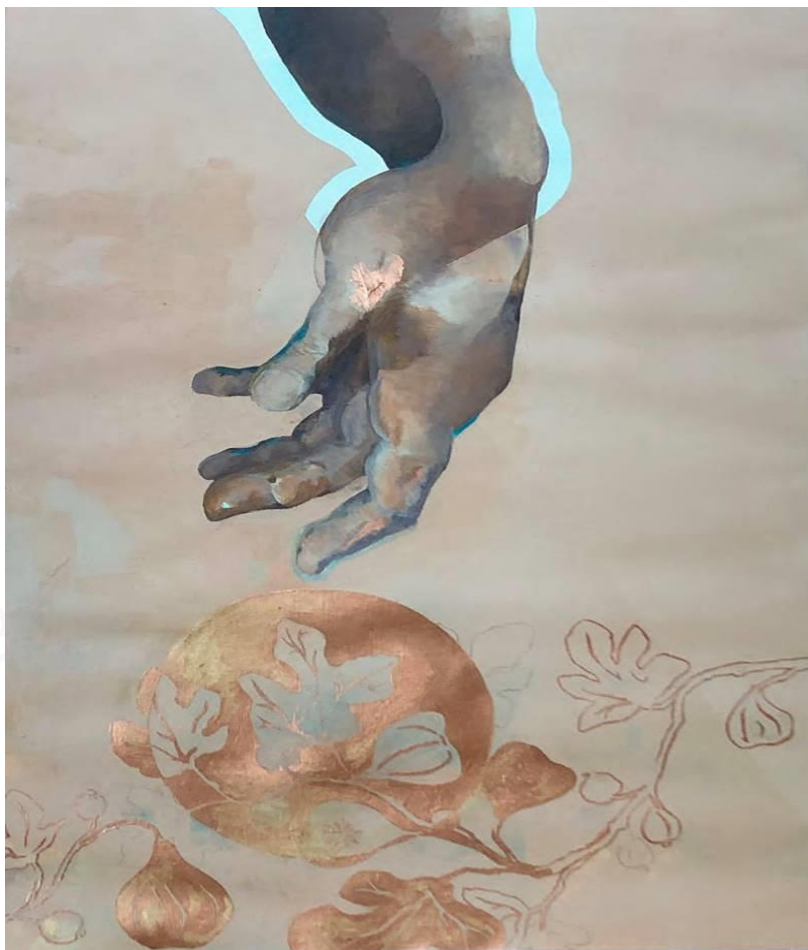
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is a process even when something tragic takes place it only primes the wheel.

My mental and spiritual journeys were about to cross paths again yet this time they would become one for the first time in my life I knew where I was. I knew yet had no idea this marriage of my thoughts would evolve to redefining Christianity I really was out of step with organized religion I was not in harmony with the teachings, doctrine, or beliefs of Christianity as I knew it. That is the real reason I threw the bible, I just did not know it, I was not set free in that act yet directed on a journey of freedom.

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**'Fall: War' acrylic, graphite, copper + pastel on paper. 22" x 15".
2015 – 2021
Nathanael Gregory Myers**

Compassion- A Gift from God
Arneitha McCall-Johnson

I'm Gods' favorite and He shows me each and every day.
He has shown me how to be compassionate.
I confess it is neither easy nor free.
If you are a compassionate person, then you know of what I speak.
Even though it takes time, money, personal sacrifice, and energy.
I feel pleasure in pleasing God as He sacrificed his life to save us all.
May He fill each heart with compassion.

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God Lives in You

B. Maximus

God lives in you
God lives in me
God provides and watches for all
Everything that is
Within your heart
Within your soul
With grace, love, truth, and salvation
God lives in you
God, loves us so much
He sent Jesus to heal
Save and forgive
Oh, oh and forgive
God
God
God
Loves us so much He sent
Jesus down to heal, save and forgive
With grace and salvation
Through love and forgiveness
Jesus is our Savior
God lives in you

Questions I ask myself

Insatiable K

How are you?

Once a simply question now has many overtones.

How am I? Well, if you really want to know.

I'm terrified. I'm exhausted and I'm weary.

I am triggered and praying that no one I love or anyone else

Dies or is killed because they are themselves.

Should I forgive you?

Here's the thing with apologies. The time it took me to process and deal with the hurt your actions or words caused, cannot be given back to me.

As a Christian I will have to forgive you, but God did not put a time-frame on that.

You had time to think about your actions or words before you decided to proceed with the harm. I'm now going to take my time to consider when to forgive you.

Lesson is. Do not cause intentional harm.

The King of the Heavens
Vincenzo Cohen

From here
I immerse myself in the sandy horizons
and I sink in the strength of Christ.
Oh my God, I ask you to save this world from the chains of time
no one is free in this fog that surrounds us..
You disappear early in the morning fog
But following in the signs of the illustrious and vulgar manuscript
It is along the way from the truth
In vespers I would come to pray that the world was free from chains.
When the Holy twilight is invoked by us, creatures of the night,
clear water set me free from these chains!

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Christian +Gay=OK
Photo by T. Thornton Canyon Walker Connections

**Dispelling the Myth an exegetical Bible Study Guide on
Homosexuality
Rev. Bob Ellis**

"Dispelling the Myth" was originally researched by Rev. Kenneth Coulter. He moved from New Orleans to Dallas in the 1980s and founded a church, Grace Fellowship in Christ Jesus. It's still there. He finished off what he called his ten years of research on the subject of homosexuality and the Bible at the Dallas Theological Seminary library. He presented his findings through a seminar called "Christianity and Homosexuality," which I sat through at least eight times, while I was figuring out who I was. Every time I heard it, I got freer and freer from my homophobic doctrinal roots.

Ken died, but not before entrusting all of his notes and research to me, so that I could continue doing the seminar after his death, which I did for a couple of years, traveling around the country doing the presentation. I tweaked and updated the information and compiled it into a booklet in 1996 and it was also published on the Internet that same year. This year it has been out there for 25 years.

When it was first published, I had literally thousands of email responses and chat-room conversations with people of all ages struggling with their sexual identities, needing a biblical road map for navigating through their spiritual confusions, redirecting their Christian convictions. The information in "Dispelling the Myth" saved lives, including mine. It encapsulates a huge piece of my own personal coming-out experience as well as my ministry; and became the launching point for spreading the message of God's love in the gay community.

Rev. Ellis's Note

So many lives have been adversely affected by rampant homophobia. It has been fueled unfortunately by a very vocal misguided few, who seem intent on representing the Gospel of Grace with condemnation. Parents have been separated from their children, brothers from their brothers, wives from husbands....and yet despite the tragedy of these broken relationships, broken hearts and sometimes the loss of life altogether, self-righteous hatred and disgust toward homosexuals continues. Surely the healing of all this brokenness lies not in hatred, but

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in love. “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” Jesus did not stop there, but went on to say, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned...”

A myth has grown up around the issue of homosexuality that for centuries has kept God’s people in bondage to condemning and being condemned. But the message of grace is clearly “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.” Those who believe in Jesus have been released from the continuous cycle of sin and its consequence, death. Now, we are free to love one another with the love of Christ, no strings attached. As Paul stated it, now we must “keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.....” We have been set free to” through love serve one another.” Those who have understood this, regardless of which side of the issue they stand on, have taken an important step toward embracing the true meaning of “GRACE”, (God’s unmerited favor to all); freely receiving it themselves and sharing it with every person along the way. Because of this, God causes them to “reign in life” through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17).

PURPOSE

Why Study Christianity and Homosexuality?

Jesus is Lord. As Christians, our behavior is subject to the Holy Word of God and all believers are accountable to the Lord. As His disciples, we demonstrate our love for Him through obedience to His commands (John 15:10). We must, therefore, understand what His commands are.

Our Mission: To Set The Captive Free! This task, left to us by the Lord himself, is the heart of our concern. The Scriptures declare that God has set us free from the Law; free to be who God created us to be; free to love him and each other (Galatians 5:1, 13-14), Jesus said that knowledge of the truth would bring freedom (John 8:32). The combination of love and truth brings about changed character enabling the maturation process in people, which is conformity to the image of Christ (Ephesians 4:13-15)

Standing By the Truth. We must share the truth with all who will listen. If challenged, we will be ready to give a defense for the truth of the hope

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we have (1 Peter 3:15)

Our Mission Defined. Before the return of Jesus for His bride, the church must return to its first love (Revelation 19:7). It is a love freely extended to all; as Jesus loved, so we must love one another. Much of the church has forgotten its primary responsibility to be the light of the world and instead is consumed with bringing discrimination and condemnation. Some have forgotten that no one comes to God the Father except those He invites (John 14:6); all who believe are joined to His family and in all its diversity, this family must learn to love (John 13:34-35).

Reshaping The Image. It is our responsibility to study and understand the truth and model it to the world through His church (2 Timothy 2:15). This modeling will reshape the image of homosexuality from the stereotype that has brought such condemnation to an understanding that God has made all of us and to all of us his grace is extended. Only then will freedom reign. We must seize the moment. It was for such a time as this that God has raised up those who live by the Spirit. The prevalence of the myth has kept misunderstanding in charge for centuries causing pain and suffering not only for gay people, but for their families and friends and everyone else. We now have the opportunity to break the curse and set many captives free (Esther 4:14). The captives are on both sides of the issue. Knowledge of the truth will loose the bonds and set us all free to love one another just as Christ has commanded us.

Biblical Perspective

The basis of the research contained in this pamphlet and all the conclusions and positions taken herein have at their center the understanding that the Bible is the Word of God and in its original format is without error. It was written by inspired men, appointed and anointed by God for that purpose. It reveals the character of God, the almighty creator of everything that is; who through his only Son, Jesus, redeemed the lost creation from sin that had separated mankind from their creator. He gave them new life through regeneration and renewal (new birth) by the Holy Spirit.

The biblical approach is inductive by method. This eliminates a great deal of assumption and traditional teaching. Every attempt not to bring preconceived ideas and beliefs which can only prejudice our understanding of the Scriptures has been made. In the belief that through objectively letting the Scriptures speak for themselves through their

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original languages, we can reach the truth of these issues. The English translations are at best “translations” where often meanings of words are sometimes lost or changed because the original text is not clearly understood or there is no comparable word in English to describe the Hebrew or Greek expression. In some translations, traditional points of view are perpetuated with a seeming disregard for the clear text in the original language. With these rules of interpretation, this study attempts to discover what the Bible (God’s Word) is and is not saying about the subject of homosexuality.

The researchers and editors of this study are fundamental interpreters of the Scriptures and conservative in their point of view using the most orthodox references and scholarly commentaries. Primarily, Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible and Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament were used for the objective basis of this study. Other scholarly works are referenced and noted throughout the study.

The Bible itself combined with these other writings form the basis of the hope that is within us. Subjectively, we have the witness of the Holy Spirit, who Jesus clearly taught would lead us into all truth. On him we rely heavily and we pray that all who want to come to a knowledge of the truth will lean on the witness of the Spirit himself without whose counsel none of us could know any truth about God.

Spirit Controlled Behavior

While this document hopes to prove to its readers that beyond a shadow of any doubt, God has made diversity in his creation including homosexual people, no amount of “logical” argument will convince those who have already made up their mind. It is, therefore, the prayer of the editor that each reader prayerfully investigates the contents herein, waiting on the Lord. It is the Holy Spirit who will reveal the loving character and nature of the Father to those who seek him with their whole heart.

While in our flesh we are prone to argumentation in convincing those who would disagree with our position (whatever it may be). We affirm, however, that the truth will never be discovered through argument, but by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Conversation about these matters can be helpful to some but let us discuss the issues in a dialogue subject to the control of the Spirit, a demonstration of the fruits of the Spirit.

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How to Have “Fruitful Discussions”

1. Above all else, demonstrate a sincere loving concern and consideration (with respect) toward everyone. Remember, your real enemy is not flesh and blood.

2. Let the joy of the Lord flow in your conversation. It is your strength.

3. Remember that Jesus has overcome the world and has given us his peace. Be completely calm, established on the foundation of the righteousness of God, not your own righteousness. 4. Be patient with those who disagree with your beliefs. Let them have their opinion. If they are blinded to the truth, its okay, because in the end, the truth will stand no matter what happens with your discussion.

5. One tactic of the enemy is to destroy his opponents with insults. We will instead destroy the arguments against us with kindness. Choose each word carefully.

6. Never lie. If you don't know something, say you don't know. Never condemn. Demonstrate how the goodness of God lives in your manner of living.

7. Do not hesitate to talk about the Lord's work of sanctification in your life. Your walk of faith needs to be clearly demonstrated to anyone and everyone who has eyes to see and ears to hear.

8. Approach every person with respect. Be firm about your belief, but gentle; presenting your position one step at a time allowing the Holy Spirit to do the convincing.

9. In all that you do be controlled by the Spirit. Do not grieve the Spirit through a lack of reliance on him. Remember the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly but are divinely powerful to destroy the strongholds of the enemy and are able to demolish and pretension setup against the knowledge of God. Knowledge of the character of God is our greatest ally. The Holy Spirit will bring truth which will set free those in bondage. Regardless how things might appear, the truth will prevail to the end.

“And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” -- Ephesians 4:32.

Sodom and Gomorrah

The traditional explanation for the supernatural destruction of the ancient cities of the plain, Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, has been

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God's displeasure and wrath against the sin of homosexuality. The tradition points to the "men of the city" who surrounded the house where two visitors had come to stay with Lot, Abraham's nephew. These visitors being supposedly men, were actually angels sent by God to guide Lot and his family safely out of the city. By this traditional view, the men surrounding the house had come to have "sexual relations" with the visitors. For this, God poured out fire and brimstone to destroy this repulsive and contemptible sin. Even now, the understood sin of Sodom, handed down to us through this traditional teaching, has taken the name "sodomy".

Until recent archeological discoveries were made, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah was viewed by the scientific community with some skepticism. The area of their location was evidently fertile and the people who lived there, enjoyed a prosperity not shared by the surrounding areas which were evidently primarily desert wasteland. Under these circumstances, it is easy to understand how the people of the cities of the plain could become greedy isolationists, always suspicious of strangers.

The world community of the time would have been small and had been unified until the division of languages at the tower of Babel. Travel between cities was very treacherous and most of the time, hotels were not available. Hospitality extended to sojourners was an established institution in the community of man. But the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, with all their abundance and wealth, were inhospitable toward others less fortunate. There is strong biblical evidence that this is why God destroyed them.

Biblical Evidence

If homosexuality is the clear reason for God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, why doesn't the writer of Genesis state it clearly as such. The prophet Ezekiel indicates a clear reason in the sixteenth chapter of his prophetic word, verses 49-50: "*Now this is the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore, I did away with them as you have seen.*"

This passage says nothing about sexual acts of any kind as the reason for the destruction but does specifically outline arrogance and a lack of concern for the needs of others as the reason. The passage clearly

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teaches that inhospitable acts were the key reasons for God's judgment. Many would say that the "detestable" things mentioned in the passage referred to sexual sins including homosexuality which is an abomination to God. Proverbs 6:16-19 lists seven things that are particularly detestable to God:

"There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers."

Nowhere here do we see condemnation of sexual sin of any kind, much less homosexuality. This is not to say that homosexual acts were not occurring in Sodom or that they were acceptable to God. The incident outside Lot's house (Genesis 19:1-10) does show that the intentions of those gathered around the house were to have sexual relations with the "angels" supposed to be men. A loving act, however, was not intended, but in this case rape. This kind of treatment was not uncommon in ancient civilizations as a demonstrative way of showing power over enemies.

By itself, this was not the reason for the destruction of Sodom since the Lord had already determined to destroy the city prior to the angels' visitation (Genesis 18). In Jude 7, the writer says that the people had gone after "strange flesh". Some believe that this is referring to homosexuality. The translation "strange flesh" is from the Greek words heteros sarx (#2087 and #4561) meaning "different flesh". Had the writer wanted to refer to homosexual acts, it would have made more sense to use terms homos sarx (#3676 and #4571) meaning "same flesh". The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha suggests an alternative rendering of this verse might be that Jude was stating that "just like the wicked angels, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah left their first grace and gave themselves to idolatrous prostitution and the violent treatment of other people, so they have become an example by suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

Jesus commented on the sin of Sodom indirectly (Matthew 10:14-15) when he gave his disciples instructions concerning their proper response to inhospitable acts toward them. He stated that "if anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust of your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town." Though it is not stated directly, the inference by contrast is clear:

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Jesus says that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of inhospitable acts.

The traditional interpretation of this story largely stems from the unfortunate translation of the word *enoshe* (#582) in Genesis 19:4. Most versions say “men”. “Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom - both young and old - surrounded the house”

The Hebrew word *enoshe* is not gender specific but indicates mortals or people. The word *esh* (#376) would have been used to mean “man” or *eshal* (#802) to mean “woman” if gender specific terminology was meant. This mistranslation gives the impression that just the men of the city had surrounded Lot’s house and the further impression that they were all homosexuals out to have sex with the angels. The word *enoshe* is used in Genesis 17:23 with the word *zechar* (#2145) meaning “male” demonstrate this point. The King James Version states it this way:

“Abraham took Ishmael and...every male among the men of Abraham’s house...” The question arises, what other kind of men are there but males? Abraham was selecting the males from among all the “people” on his household for circumcision. The more modern translations corrected Genesis 17:23 to indicate people (or in this case household), but for some reason did not make the same correction in Genesis 19:6.

The intentions of the people surrounding Lot’s house were to rape the visitors. Most people regard rape as an act of violence rather than a sexual act. As it would be illogical to condemn all heterosexual sexual acts because some people acted abusively, it is also illogical to bring condemnation to all homosexual acts when only some acted irresponsibly.

Women in the culture of the Old Testament were treated as property; to be used as their owners saw fit. Men, on the other hand, were to be given respect. Sexual violence against a man by another man was an all-too-common demonstration of dominance over another. Its purpose was to take away the dignity of the subdued; to humiliate the man through forced anal intercourse. This was carried out by men who were not necessarily homosexuals themselves. Compare with Judges 19.

Prostitutes were a common part of the religious fertility rituals in ancient times and no doubt were prevalent in Sodom and Gomorrah. A word used by many today to condemn homosexuals is the word *Sodomite*. Many use this term as a reference to those who lived in Sodom and supposing them to be homosexuals, have used this word

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synonymously with homosexual as a negative slam. The word, however, does not appear in the story of the destruction of Sodom and is used only four times in the entire Bible. It is the word *kawdashe* (#6945) and refers to male temple cult prostitutes. Usually, as in Deuteronomy 23:17, their counter parts, *kedayshaw* (#6948), the female temple cult prostitutes are also mentioned. These are not homosexuals. They are prostitutes who were active in the worship of the pagan fertility gods and goddesses of ancient Palestine, according to *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible*. The word sodomite originated from the King James Version, but only in reference to these temple cult prostitutes. Later versions must have picked up the homosexual connotation from the traditional understanding and interpretation of what the sin of Sodom was and has since been used to condemn homosexuality.

These misinterpretations and the refusal by some biblical scholars to denounce such obvious mistranslations appear to be an attempt to keep homosexuality under control. When faced with the evidence, many have turned a deaf ear and not given serious consideration to the possibility that the traditional interpretation may in fact be in error. This tradition is so strong, those having a different interpretation are often ostracized for their non-conformity. Standing for the truth on this issue could mean professional suicide for clerics looking for recognition and acceptance; and those in the spotlight already, are fearful of losing face and will not speak out either.

Is there no one who will stand up for the truth no matter what it appears to be? One thing is for sure, the truth will be the truth no matter how anyone might try to cover it up.

The Law of Moses

The first five books of the Old Testament are called the Pentateuch (literally 5 tools). They are traditionally attributed to Moses' authorship and contain the Law (Torah). The Law contains more than six hundred regulations governing everyday living for the Children of Israel. They cover everything from instructions on how to wear clothes and prepare ceremonial foods to laws concerning the observance of holy days and punishments requirements for certain crimes. The Law was specifically given to the Israelites and never intended to be the law for the Gentiles. In that sense, none of us have ever been under the Law and there is no need for us to be under it now.

The Apostle Paul observed that the ones who have fallen away

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from grace (Galatians 5:4) are the ones who have put themselves under the Law. This was sect known as the Judaizers and not those without the Law. The Law was given to show the righteousness of God could not be obtained by legalistically keeping rules. It gave the people knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20) and demonstrated the impossibility of anyone being able to measure up and be accepted by God on the basis of keeping it.

The major source of condemnation today against homosexuality and other social moral issues, has come from those who have fully grasped the significance of the law of Grace as opposed to the Law of Moses and their belief that homosexuality is a violation of God's Law. Nearly every argument against homosexuality has at its root the Law of Moses. They mistakenly believe that sodomy is forbidden by the Law. This is not true. The word sodomy is a modern word, coined under the mistaken belief that Sodom was destroyed because of rampant homosexuality. The word sodomy does not appear in any of the main translations (KJV, RSV, NASB, or NIV).

It has taken on new meaning in this century referring to any sexual act other than copulation between a man and a woman who are married to each other. It varies from state to state in its legal definition. This variance illustrates one of the prime difficulties in understanding the Scripture in its original language. To understand and explain what the writer has written, one must understand the words the writer used as the writer understood them. Word meanings change over time and the unlearned can come away from passages with a total misunderstanding of the writer's meaning.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are the traditional condemnation passages against homosexual acts and appear in our modern translations to be clear cut prohibitions. Some have said these passages would justify capital punishment of homosexuals. Would these people also bring the same judgment against adulterers (Leviticus 20:10)? Following suit, they would also have to prescribe the death penalty for their stubborn and rebellious sons (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). One thing is clear from Paul's teaching: anyone who puts themselves under any one point of the Law obligates themselves to keep the whole Law (Galatians 5:3) or they are worthy of death.

In truth, it is uncertain what Leviticus 18:22 is saying. The literal transliteration reads: "You must not sleep the sleep of a woman with a man; it is ritually impure."

Many scholars believe this saying represents an idiom that has lost its meaning over time due to cultural traditions of the time long since

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forgotten. John Boswell makes a case in *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* that this prohibition cannot be a blanket condemnation of homosexuality, because the writer uses the Hebrew word *toevah* (#844) referring to the act as being “detestable” or an “abomination”. The Hebrews used special words to condemn specific wicked or abominable misdeeds. If this passage had been referring to sexual misconduct, the writer would have used the *zimmah* (#2154) instead of *toevah*.

The land was full of idolatry. The Palestinian god of the sun, Baal and his consort, the fertility goddess Ashtoreth, were commonly worshiped in the area and *toevah* appears throughout the Law to denounce these idolatrous practices. But *zimmah* is used wherever immoral acts such as prostitution or rape are the subject. Whatever detestable acts here are being prohibited have something to do with idolatry.

In the New Testament, we find that Jesus said nothing we can identify clearly about homosexuality. Homosexual relationships in the Greco-Roman world were common place at the time of Jesus. Had these relationships been so very detestable to God, certainly Jesus would have commented on them. Surely Paul would have commented on them. Some believe he did and in our next section we will consider Paul’s writings.

ROMANS 1:18-32

Of all the passages of Scripture in the Bible used to condemn homosexuality, the most frequently used is this one here in Romans. Some of the words used here have been distorted, but for the most part, the translations we have today appear to be faithful to the Greek and accurate renderings of the text. The passage is clearly speaking of homosexual acts. This may at first appear to be an admission that homosexuality is not acceptable to God, but in the context, the passage makes no such blanket condemnation. Street walkers are commonly seen in cities across America and Europe, soliciting their bodies for money. There is no blanket condemnation of heterosexuality as the result of the misbehavior of the few. In the same way, homosexuality in general cannot be condemned on the basis of its abuse by a few.

In the context of this passage, Paul is exposing the practice of the pagan rites of fertility, common in Rome and throughout the known world of the time. Paul’s concern (rather than a warning against homosexuals) was for the Roman Christian’s involvement in these fertility rites. In Corinth, where evidently a man was sleeping with his

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father's wife and all knew of it (1 Corinthians 5:1), but did nothing about it, Paul took authority, exposing him and requiring his expulsion. He must have had a similar concern that the Roman Gentile believers, who had formerly been actively involved in the temple cult fertility rites, might continue to do so. Rather than a blanket condemnation of homosexuality, this passage is a slam against the hypocritical Christians who were themselves continuing to participate in the temple cult orgies. The participants were not predominantly homosexuals, but heterosexuals participating in homosexual acts.

The people Paul is describing, who are involved in this temple cult worship, have some very distinct characteristics. First, they have rejected the knowledge of God (verse 20). Second, they do not glorify God or acknowledge his provision for them and their hearts and minds have become "darkened" (verse 21). Third, they have exchanged the glory of God for idolatry (verses 22-23). Fourth, they degrade one another through promiscuous sexual acts (verse 24). Fifth, they have believed lies, serving created things and not the Creator (verse 25). Sixth, they have exchanged their own "natural" sexuality for the "unnatural" (verses 26-27). Seventh, they have depraved minds that promote unbridled lawlessness (verses 28-32). These are very specific characteristics and while there may be many who fit these descriptions today, this does not describe the modern mainstream homosexual community and for sure does not even come close in describing those gay men and women who are believers, serving the Lord. The problem here is that many church-goers cannot see the difference between what Paul is describing here and committed loving relationships. There is a big difference.

In verse 26 and 27, translated to our English word "natural" is the Greek word *phusikos* (#5446) which means intrinsic; that which is born or inherent. It does not describe something that is necessarily universally true, but intrinsic for the individual. What is intrinsic for one person is not necessarily intrinsic for the next person. For example, one person may be intrinsically tall (as height runs in his/her family) while another person may be intrinsically short. Both are intrinsically influenced, but not in the same way. Both are "natural" in their appearance but with opposite results. Those in this passage, involved in the fertility rites, were giving themselves over to do those things that were not natural (intrinsic) to themselves. Even the English word "nature" means that which is inborn or inherent to the individual. The assumption here which causes so much confusion is the belief that Paul was saying that "natural" refers to

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the heterosexual persuasion; that all humans are naturally heterosexual from birth. This assumption, based on the evidence of experience does not hold true.

Surveys on the incidence of a homosexual orientation in identical twins was done years ago at Johns-Hopkins University. In all cases where one of the twins was homosexual, the other twin was also. More recently, in the July 26, 1993, issue of Time Magazine, the Science Editor describes recent findings that lean toward a genetic explanation for homosexuality. "This new work and the studies of the twins are two lines of evidence pointing in the same direction. But the DNA evidence is much stronger than the twins' study", according to Simon LeVay whose research on the human brain differences is widely accepted. Science is progressively confirming what many gay men and women have known all along, they were created that way.

Then (and if) science finishes its work and proves genetic rationale for the incidence of homosexuality, this will not end discrimination. Much like racial prejudice, people will need to redefine their understanding of homosexuality to end the revulsion and hatred our culture has generated toward the gay community. As Christians, we must end this war against a segment of humanity, proclaiming God's love and acceptance rather than his rejection of anyone. Gay Christians must set an example of integrity as a demonstration of the redemptive work of God in the gay community. This example is for Christians and non-Christians, gays and straights; to be a light in the darkness of prejudice and hate.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." (King James Version, 1911)

The English translations have taken a great deal of liberty in this particular passage; translating three different words very carelessly. Some versions have taken two of the Greek words used here and combined them into the one word "homosexual". This passage has become one of the more quoted clobber passages used against homosexuals. An attempt to perpetuate a view that the Apostle Paul could not have possibly had concerning gay people has been forced into the meaning of these words. Assumption comes greatly into play in

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translating when little is known about the exact meanings of words. Meanings of words used in the biblical text are largely understood as the result of the word's usage in other places. Using biblical and non-biblical sources as a reference point, ancient languages can be best understood through the repeated use of any given word in authentic period documents. In other words, the more a term is used, the better we can understand its meaning.

Fornication

The King James Version has assigned the “fornicator” as the meaning for the Greek word pornos (#4205) used in this passage. The word fornication in the year 1611 meant “voluntary sexual intercourse between a man and an unmarried woman.” The word pornos, however literally means “male prostitute”. Together with its counterpart porne (#4204) which refers to female prostitutes (harlots), both are derived from the root word porneia (#4202) meaning “harlotry”. The more modern translations have used an even more indistinct term “sexual immorality” (New International Version) which has a much broader connotation and is way beyond the original meaning of the text. In his much-used reference manual, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, J. H. Thayer admits that a much broader term “must be adopted in these passages” because we have learned “how leniently converts from among the heathen regarded this vice and indulged in it”. In other words, he says, ‘we must modify our translation of the Word of God so that we can ensure a general condemnation of sexual acts outside of marriage regardless of what the text actually says. God did not put it just right, so we must, therefore, correct him.’

Effeminate

The second word malakoi (#3120) is found in the New Testament only three times (Matthew 11:8, Luke 7:25, and 1 Corinthians 6:9). It has a double meaning in the Greek much like words in English. An example is the word light. Its usage in a sentence determines its meaning whether it is referring to heaviness or a source of illumination. In much the same way, malakoi literally means first “softness” as it applies to the feel of fine fabric. Secondly, the word is used to describe a character flaw, and in this case, it means “weak willed” or “easily beguiled”.

Our modern slang expression “softy” used to describe someone

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who is soft hearted, kind and easy to get along with seems closer to the meaning, except that it has a positive connotation. But malakoi has something to do with a moral weakness in context. It is perhaps that inability of some to maintain moral integrity and be self-controlled because of the ineptitude of their convictions and the lusts of their heart. The word better fits the pattern we see in our modern culture to those who are addicts.

Addictions to various drugs, alcohol or sex is a common problem in our culture and translating this word to addicts would not only make more sense in the context but would be in keeping with the meaning of the word. The Latin Vulgate translated malakoi to the word “mollis” which has exactly the same meaning, but the word “mollis” became a slang expression that referred to men who wore silky refined clothing. This meaning undoubtedly explains why the King James Version used the “effeminate”. In one translation, malakoi became “Catamite” which was a young boy slave used sexually by his master. Another translation uses the word “lecchouris” (lecherous) and another “voluptuous” and still another “sissies”. The multiple ways we see this word being translated is a testimony to the confusion of the translators and biblical scholars and evidence of an attempt to prejudice scripture against homosexuals.

Abusers of Themselves with Mankind

The third word, arsenokoitai (#733) is used only twice in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10). Its meaning is at best questionable. If it refers to homosexuals, the question arises why Paul would have used such an obscure and questionable term when he could have used other much clearer terms to describe what he meant. The Greek culture was filled with homoerotic words used to describe various homosexual relationships, but instead he used a word that does not appear anywhere in Greek homoerotic literature. Transliterated, the word arsenokoitai means “man-active-bed”.

It could mean a male prostitute who takes the active role sexually. Modern day male prostitutes are differentiated by their trade, either for women, “gigolos” or for men, “hustlers”. Similarly, the Greeks also may have identified prostitutes by their trade. If Paul had wanted to condemn a group more inclined to be exclusively homosexual, he might have chosen the term arenokoitai (“man-passive-bed”) which would indicate a male prostitute who takes the passive role sexually.

The King James Version avoids a direct translation of this word

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with the phrase “abusers of themselves with mankind”, but it is interesting to note that even though the word homosexual did not exist at the time and wasn’t even coined until the late 19th century, a word existed in 1611 which if used by the King James translators would have left no question as to what they were talking about. This word is “invert”, which meant homosexual, but they did not use it. More in keeping with the context in both this passage and in 1 Timothy 1:10, a suggested better translation might be “rapist” since it has something to do with someone who takes the active role in the sex act.

Cursory View of the Translations

The following chart demonstrates how ridiculous and far fetched some of the translations have gone with this passage. For instance, translating to “child molester” is completely ridiculous and “those with infamous habits” seems extremely vague. Some kind of male pervert is unquestionably referred

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TRANSLATION	YEAR	RENDERED AS:	
Koine Greek	56	malakoi	arsenokoitai
Latin Vulgate	405	mollis	masculorum concubitores
Wyclif	1508	lecchouris	synne of Sodom
Tyndale	1525	weaklings	abusers of themselves with mankynde
Reims-Douai	1609	effeminate	liars with mankind
King James Authorized Version	1611	effeminate	abusers of themselves with mankind
The Revised Version	1881	effeminate	abusers of themselves with men
American Standard Version	1901	effeminate	abusers of themselves with men
Revised Standard Version	1946	sexual perverts	
Jerusalem Bible (French)	1955	effeminate	people with infamous habits
Interlinear Greek-English New Testament	1958	voluptuous persons	Sodomites
The Amplified Bible	1958	those who participate in homosexuality	
New American Standard Bible	1963	effeminate	homosexuals
Today's English Version	1966	homosexual perverts	
Jerusalem Bible (German)	1968	sissies	child molesters
Jerusalem Bible (English)	1968	Catamites	Sodomites
The Living Bible	1971	homosexuals	
New International Version	1978	male prostitutes	homosexual offenders

to.

These obvious mistranslations do not exonerate the prevalent homosexual promiscuous lifestyle, for clearly Paul's condemnation is against unbridled promiscuity in any form, homosexual or heterosexual. It is, therefore, the responsibility of gay Christians to redefine "gay-ness" as it relates to Spirit controlled Christian living; operating as new creatures before Jesus Christ who is Lord; setting an example to all unbelievers as a demonstration to everyone that they truly are the children of God. "Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." Romans 8:14

Who Are the Eunuchs

Some have taken Jesus' statements in Matthew 19:9-12 about divorce and remarriage as an indication that he condemned homosexuality by omission, confirming that heterosexuality is the only "normal" relationship possible. On closer examination, it would seem that just the opposite is true. Jesus is talking about eunuchs and defines them as those who are unable (or unfit) to function in marriage for one of three reasons:

They were born that way and so are intrinsically eunuchs.

They were made to be eunuchs by other men.

They made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

In our culture, the word eunuch is commonly understood to be a reference to castrated males. The Hebrew word saris (#5631) often translated to the English word eunuch, is used to refer to men, who sometimes for political reasons in some eastern cultures, were castrated to insure no threat through procreation.

But this condition was not synonymous with eunuchry in general. Eunuchs were often trusted officials with great responsibility and political power. The Old Testament often uses the word chamberlains, court officials or officers when translating the word saris and can easily be missed when reading the English versions. This same meaning belongs to the Greek word eunukos (#2135). Eunuchs were often in charge of harems; responsible for the protection and care of the wives of the king because they posed no threat sexually. They were overseers of the beauty treatments for the women to make them presentable to the king (Esther 2:3, 12-13). The Ethiopian Eunuch was the treasure keeper (Acts 8:27) for Queen Candace. Often Eunuchs were recognized for their spiritual sensitivity and wisdom and were chosen to advise the king. Daniel and the Hebrew children were eunuchs in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Isaiah prophesied that Hezekiah's children would become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (2 Kings 20:16-18). This was fulfilled when Daniel and the three Hebrew children (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) who were described as "beautiful men" (Daniel 1:4), were presented as eunuchs to King Nebuchadnezzar's court. The chief of the king's eunuchs, Ashpenaz, gave "tender love" (Daniel 1:9) to Daniel. The Hebrew word used here is checed (#2617), meaning affectionate love. The modern translations have watered this down significantly. Checed is used 250 times in the Old Testament and

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translated 174 times to “love”, but for some reason when referring to Ashpenaz’s relationship to Daniel, the New International Version says “favor and sympathy”.

It is important to note and clarify that eunuchs and homosexuals are not synonymous terms. However, in Matthew 19:11, Jesus indicates that whoever the eunuchs are, they are that way because of the gift of God given to them. J. H. Thayer identifies them as being “ (b) naturally incapacitated for marriage or begetting children.” Sterility can certainly incapacitate a man from begetting children, but what can incapacitate one from marriage? Tom Horner in his book *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality In Biblical Times* indicates from his research that wherever eunuchs were present, there is the presence of overt homosexual activity, or at least a very strong possibility of it. James Tinny, the late founder of Faith Temple in Washington, D.C. taught that eunuchs who served as royal chamberlains must of necessity be emotionally or psychologically homosexual or they would not be trustworthy. A heterosexual man, even though he may be physically emasculated, would still have a heterosexual drive to caress and kiss.

Because of their incapacitation toward marriage for whatever reason, the Jews regarded eunuchs as cut-off from their heritage since children were seen as the only way of extending yourself passed this life. Isaiah 53:1-8 is the passage the Ethiopian Eunuch was reading when Philip joined him by direction of the Holy Spirit to explain how he (the Messiah) could be cut-off with no descendants (verse 8). Jesus, therefore, was also a eunuch.

Eunuchs, however, who choose what pleases God and keep his covenant, have a promise from God, that he will give them a “name better than sons and daughters...an everlasting name that will not be cut-off” (Isaiah 56:4-5). This promise is for us who are set apart for God’s service as eunuchs ministering to the bride of Christ, his church. In this function, we are working toward readying the bride for the return of the bridegroom in order to present her spotless and without blemish, purified to love without hypocrisy.

Who Can Be Saved

The clear message to the gay community from the modern Church has been one of rejection. Gay people, like many other minorities or small eccentric groups, have been labeled as unacceptable to the kingdom of God. In the same way that the Jews considered Gentiles as unclean,

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gays have been treated as filthy; rubbish to be thrown out. Some have rejected this blanket statement and have attempted to reach out; understanding that Jesus' mission was not one of condemnation, but salvation. However, one Christian leader writes, "homosexuals are dogs." This terminology, he believes, is a slang expression used in scripture to refer to homosexuals. In his point of view, "hate" and "prejudice" are justified. Terms like "family values" are used in such a way so that gays are presented as though they do not have any redeeming value. This presents the view that rejection is the only proper response to homosexuals. But, nowhere in scripture can anyone justify hate as a proper response to homosexuals or anyone. All people are the creation of God. Instead, James says to treat all alike without discrimination (James 2:1-4).

The early Church, beginning from Jewish roots, had an ethnocentric view of who they were to God and at first did not recognize any non-Jews as part of God's family. This bigotry was clearly broken by an incident that occurred in Acts 10. This lengthy story tells how Cornelius, a Roman centurion and devout Gentile man, received the message of the gospel from Peter and subsequently the baptism of the Holy Spirit. After witnessing the event, Peter declared to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem when they questioned him about his actions in going to the "uncircumcised", *"who was I that I could stand in God's way?"* (Acts 11:17). And later, Peter reiterated the conclusions drawn from the incident (Acts 15:8) that it is God who "knows the heart" and shows who he has chosen by giving them the Holy Spirit. This same message is still true today, that it is God who chooses and shows his choice by the giving of his Holy Spirit.

Paul's later clarification of the law of grace clearly says that God's free gift of grace (unmerited favor) is extended to all who by faith receive it (Romans 5:2). *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that WHOEVER believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16) *"Everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved."* (Joel 2:32) Paul teaches *"there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* (Romans 10:12-13) *"All the Father gives me will come to me, and WHOEVER comes to me I will never drive away."* (John 6:37) A person who is seeking God cannot even do so unless God draw him. So it is by God's invitation that anyone comes to him. *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at*

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the last day." (John 6:44)

These important passages paint a picture of no matter what the Church's sins are, God's love is extended to **WHOEVER** will respond to his free gift of grace. Jesus did not come to bring condemnation to anyone, but so that the world through him might be saved (John 3:17). Therefore, those who do not extend the free gift of God's unmerited favor to everyone as it was extended to them, are not abiding in the clear teaching of the New Testament. The witness of the Holy Spirit is all anyone needs (Romans 8:16) to come to the inward security of knowing who they really are a child of God.

Glossary

PART 1 ENGLISH DEFINITIONS

Abomination - Detestable. Differing Hebraic terms used in the Old Testament for this one English word describe specific areas of actions considered particularly detestable to God. Each Hebrew word used is unique, describing a specific behavior with varying degrees of abhorrence.

Addict - One who surrenders his/her will over to a behavior or substance habitually and becomes psychologically dependent on that behavior or substance.

Adultery - A violation of the covenant of marriage through sexual intercourse of one of the marriage partners with a third party.

Bigotry - Closed minded; intolerant and opinionated.

Catamite - A boy slave kept by a pederast.

Chamberlain - An attendant on a sovereign or lord in his bedchamber

Conservative - Traditionally accepted methods of doctrinal interpretation.

Deductive (Reasoning) - A logical philosophical approach to reasoning beginning with universal truth to determine individual truth; from the general to the particulars; starting with the whole and reasoning to the part.

Effeminate - Having feminine qualities of softness or weakness. A person of over-refined mannerisms.

Emasculate - To deprive a man of virile or procreative power; to castrate

Ethnocentric - Regarding one's own group to be superior to others

Fornication - Voluntary sexual intercourse between an unmarried woman and a man.

Fundamentalism - The belief system emphasizing the literal inerrancy of the Scriptures.

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Gigolo - A male prostitute who caters to women.

Greek (Language) - Language of the Hellenes; dominant language of the world at the time of Christ due to the influence of Greek culture after the conquests of Alexander the Great. The Greek dialect “Koine” was the common language used in writing the New Testament.

Harlot - A woman who engages in promiscuous sexual intercourse for pay.

Hebrew (Language) - The primary Semitic language used in writing the Old Testament. It was the ancient language of the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. Aramaic was also used in writing the Old Testament being a Hebraic derived dialect.

Homophobic - Having an irrational fear of homosexuality.

Hustler - A male prostitute who caters to men

Idiom - A language or expression peculiar to a particular people or region.

Idolatry - The worship of a physical object as a god or an immoderate attachment or devotion to something other than God.

Immorality - Acts contrary to established standards of good behavior.

Inductive (Reasoning) - A logical philosophical approach to reasoning by determining universal truth beginning with individual truth; from the particulars to the general; starting with part and reasoning to the whole.

Infamous - Bad reputation or disgraceful.

Intrinsic - Belonging to the basic constitutional nature of something.

Invert - A homosexual. This word was coined prior to 1611, before the King James Version was published.

Isolationist - One who keeps to themselves by abstaining from political entanglements

Judaizers - The early Christian Church being predominantly Jewish struggled over the issue of non-Jewish converts. At first it was thought that before becoming a Christian, one must first become a Jew, receiving circumcision. However, Peter was shown that God had accepted the Gentiles as they were and later Paul expounded on the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. The Jerusalem council upheld his teaching. Some continued to insist that the Law of Moses must be observed to the letter and became known as the party of the circumcision or Judaizers.

Lecherous (Lecchouris) - Given over to an inordinate indulgence of sexual activity.

Molester - One who makes annoying sexual advances, sometimes having injurious effect

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Orthodox - The conventional point of view as established by conservative doctrinal interpretation

Pederast - An older man who keeps young boys as his sexual slave. This practice was common in the ancient world. Practitioners were not necessarily homosexuals.

Pervert - One given over to some form of extreme sexual abnormality.

Prejudice - A preconceived judgment or opinion based on insufficient knowledge or partial inconclusive evidence. An irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual or group because of their adjudged inferior characteristics.

Promiscuous - Having multiple sexual partners without any commitments between them.

Prostitute - A person who engages in promiscuous sexual intercourse for pay.

Rape - Violent acts of a sexual nature performed by the force of an individual over another without their consent.

Sissy - An effeminate man or boy often thought of as a coward.

Sodomite - A male temple-cult prostitute. (This word has no relationship to homosexuality except by those who have mistakenly interpreted Genesis 18-19 as a story of male homosexual rape.)

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Sodomy - Sexual intercourse between persons of the same sex; or sexual acts defined by cultural norms to be outside accepted moral practices.

Translation - A rendering from one language to another using cultural and textual word meanings.

Voluptuous - Full of delight and pleasure to the senses producing sexual arousal.

Vulgate - Latin version of the Bible authorized by the Roman Catholic Church in 405 AD.

Whoever - Anyone.

Whore - A woman who engages in promiscuous sexual intercourse for pay.

Whoremonger - A man who fornicates with whores.

PART 2 HEBREW DEFINITIONS -

Ashtoreth (Asherah) - Canaanite mother-goddess of fertility, consort to Baal, god of the sun, but associated in the Old Testament with idolatrous worship using asherah poles which were wooden images of the goddess.

Baal - Canaanite god of the sun.

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Checed - Lovingkindness (Strong's #2617) Used extensively in the Old Testament expressing a physical showing of affection through caressing or lovemaking.

Enoshe - Mankind. (Strong's #582) Refers to the human race, people, mortals in general.

Esh - Man (Strong's #376) A male person.

Eshal - Woman (Strong's #802) A female person.

Kawdashe - Male temple-prostitute (Strong's #6945) A male devotee by prostitution to licentious idolatry.

Keydashaw - Female temple-prostitute (Strong's #6948) A female devotee by prostitution to licentious idolatry.

Saris - Chamberlain (Strong's #5631) A eunuch trusted to guard the private possessions of a king or lord for whom they are employed. They are sometimes castrated to ensure the fidelity of their trust.

Toevah - Detestable or abominable (Strong's #8441) Something disgusting or abhorrent to God because of some kind of idolatrous involvement.

Torah (Tora) - The first five books of the Old Testament commonly known as the "pentateuch" (the five tools) often referred to as "the Law."

Yadah - To know (Strong's #3045) Knowing someone by way of recognition. Can mean anything from mere greeting to having sexual relations with someone.

Zechar - Male (Strong's #2145) Refers to the male gender, either animal or human.

Zimmah - Detestable or abominable (Strong's #2154) Literally meaning "a bad plan." Often used in the books of the Law to specifically characterize detestable acts that were sexually immoral.

PART 3 GREEK DEFINITIONS

Arenokoitai - A male prostitute who takes the passive role during the sex act. Transliterated it means "man-passive- bed."

Arsenokoitai - A male prostitute (Strong's #733) who takes the active role in the sex act. Transliterated it means "man-active-bed."

Eunukos - Chamberlain or bed-keeper (Strong's #2135) A trusted guardian in the service of a monarch incapacitated for marriage on the basis of intrinsic qualities, or by choice, or by emasculation. They were often powerful political officials or court officers.

Heteros - Different (Strong's #2087) Not the same.

Homos - Same (Strong's 3676) Similar to identical.

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Koine - The common dialect of Greek used during the time of Jesus in the near eastern and Mediterranean lands. It was made common throughout the known world due to the conquests of Alexander the Great.

Malakoi - Soft to the touch; Weak-willed (Strong's #3120) The feel of a fine fabric. When referring to the character of people it means moral weakness or unrestrained. The Latin rendering mollis has the exact same meaning. The Latin word became a slang expression at the time of Clement of Alexandria to describe certain male prostitutes who dressed themselves in finery, cropped their hair and sometimes castrated themselves to maintain a youthful appearance and high voice. This meaning probably best explains why this term is often translated to "effeminate" in many English versions of the Bible.

Phusikos - Instinctive (Strong's #5446) Referring to that which one is naturally inclined to do instinctively or one's inherited physical appearance.

Porne - Female prostitute (Strong's #4204) A woman who engages in promiscuous sexual intercourse for pay.

Porneia - Harlotry (Strong's #4202) Promiscuous sexual acts with prostitutes.

Porneuo - To act the harlot (Strong's #4203) To engage in promiscuous sexual activity with a harlot.

Pornos - Male prostitute (Strong's #4205) A man who engages in promiscuous sexual intercourse for pay.

Sarx - Carnal (Strong's #4561) Specifically referring to flesh or skin, but in spiritual terms that which is in opposition to the spiritual; natural.



Fighting Role
Yohanes Soubirius De Santo

A Neon Gospel (For Colm)
Alan Garrigan

“Man is something that shall be overcome” Friedrich Nietzsche
Some suckers just want to get high,
Life is infinitely more important,
Literally a chance to live forever,
A fly cannot comprehend space-light,
A man cannot comprehend the possibility,
Of his own mortality
They shall raise the ashes,
As all convenes into one,
Veritable singularity,
Whatever you call it
Peace comes when you pray

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Them
Insatiable K

Religion is continuous

It is fluid

God = Allah = YH'WH = JESUS

I am just as fluid as God

I = Male = Female = Them

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**Why
TT**

Saviour, Saviour
Hear my humble cry
Why did you create gay people?
We suffer and then we die
Why would you create me in your image?
Then leave me all alone.
Why would you allow them to torment me, us?
Male and female, created you them.
I am them. I am both male and female and yet the world does not
understand.
We are bullied, shamed, cast out of your holy worship spaces.
Is it jealousy?
It is hypocrisy or simply misunderstandings?
Why do you leave us to fend for ourselves?
To fight against those who come against us in your name.

For Joyce
Kat M. Harris

Jesus is the best thing

That ever happened to me

Musical melodies with words that touch your core

Yes Sa

Shouts of hallelujahs, thank ya Lord ring out

The one that shatters my heart and soul

Yes Sa

That Yes Sa is full of remorse, shame, guilt, love, adoration, acceptance,
and defeat

That Yes Sa lifts and tears down at the same time

Yes Sa as arms flail and tears flow

Yes Sa as the ushers rub her back and fan the heat away

Yes Sa as I hold on and pray for God to ease her pain

Yes Sa

Yes Sir

Yes God

Help her

Help me

Help us

One day I was lost but Jesus found me

Jesus is the best thing that ever happened

This notion that God was given to slaves and passed down from
generation through generation fascinates and alarms me

Did she know?

Was the God she praised and feared the right one?

Was her condemnation due to fear?

Did she believe that I would not enjoy paradise with her?

I know she loved me and wanted the best for me.

In the end, her love was all that mattered.



I am a Man
Kel M

You see hips and lines
But I am a man
Men are not simply muscles and dicks
Men are providers, comforters, and protectors
I'm no less of man because I have feminine features
Then a woman that has masculine features

She looks like her daddy

I am all man
No, I do not want your woman
Nor do I want your man
I want to simply be me

She has an hourglass or pear shape

I protect my family
I provide for them
I can dick em down like the best of them
Does it matter that mine never gets soft?
I don't need a blue pill to sustain me
You have the physical outward appearance
I have the inward hormonal and mental presentation

I am a Man

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Silver Rose for the Divine and Love
Cesar Ceballos

Then versus Now
Insatiable K

Conversion does not equal freedom
Ancestors were captured and sold
Buck breaking made that which was natural
Abhorred and feared by all
Sodom and Gomorrah used to shackle
Scripture says man who turn away from their natural affection are wrong
If my natural affection as a man is to love a man, I am not wrong
If my natural affection as a woman is to love a woman, I am not wrong
Love between consenting adults is not wrong
Adult age is determined by the state of residence (some need to increase that age)

II

We pray to Jesus to save us and yet we're still enslaved
Angola and other pay for prison systems are now century plantations
I love the Lord
Allah
YHWH
But do they love me back
Do they pity my groan
Do they accept me for who I am when they created me
You want me to sit under persecution but you do not admonish deacon
so and so when he's sleeping with a Mrs. or Ms. that's not his own
You do not call out the preacher who abuses his wife at home or the
preacher whose perpetual whoredom is excused because he can preach a
mighty word
God is not pleased with that
I called Jesus on the mainline and told him I wanted to be what he
wanted me to be
I'm still gay
I knelt and prayed to Allah in the East and asked to be pure
I'm still gay

III

Ain't I a woman

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It's a question asked by many

Women are still not allowed to preach in some spaces

Instead placated with titles such as Evangelist or Exalter

If God can use a donkey to spread the word per

The same scriptures that condone slavery

Women can preach

Women stayed by Jesus' side during and after the crucifixion

Women told the good news of resurrection

Yet they are not allowed to tell the good news in the pulpit

Vashti says your gifts will make room for you

Yet the room isn't being made in some spaces

We have to leave and create our own spaces

Thank God for Archbishop Carl Bean and those like him for creating
such a space

Now we have Bishop Tonyia Rawls, Bishop Jacquelyn Holland, Bishop
Karen Oliveto, Bishop Eva Brunne, Bishop Allyson Abrams, Bishop
Yvette Flunder, and so many others.

God is Love and Love is for Everyone

God is L.I.F.E

L.I.F.E is for Everyone

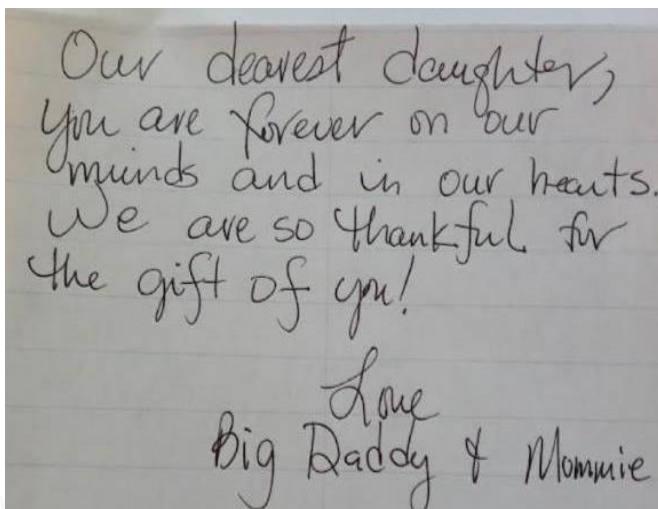
EVERYONE

The Mask
T. Thornton

I wear the mask that grins and lies
I'm committing the crime for which my foremothers died
I wear the mask of sin and shame
For I love women of which I am the same
I wear the mask of lies and deceit
For I play the pronoun game changing she to he
Is it so wrong to just be me?
Am I ready to be ostracized by society?
How long will I continue to live in pain?
Just because someone hit me or called me a name
Lesbo, dyke-it's all the same but it's who I am
Why should I run away instead of grin and laugh?
I am one in a million quite unique
But I am categorized because of what I do underneath the sheets
I am constantly asked, when will you stop wearing the mask
I just reply I shall stop wearing it when you stop caring and respect me
for who I am and not who I love
I will stop wearing it when I can walk hand and hand with my woman
and not get stares, glares or have the police hailed
I will stop wearing it when the world accepts the fact that I am here, and
I am a woman who loves women and it's okay

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**A Parent's Love
Big Daddy & Mommie**



When your birth parents can't give you the love you need, just replace daughter with your name in the below note.

Parents are not perfect. In fact, some parents can be dicks while others can be gold. Whatever their reaction to you, remember above else you are loved.

You are Amazing, Talented, One in a million. If you need a hug or a parental figure, PFLAG has many programs all over the USA and if you don't have a PFLAG near you, there's a group *Mom for a Minute* on the Reddit that will be there for you whenever you need someone.

God, please protect the hearts and minds of those reading this right now. Fill them up with your strength and light. Allow love to wash over them whenever they need it. Protect them as well Lord. Send only good to them in their times of want and or need. We ask in Jesus name, Amen.

The Trevor Project / For Young LGBTQ Lives
(<https://thetrevorproject.org>)

PFLAG / For Parents and Family of LGBTQ persons
(<https://pflag.org>)

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Trevor Project Lifeline: 1-866-488-7386 For LGBTQ Young Persons under 25. Text start to 678678

Trans Lifeline: 1-877-565-8860 (U.S.) or 877-330-6366 (Canada)

LGBT National Hotline: 1-888-843-4564

LGBT National Youth Talkline: 1-800-246-7743

LGBT Senior Hotline: 1-888-234-7243

Crisis Text Line 741741. Text hello to 741741

YouthLine 839863. Text teen2teen to 839863 or call 1-877-968-8491

Substance Abuse and Mental Health call 1-800-9662-4357

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We are included in Whosoever

Kat M. Harris

Note: God is at times referenced as them because God has no gender. God is spirit.

I don't know about you all, but Jesus is the best thing that ever happened to me. I bring you greetings in the name of Mother, Father God. Please turn with me to Acts 2:21. The New Living Translation reads, if anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. I prefer the King James Version which states, whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved. My sermon topic is we're included, we are. Everyone reading this sermonette is included in whosoever.

Prayer

Father God, we thank you for everything that you are, everything that you do, have done and will do. I ask that these words be endowed in the spirits, minds, and hearts of those that read or hear them. Water this Word, Mother God. Let those that take them, become the fire starters that save the world.

Sermon

Acts chapter 2 begins with Peter, some disciples, Jews, and Gentiles gathered in the upper room. Now they had received the Holy Spirit for the first time. In our Holy Ghost imagination, we can recall visits to church where the congregants jumped, shouted, ran, and cried while full of the spirit. There are always those in the same congregation that look upon the others in shock, awe, startled and confusion. Well, the same occurred in the upper room. There were those who said those full of the spirit were drunk or under the influence because they were speaking in tongues or other languages besides their native language. Peter addressed the crowd and said if you can recall the prophet Joel spoke about this day. Joel stated that there would be a day when the spirit of God would be poured out upon all flesh. Men, women, children, those that were not able to understand, if they believe.

Some argue that the gift of the Holy Spirit was the most important part of that day. I'm here to say otherwise. Further down within the scriptures, Joel stated that whosoever believes in the Lord, shall be saved is the most important event of that day.

Some of you may be saying that it is all well and good but why is

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it important. It is important because some of us have been condemned and put down because of how we behave, who we love, and for not following man's religious rules to their liking. I believe some of you may have a startled and confused look upon your face and are thinking, ok that's great we are saved, so let me tell you what salvation is for those who don't know. Salvation is being free from the penalty of sin which is death. *Sidebar, being a member of the LGBTQIA+ community is not a sin.* Some of us have been told that we have to pay our tithes to be saved, you must be baptized, or you have to live right. No one ever gave me a map or full details on what right living is, if you know please share with the world, in Acts 2:21 it simply states whosoever believes. I'm not telling you not to pay tithes nor am I saying that you should not strive for right living or the mark of the high calling, but Paul and Joel are clear that God's requirement is belief. Deacon Annette Johnson shared with the Unity Fellowship Church Charlotte that belief is believing that something is true.

You have to believe that God sent his son, Jesus to die on the cross for us, rose on the third day so that we all will be saved. It means you do not have to follow the list that some Christians give you, shout or try to slam down your throat. God informed the prophet and disciple to say, whosoever believes is saved. Now you have the knowledge that all that is required to have eternal life is belief in Jesus. Whenever you are confronted with hate or people try to convince you that you are not saved, just say whosoever believes.

It is important because when you have doubts or want to turn away from God, you can look in the mirror and say whosoever, I'm included. You are not an outsider anymore, you are not trash, and you are saved because you believe. Furthermore, this means that you should not walk around nor act as if you are not saved. Because you are saved. Act as if you are a child of God and not a child of the enemy. Walk in boldness knowing that you are included in whosoever. You were included before you were conceived. God knew you when he created the world, knew your likes, dislikes, your failures, and successes.

God also knew that the world would try to mislead you and you try to turn you away from love, grace, and salvation. This grace and salvation cover you wherever you may be. If you're in the bar room, you can say to yourself and others, Jesus loves you. When people condemn you, call you out of your name, state that you were not created in their image (God), or say that God does not love you. You can brush off your shoulder, stand tall and say, I am a beautiful creation of God, I am

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included in whosoever!

God made it easy. Whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord and believes. This goes for everyone, adults, and children. When Jesus said whosoever, he gave you the key to the door, but it is up to you to take the key and walk through the door. You cannot walk in and expect your life to be the same. When you take the key and walk through the door, you silently agree to share the key with somebody else.

I know this because there was once a man, who had done wrong. On the day of his execution, he called out to someone. That someone was Jesus. Jesus, who was in the midst of dying, who had been whipped all night long, spat upon and denounced, told death to hold on, someone was calling his name. Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would join him in paradise.

I'm going to guess that some of you are still questioning my thoughts. Well, I'll share my story. I was raised in the church, sang in the youth and young adult choirs. Would sing loudly, I have decided to follow Jesus. There was something different about me. I did not flirt with boys like the other girls. I didn't love "normally". When my mother and grandmother found out that I was a lesbian, they told me that I was going to hell. I could never understand how someone can carry you for nine to ten months in their body, birth you, rock you when you're weary and or sick, and look you in the face and tell you that God doesn't love you. My grandmother, who is my heart and soul, who taught me and sang to me that Jesus is the best thing, who told me that God created everything, when they found out my sexual identity, told me that God does not love me.

I no longer sang, I have decided to follow Jesus. My song changed because I could hear them in my head. I lost my mind for a minute. So, my song became if loving her is wrong I don't want to be right. The more I heard them in my head, God and I were tight. God was the best thing, but I forgot that, and I separated myself from God. In my eyes, my mother and grandmother were holy, righteous, and right. Their words must also be right and the truth. I believed the words that they spoke. But, if you have ever experienced God on any level, there is something in you that will ache for them when separated from them. My soul wasn't happy. It ached for them and called out to them.

One day I fell to my knees and asked Jesus to help me. Save me Lord. If being gay is not what you want me to be, take the feelings away from me. God came to me with a still and quiet voice and said, I created you just as you are. I knew who you would be and who you would love

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before I formed the world. I can tell you the total number of hairs on your head.

I went to my mother and grandmother and told them that I am included in whosoever. God didn't say you had to be one race or another. God didn't say I had to love boys. God told me to walk in my truth. Believe in them because Jesus' blood covers me too. So, when God sees me, he does not see sin, but the pureness of my heart. Believe that you are a whosoever today. Believe that you are a beautiful creation of God. Know that Jesus died for you too. They made it easy for you. All you must do is believe. All you have to do is stretch out your hand and call on Jesus. If Jesus, stopped death on the cross for a thief, how much more will he do for you.

Jesus is the best thing. He loves me. God loves you. God loves us. All of us, LGBTQIA+ included.

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Charlotte Pride views
Photo by T. Thornton

The Fall of DOMA (Defense of Marriage Act) **M.H.**

I waited patiently as the rulings were read. DOMA died and that allows me to leave my hard-earned dollars to my wife and future children via Social Security. Now I simply need clarification on the matter of the state of NC being mandated to recognize my marriage legally which will allow my children to have both parents displayed on his/her birth certificate. While these victories will go down in history there is still more work that needs to be done. The SCOTUS' ruling influences federal benefits but not state benefits. I applaud the bravery of the five members that voted for equal protection and pray that one day all citizens of the United States will share equal rights, protection, and services under the full extent of the law.

I am a Christian, multiracial lesbian woman. I did not choose to be gay I was truly born this way. It saddens me that so many think being gay is something that one can change. I cannot change how I feel no more than I can change the color of my skin. Christians forget the two commandments left within the grace dispensation by Jesus, love thy God with all thy heart and love thy neighbor as thyself. I am charged to love the rapist, the cheating preacher, the war bringers and bigots so I charge you to love me, the multiracial lesbian that only wants my social security benefits given to my wife and children, that want the same tax rules to apply to my marriage as they do to "normal" marriages.

Let's stop being a hypocritical nation that allows church and state to apply when it's convenient for some and not convenient to others. My marriage will not bring down the nation just as bad heterosexual marriages did not destroy our nation. The Republicans keep bringing children into the equation well there are many children in heterosexual marriages that do not fare well, but nothing is being done to protect these children.

Let's be clear, don't use children as your argument when we as a nation do not protect the children within the various state agencies that fall through the cracks every day, that are abused by "loving" heterosexual couples or individuals. Consider the children of same gender loving relationships that have asked the world to allow their parents to just love each other and share equal rights.

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While my marriage may not be perfect, it is still mine and I am glad that today it still stands. Hopefully one day my children will share the same rights as those within a heterosexual marriage.

I thank SCOTUS for putting judgment on morality back into the hands of God where it belongs. Matthew 7:1 states, Judge not lest ye be judged. I am a Christian woman that evangelizes and spreads the word of God, and my life mate happens to be a woman.

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Delivered through the love of God
TT

My soul
Is resting in the arms of God
Why should I worry
Why should I fret
God's taken care of me
Because I confessed
Accessed Jesus as my Savior
Now I am free
I'm resting in the arms of God

I am safe, with God as my guide
I've been gifted with eternal life
The enemy has no power over me
He was lifted for my liberty
I'm resting in the love of God

My soul, my soul
My soul is resting in the arms of God
The Lord protects me and holds me close
Now I'm filled with the Holy Ghost
Made to lift praises to the King of Kings
I'm resting in the arms of God

My soul, my soul
Is resting in the arms of God
My heart, my heart is safe in the hands of God
I'm delivered, yes delivered
Delivered through the love of God

Thoughts on Grace

T. Apples

Forgiveness seems to be offered to everyone except those like me
Those who are different
Who declare that they are not cisgender nor different gender loving?
The LGBTQIA+ community are not offered the same tenets of grace and
mercy as others
We've all heard the story of the thief on the cross
Granted favor and the promise of meeting Jesus in heaven
Does that promise apply to me, to us?
To those on the fringes of society and the norm
Benevolence is sometimes a dream
Kindness does not exist and murder
Awaits those who walk in their truth
Some families disown their children
Put them out into the streets or abandon them
For some, God provides another type of family
Just as he provided a son for his mother Mary
Some experience love and others hate
Often, we ask the same words Jesus asked of God
Why have you forsaken me?
What did I do, or can I do differently?
We thirst for love and acceptance
With each passing day, we wonder
When the hatred will cease
Will it be better in paradise?
On our knees we plead
We scream
We invoke the blood of Jesus
Grace and Mercy before
We give up our ghosts
Or the darkness consumes us

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Road to Calvary - Rhodes, Greece
Photo by T. Thornton

I DON'T KNOW MUCH

Carla Y. Nix

There was a time in my life when I thought I knew everything! I thought I knew more than my parents (or that they were behind the times, and they just didn't understand all that I "knew"). But, as I aged and matured, there is one great truth I learned. That is that I don't know much! However, I learned an even greater truth. That is that although I don't know much, I do know that God's love for me is never ending. He will always love me.

I've made many mistakes in my life. I've been wrong. I've been unkind. Although unintentionally, I have hurt others. I have many regrets. I once did not do my best, nor lived up to my full and God-given potential. I have been a disappointment to others, including myself. I even at one time hated myself and did not acknowledge the valuable person that God created. I've waddled in depression several times. I even wondered why God wouldn't let me die during those dark times.

I've walked through that valley of not loving myself. But through it all, and in spite of my own self, the one truth remained. God loves me! Romans 8:38-39 became my strength:

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." In short, no one or nothing will stop God from loving me. No matter what others think about me, no matter how I feel about myself, no matter what I'm going through, no matter what faces me, no matter how I mess up, **GOD LOVES ME!**

He loves me so much that He blessed me with gifts and talents. He provides for me. He enables me to be a blessing to others.

He is my God! A loving Father. Even when I do fall short, make mistakes, disobey Him, and just simply mess up at times (because I'm definitely not perfect), as we all do (we're all human), He still stands there with open loving arms to cradle me. I can't emphasize enough how great His love is.

My life is precious, and I am valuable. I have worth. As such, it is important for me to let the love of God reflect through me. I am so

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thankful that I moved beyond wanting to be right all the time about everything and now bask and rejoice in the one important truth that God loves me. Equally as important is that I love Him and show this by living for Him.

I may not know much, but what I do know is an eternal truth,
GOD LOVES ME!

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The Cross Maker's Daughter

Kat M. Harris

My name is Rebekah Levi. I live on the outskirts of Jerusalem with my parents Sarah and Ben Levi. I want to learn the family business. It is not really allowed because I am a girl. In my culture boys are taught, girls learn to keep the house. I know that you have not heard of us, and we are not mentioned in the Bible directly, but the product of my family business appears within the Book of Books, there are songs written about it, and some of you have wear it around your necks. The event we are remembered for occurred on this day thousands of years ago. My father made the cross on which Jesus died.

My family is in the business of cross making business. When the Romans entered Jerusalem, my father became the cross maker for the Empire's crucifixions. My father had pledged allegiance to the Roman government to gain their confidence and business. As a result, our family was outcasts within Jewish society. We lived very well, and my father was looking to expand the business until one Thursday night. A knock on the door startled us. It was a Roman centurion. I overheard the conversation as they stood outside my window.

"Levi, we're need of an additional cross for tomorrow. There's a trial going on in the Jewish quarter and word is the man will be sentenced to death." "There has never been a trial in the Jewish section," my father replied but agreed to have the cross ready. "Sarah", my father called out as he reentered the house, "I must work tonight, and it seems the Sanhedrin is having a trial tonight. Bless the man's soul as he's to die tomorrow." My father hung his head as he headed out to his workshop. "No rest for me tonight." My mother seemed anxious but returned to bed.

"May I help you father. It might take all night, but I would like to help." I said hoping he would allow me to help him.

"Yes, child it's time you learned how to make a cross."

Unbeknownst to my father I had snuck into his workshop before and played with his tools, I noticed that the gleam in his eye that was normally there was missing. It never struck me as odd that my father's work though very beautiful was used for something so detrimental and heinous.

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“Father, what’s wrong?” I asked as we began work on the cross.

“Nothing child, this work is just hard sometime.”

We worked through the night. He added a saddle for the prisoner’s feet to rest on and sanded the lateral and horizontal beams. I also noticed that he used cedar wood which is a better-quality wood than what he normally used, and he did not sand the other prisoner’s crosses. I knew that at times, the Romans would scrub and rinse the crosses to reuse them but lately they burned them because of the lesser quality wood.

“Father why did you sand the beams,” I asked.

“To ease the suffering of the person whose cross this is to bear.”

We finished before the first light of day. I stood with my father as the Centurions carried the cross away.

“What is the name of the person to be crucified with the two?”

My father asked the Centurion.

“They call him Hosanna, but his name is Jesus.”

My father fell to his knees. My mother who had been watching ran to his side. “Oh dear, the cross, my cross will be used by the Christ.”

I did not understand why my father displayed such emotion. I did not know this Jesus the Christ but wanted to know why my father cried and prayed. My mother shook my father and told him that they needed to make it to Golgotha, the skull hill. My father wept openly exclaiming that the followers of Christ would hate him, that God would not forgive him. My mother was adamant about them getting into town to learn more. To be sure, it was the Christ being crucified.

“Benjamin, I don’t think it’s as bad as it seems. Yahweh is a forgiving God, let’s go.” She grabbed him and they rushed off. I followed them because I wanted to see this Christ. I lost sight of my parents as we entered the outskirts of the city. There were so many people there. Some were crying, some were yelling “Crucify him!” and the rest were silent.

The Roman guards blew their horns signaling the release of the prisoners. They were to walk through the city streets to Golgotha. I knew from hearing my father speak about crucifixions that the prisoners carried their own crosses from the Roman court to the top of the skull. I climbed a tree that once bloomed with the sweetest figs but now stood barren. I wanted to see the prisoner who had the cedar cross.

I saw two men that the crowd jeered and laughed at and then the last man who was hunched over under the weight of the cedar cross, received mixed jeers from the crowd. I saw that the skin on his back was broken from the lashes he must have received last night. I felt sorry for

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him, as he seemed to be in intense pain. I was suddenly glad that my father had sanded the wood. There were women who followed alongside him in the road, it seemed that they were praying and crying. I noticed that though the crowd leered at this man they parted when the women passed them.

My focus on the man was broken because a group of people had surrounded a man standing beneath the branch where I was perched. The crowd called him Peter, but he denied this saying that his name was not Peter.

“Aren’t you a disciple of the Christ, you look like the man who traveled with him.”

“I am not. I do not know the man.” The man cast his face to the ground. His voice wavered as he spoke, and his spirit seemed to falter as the crowd dispersed.

“My Lord, what have I done? Forgive me, forgive me.” He stood there watching the Christ march toward the skull. I started to descend from the tree and fell from a withered branch. The man caught me. I noticed his eyes glistened with tears. “Are you okay sir?” I asked.

“No, my child, they are going to kill the Lord Jesus the Christ. He was sent by God to save us and now they will kill him.” “Which one is the Christ, sir?”

“He is the third man.”

The man carrying the cedar cross, the Lord as the man called him would be killed on my family’s cross.

Before I could ask the man what he meant by calling the third man Lord because this title was reserved for Yahweh, he ran off. The world around me was silent. I realized that the crowd had moved closer to the skull. I started to run to catch up with the crowd when I noticed another man speaking with some Pharisees.

As a girl, I was not allowed to be in the presence of the holy men, so I stopped and ran into an open doorway to avoid being seen. I heard the man say to the leaders, “take the silver back. Please. You can stop this. You told me you just wanted to question him not beat and kill him.”

“What we did was our business. It is of no concern for you. Take your guilt elsewhere Judas. We have no use of you or your money.” The leaders stood their ground.

“I don’t want it anymore it will bring death to me. The Lord is the Son of God.” He threw the money at the Pharisees and ran towards the withered fig tree. I saw the Pharisees look around and pick the money up. “What will we do about Judas?”

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“Nothing, he has taken care of himself. Let us hide ourselves until someone notices his body.” The leader pointed toward the fig tree, and I saw the man called Judas swinging from the branch that I’d sat on while Jesus passed by. I wondered what would drive a man to hang himself. I knew this was blasphemy and a violation of the Law, but I said a prayer for him as I came out of hiding and ran to the skull.

The crosses had been lifted up by the time I reached the hill. I was able to hear the man on the left of Jesus demanding that he save them and himself and prove that he was the Savior.

I could see Jesus close his eyes and a pained look appeared on his face. The sky grew dark, and the wind picked up. The man on the right rebuked the one on the left and told him that he was addressing the Savior of the world. He turned his face towards Jesus and asked him to remember him when he went into his kingdom. Jesus opened his eyes, and his body began to glow as he said, “This day you will be with me in paradise.”

The man on the right smiled and his appearance changed. Before he addressed Jesus, his expression and demeanor reflected wickedness but after Jesus told him that he could join him in his kingdom, he reflected goodness. Something in me stirred. I wanted this goodness. I wanted to go with Jesus to his kingdom too. I heard Jesus speak again this time to one of the women who had walked alongside him earlier. “Woman behold your son,” as he looked upon one of his followers, “Son behold your mother.”

I thought it odd that he would discuss lineage while dying on the cross, but I heard some in the crowd murmur that it was his mother. I saw the disciple as the people called him comfort the woman, they also called Mary. She continued to weep and pray while she looked up at Jesus. The people closest to me fell to their knees and began praying with her.

The sky grew black as Jesus cried out, “My God, why has thou forsaken me?” His face showed great grief and pain. I felt sorry for him. I was certain that Judas was not his father and some in the crowd said that Joseph had passed away, but his face was lifted towards the heavens, and I knew that he was addressing Yahweh.

I was overcome with grief. My father was right. We had made the cross that the Lord was hanging from. I felt just as guilty as Judas had appeared and my expression became pained as the one, they called Peter. I was frozen, I did not move as I heard Jesus say, “It is finished.” I did not know what he meant but as the ground began to shake, he yelled out, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

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I looked up at his face and shouted, "Lord forgive my family." I am not sure if he heard me. His muscles relaxed and I knew that he had died. I heard a Roman Centurion, the same one who had ordered the cross, and who had not moments earlier offered Jesus sour wine as the friends laughed. Who had also won Jesus' cloak cry out, "Surely this man was the Lord of Glory and the Son of Yahweh."

Many in the crowd ran away and as the crowds cleared, I saw my mother and father on their knees with their hands held up to Yahweh. I knew that like me they wanted God to forgive us. I walked home and began to relive the memories from yesterday and today. I saw a group of ten men handling Judas' body and heard the Pharisees say that they would bury him in the Potter's field because he owned the land and his sin would not allow them to bury him in the Jewish burial grounds. The men wept as they carried his body away.

When my parents reached the house, they were silent. Their tear-stained faces showed grief and pain. My father did not go into his workshop that night or the next day. I avoided my parents both days and found myself wandering into my father's workshop. As I looked around the room where I had just a day before longed to enter and work alongside my father I felt ill. I no longer wanted to learn the family business of cross making. The things of beauty were now things of ill will.

I did not want to help the Romans kill people anymore. I wanted Yahweh to forgive us and to turn our lives and business around. I stayed there the rest of the day making sample crosses, miniatures of the full-sized crosses. I do not know why I did it or what we would do with them, but my heart began to feel less heavy and less guilty.

I fell asleep in the shop. Sometime during the night, I heard a voice calling my name. I remember answering the voice. The voice told me that I would not have to worry about the crosses my family made. They fulfilled a purpose because the Son of man was lifted up as he said.

"You will no longer make crosses of death but of life."

"I don't understand," I remember saying back. "Jesus died on our cross."

"Jesus is no longer dead. He lives, it is the third day, and Jesus has risen his temple up." "Will he forgive us?"

"He has forgiven you. Remember to make crosses of life and not death."

I felt arms encircle me as I awoke with a start.

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“He lives, Rebekah,” my father shouted, and he lifted me above his head. “Jesus lives.”

Though I did not understand, I rejoiced and praised Yahweh with my parents. No longer will we be cross makers of death but of life. “We can use the sample crosses I made to remind people of Jesus and his mission to save the world father.”

That day we became followers of Jesus. We met the man called Peter who had denied Jesus and helped me. He told us stories of Jesus and asked us to share our story, our testimony with the world. We believed that Yahweh would provide for us, so my father ended the Roman contract and our family lived in peace and never lacked.

Some of you want to know the moral of my testimony. Well, if you judge, hate, misuse or abuse others you are a cross maker. Your actions cause the mental, emotional, or physical death of the people you hurt. Some of you have a family business that hurts people, if your family makes it a habit to talk about others, hurt others, or destroy relationships you have to decide to get out of the family business. Some of you hurt others because they are same gendered loving. You hurt others who are different races, faiths. That is not what Jesus died for.

Nevertheless, there is hope for you. Just as my family was granted forgiveness, you can be forgiven also.

Turn your thoughts and actions to be life cross makers.

Instead of judging, lift the person up with a word of encouragement. Spread the love of Jesus and use your ex cross making testimony to bring life to others and not death. I often hear many of you speak ill of Judas. He hesitated when they reached the garden and he was remorseful after the trials. I think he did not believe that Jesus would forgive him. That saddens me. For those who focus on his taking his life, let's talk about Samson. Samson did commit suicide with God's help. I've heard that it is written in the book of Judges 16:28-30. Samson asked God to grant him the strength to avenge himself, but he also died by his own hand. His death is glorified while Judas' is not.

This is why it is important for us not to judge anyone else. We cannot see their heart nor hear their most innermost thoughts. May God's peace be with you and their mercy bless you.

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Stained Glass Window
Photo by T. Thornton

Who?

B. Maximus

Who would choose this life?

Who would choose to be treated like dirt, murdered and spit upon?

Who are we to judge?

The same Word that tells women to be silent in church, 1 Corinthians
14:38

That slaves should be subservient to their masters 1 Peter 2:18

Same gendered loving persons are jailed, persecuted, beaten, and
murdered, just for being themselves.

Tell me, I beg you.

Who would choose this life?

Everything but a Child of God
Insatiable K

Whoremonger
Faggot
Dyke
Drug Addict
Perverted
Crack Head
Idiot
Worthless

Just some of the labels placed on me
Placed on us
They hurt!
They sting!
They cause me useless time spent reminding myself that I am worthy of
love
I am beautiful
I am handsome
Just as I am

We are called everything but a child of God

Letter to God
M.H.

Hey God.

It's MH. Just was wondering if you love us or are we feces in your eyes. Our ancestors learned of you from Phillip the eunuch, the Queen of Sheba or word of mouth. God, it seems like we're the new Israelites and white supremacy is Pharaoh.

We've been praying for freedom, equality, and peace for well over hundreds of generations. Yet we're still murdered in the streets. By those who look like us and others who do not. Some have badges, most have guns. How long will we have to suffer? How many lives must we lose? Some of us are wondering what did we do?

We are hated, ridiculed, scorned, and hunted. All lives and blue lives seem to matter more than the whole of humanity, every life. Can you hear me God? Have you tuned us out? Can you send a sign please that you still care about the one that is lost? We're the one. The "not normal", the non-cis gendered, the non-pale skin peoples. I am begging and crying out Lord.

Help us.

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The Rainbow Elf
Shauna D. Harris

Cast:

Rainbow Elf – unassuming individual

Main Character – disheveled, torn shirt with some blood splatter and blue jeans.

Police Office – full uniform, no hat

Stage dark: Voice states, The Rainbow Elf, brings joy, gifts, and encouragement. Sometimes it brings mischief but never strife, harm, or judgment.

Lights up. Main Character is sitting at a table and talking to themselves.

MAIN CHARACTER

I first met a rainbow elf in an unlikely place, a jail cell. I was in for defending myself a bit too well. The elf was the only other person in the cell with me.

Fade to black. Scene changes. Main and Elf are in jail cell.

Elf is sitting on bench. Main is on the floor. Walls are beige, a steel toilet sits in one corner. Only one wall has bars and the other are brick.

ELF

Are you ok?

MAIN CHARACTER

I am.

Elf offers Main a napkin

ELF

You know a bag of frozen peas will help with the swelling.

MAIN CHARACTER

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Not a steak?

ELF

Now who wants a raw piece of meat stuck to their eye?

Main and Elf glance at each other and laugh. Main then looks around the set.

ELF

You don't have to sit on the floor. I don't bite.

MAIN Smiles and joins ELF on the bench

ELF

Want to talk about it?

MAIN CHARACTER

Are you a friend of Dorothy?

ELF

I am a rainbow elf, and we are friends of most, especially Dorothy.

MAIN CHARACTER

I had a run in with haters of Dorothy

ELF

Oh, that is truly unexpected. Especially during the daylight.

MAIN CHARACTER

I thought so too. I was walking with my friend. We'd been discussing next steps. To reassure him, I kissed him on the lips.

VOICE OFF STAGE

Faggots! Go to hell!

MAIN CHARACTER

I turned at the slurs and saw three people staring at us. Let's just go, my friend said while taking my hands. I felt the need to challenge but allowed him to pull me away.

This version of the book is not to be sold.

VOICE OFF STAGE

That's right, dirty asses. No one wants you here.

MAIN CHARACTER

My anger grew. This older couple stared in disbelief. My friend tried to pull me forward, but I couldn't let it go. I was born and raised here. This city is as tolerant as they come, or so I thought. We exchanged words until one ran towards us and threw a punch. I'm no pushover so I hit back. Everything became a blur. I remember hearing stop. I'm calling the police. When I came to, I had one pinned between the ground and a car and another was lying nearby in shock. My friend and the couple said the other person ran away. The cops came and here I am.

ELF

Wow! Well, the law says you can defend yourself, but once they are down, you must stop. Unfortunately, there's no laws against verbal harassment. People can say whatever they want. You're not going to hell. They don't have the keys.

MAIN CHARACTER

I know this but it still hurts to hear it. I would have let it go after saying my peace, but I didn't expect them to hit me.

ELF

It does seem strange that they'd attack you physically.

MAIN CHARACTER

Well, I turned the table. I said in my experience those who have the most to say against gays, typically are gay themselves or on the down low.

ELF

The old folks did say a hit dog will holler.

MAIN CHARACTER

Thanks for not judging me.

ELF

This version of the book is not to be sold.
We elves do a lot of things, but we leave judgment to others. Life is hard enough as it is, who needs to live under a cloud of fear or hate.

MAIN CHARACTER

Thanks for that.

Cell door clangs. Sound brings the Elf and Main Character's attention to the officer who enters the cell

OFFICER

Time to go home.

MAIN CHARACTER

It was nice talking to you.

ELF

Dear, they are here for you. I'll be here awhile longer.

Main Character looks to the officer. The officer shakes their head in confirmation.

OFFICER

Your family is waiting for you.

**Officer leads the main character from the room. Fades to black.
Next scene main character is back at the table.**

MAIN CHARACTER

In our darkest moments, rainbow elves will show up with love, laughs and good advice.

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Loving not Judging
Photo by T. Thornton

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Jennifer's Quest

Anon

Growing up female in North America means your favorite color should be pink or some variation thereof, frilly dresses and makeup as you're growing up is the norm and living a Christian heterosexual life is recommended heavily. So, what if there was someone who resisted the norms of being female and sought to be non-labeled or androgynous?

Well, this is Jennifer's story. Jennifer was born in New Orleans where anything goes, norms are thrown out of the window and life is enjoyed. Even in the Big Easy where the good times roll nonstop, there are consequences for every action.

Her earliest memory of being female was her mother dressing her up in frilly dresses, lace socks and white shoe to attend church. However, being a tomboy, by the time she returned home from church the lace would hang over her shoes and her dress would be dirty and sometimes tattered. For her disdain of her mother's words spoken to her before each service "Don't mess up your clothes", she was disciplined and playing hard was discouraged. "Little girls don't climb trees or run hard like little boys. In an effort to reform Jennifer, her mother purchased baby dolls, cheerleading outfits and equipment and prevented her from playing with boys. When Jennifer seemed disinterested and started, sulking, her mother relented and allowed her to play how she wanted to play.

Therefore, instead of playing dolls with other little girls, she climbed trees and played tag football and kickball with boys. Time went on and Jennifer still played just as hard and long as the boys. Nature started to run its course and she developed breasts and started her cycle. She went from being one of the guys to being singled out as one of the girls because her shaped changed and she was a "young lady" and young ladies cannot play like the boys. Awkwardness set in and she started secluding herself.

She noticed that as her body changed, men started to watch and stare at her and the team of guys she once belonged too now treated her as an outsider. She sought to hide her curves and breasts by wearing big clothes sometimes two or three sizes to big. Her family did not approve of her new style of dress. Jennifer felt safe and comfortable because she fit in. When people could not notice her curves, they treated her as they

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once had, let her be who she was or just ignored her. The females in her family voiced their concern regarding her ability to date or appear as a “normal” female due to her choice of clothing. The more comfortable she became the more masculine her choice of clothes became. They guys still looked at her as one of the guys just a “girly” one and her mother strongly disapproved and tried to discipline the “boy” out of her with mental and physical roughness.

Her physical appearances really changed in that she didn’t style her hair as other girls would but always wore a hat, and the bigger her clothes became the more unfeminine she became but not only did she not look like a female, she didn’t quite look like a male either. Her family attributed it to her being a lesbian, but the truth of the matter was she indeed did not feel like a female or a male for that matter. Years after becoming a young lady her gynecologist informed her that her hormones were unbalanced in that she would have testosterone and estrogen surges. On the day of the individual surge, she would feel more like one gender than the other.

So not only was her body reacting to chemical signals in her brain, but she was also acting on how she felt. She really did not feel like male or female. She did not want to have a sex change to become male instead of being female. Her style of dress reflected that.

Jennifer was accustomed to other people not necessarily knowing what her sex was and that was fine to her. One day she looked in the mirror and couldn’t stand the sight of herself. She didn’t know who she was, nor did she know what sex she was. She was tired of other people staring at her, feeling like she didn’t belong and wanting to be taken away so not to disappoint anyone anymore. She felt “normal” but she didn’t feel that she fit into the predetermined “gender” slots. She could play “male” and her body acted “female” but who was Jennifer really, is she a she or a he or just Jennifer, with no gender.

She decided to dress and act how she felt but due to the fear of violence or being disowned like her family threatened, she toned down “her masculinity”. She brought women’s clothes that were not feminine, wore boxers’ underneath and wore ponytails and hats. Instead of wearing clothing two and three sizes too big, she wore a size too big and some days when her estrogen was more dominant than her testosterone, she wore feminine clothes and makeup. Though different people complimented her on how pretty she looked or beautiful she was, she didn’t feel it she felt out of place and unnatural in her own skin. There were times she thought and tried to end her life but never succeeded and

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that led her to accept that she was different.

She enrolled in a class at her university to find out more about Sex and the Body and where she fit in, if she fit in at all. There were several texts that were required for the course, but they all shed a little light onto her situation and her feelings. She began to explore, looking for others like her. The more she looked, the more she began to feel like she wasn't alone in the world and the more she was able to accept and love herself.

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Angels
Anon

Angels watching over me
Do they really?
Did they watch when I was molested?
Were they watching when the trans sisters and brothers were killed?
Are they watching while we turn tricks?
When I cut myself or take the pill that was prescribed for someone else's
pain?
I'd like to believe they protect me but I'm not sure.
So many are harmed and hurt but no one intervenes.
Angels
Supposedly watching over me
Supposedly watching over us

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Psalms for me
C.H.

The storm clouds are coming Lord, but I won't run.
Storm clouds are coming Lord, but I won't move.
I'm going to wait for your message Lord, I won't move.

Rain is coming down, I won't run
Rain is coming Lord, but I won't move
Waiting for your blessing Lord, I won't move

Wind is howling Lord, but I won't run
Wind is howling Lord, but I won't move
Waiting for your presence Lord, I won't move

I won't run
I won't move
I won't hide

I'm going to wait
Wait on God
The storm is coming Lord, I won't move

II

There is hope on the other side of yes.
There is peace on the other side of mess.
If you trust in God today, he will surely make a way. There is hope on the other side of yes.
God can mend your broken pieces. He will make your world like new.
All you must do is trust him and things will fall in place for you.
There is hope on the other side of yes. There is peace on the other side of mess.
If you trust in God today, he will surely make a way. There is hope on the other side of yes.

III

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Going home can be a strange and funny thing. Past hurts, shame and guilt sometimes bar the way.

God wants all of the children of the King to come home will you trust, obey and listen to the call.

Come on home, God's waiting with open arms.

Come home and forgive all who's harmed you.

Come home and experience the loving and warmth of God's arms when you come home.

Come on home, you've waited and wanted the chance to see. If things would turn around and be different.

Everything is in God's plan and there were things you needed to learn and go through. You were never alone, God was there all the time but know it's time to come home

Come on home, God's waiting with open arms.

Come home and forgive all who's harmed you.

Come home and experience the loving and warmth of God's arms when you come home.

Come on home.

You've waited long enough for God to clean up the mess and though things look the same. You've grown and changed and now it's your chance to help someone else Come on home

You're loved, important and special to God. God knows and is listening to your heart. It's safe now, the red carpet has been laid out just for you

What are you waiting for, come on home.



Fare Thee Well
K.H.

May the Lord watch, between me and thee, while we are absent from one another.

May Allah protect and guide you, as you journey through each day.

May YHWH cover you with light and goodness.

May the strength of the ancestors carry and surround you daily.

May the peace of Buddha, keep your mind.

Amen

Ase'

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family, teachers (Alfred Lawless and McDonogh #35), and all the people God placed in my path that showed them love, encouraged me to continue forward.

A special word of thanks to my grandmother Evangelist Joyce T. H. Williams, to Rev. Cleveland Washington and Rev. Bob Ellis, each of them saved my life at different times. My grandmother fostered a love of the loving, redeeming, and accepting God and the notion that it was okay to question if it was done respectfully. Rev. Washington never condemned nor shamed me, even when it was clear that I was not a heterosexual. He fostered my love of studying the Bible.

Rev. Bob Ellis for putting his friend Pastor Ken Coulter's research together and publishing *Dispelling the Myth*. In 1994 while on this quest for truth, Bob compiled the research of the late Ken Coulter (Founder of Grace Ministries, Inc. of Dallas, and New Orleans) into a booklet called "*Dispelling the Myth*". It is an exegesis of the problematic passages dealing with homosexuality. The first Internet site containing this work went up in 1996. The original site is now off-line. Since then, more than two dozen other web sites have sprung up with this work on them including a Portuguese version. Mercy To All includes not only the official version of "*Dispelling the Myth*", but also other writings from Bob's unique perspective.

I came across this research in 1995 when I was contemplating ending my existence. I felt validated and that my understanding of the scriptures used to condemn aligned with my high school understanding of the same scriptures. Rev. Ellis has graciously allowed us to publish the research so that it can reach more persons and help to enrich more lives.

In memory and honor to Archbishop Carl Bean. An answer to many prayers, we thank God for your yes, tenacity and determination to spread the true Gospel of Jesus, that we are all included, that God is Love and Love Is For Everyone (L.I.F.E).

Thank you to all the contributors and those who whispered or spoke prayers, mantras or thanks for the anthology. We hope this is a first of many more positive, accepting and affirming works.

Finally, to our parents, biological and God given, thank you. Because of you all, we are.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

Some of our authors chose to be anonymous and we respect their wishes



Rev. Kwame A. Ahaligah PhD

is a minister of word and sacrament with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church Ghana. He is currently affiliated with the Church of Scotland. As a pastor, Kwame is interested in advocating for a more equitable world for all peoples, regarding equality of dignity opportunity, and status. As an academic his research and teaching expertise is in African ‘Christianities’, Religion and Politics in Africa, Pentecostalism, African Traditional Religions, Christianity and Community Development.



Marwa Alqatari

grew up in Saudi Arabia and now lives in Charlotte, NC. She is a Computer Science graduate that found a passion for expressing herself and sharing her story. through poetry, prose, and different forms of art. You can find more of her writings on **Twitter**, **Instagram**, and **YouTube** @ MarwaAlqatari .

T. Apples

a kid at heart with a love of elders and children. She can be found volunteering with her church or traveling internationally.



“An innovative and cutting-edge spiritual leader”

The Rev. Elder Claude E. Bowen

credits his deep roots of Liberation Theology and extensive involvement in Social Justice to the many “parents” that nurtured and promoted his undying quest for a spiritual renaissance. A United States Marine who served in the Vietnam War, his active participation in the church started at an early age. Raised by a Baptist mother and a Lutheran father, he found solace in the practice of stewardship within the Black Christian Church. This practicality gave him the freedom to question the dogmatic traditions of the church that excluded so many people, who had so many extraordinary gifts to offer. Reverend Bowen’s commitment to serve the manifold of God’s people led him to become a member of Unity Fellowship Church Los Angeles. Unity Fellowship Church affirmed the love of Christ in all people, including LGBT people of faith. As pastor of Unity Fellowship Church Riverside. He founded UJIMA, an initiative that addressed the social justice and related needs of underserved individuals in the congregation and surrounding community. His church and Social Justice involvement has attained commendations from the Inland Empire Gay and Lesbian Democratic Association, Catholic Charities the Cities of Riverside, San Bernardino and Los Angeles as well as the California State Office of AIDS. Reverend’s spiritual renaissance constantly affirms that the personal relationship with the Divine Creator is free from Dependence, Dominance and Oppression. He further affirms that the action of love must be demonstrated to all of God’s creation. .Currently, Elder Bowen is on the

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staff of THRIVESS as co-author and facilitator of the Silver Lining Project, President of Ubuntu a consulting firm founded with Kevin Williams to continue his work in HIV/AIDS Prevention and Education and Life Coaching. He is a Scholar from the Center of Disease Control HIV Learning Institute. He holds a Bachelor of Psychology (focus on Human Behavior Analysis) and a Master of Divinity.



Laurinda D. Brown MFA

a native Memphian and a graduate of Howard University. Laurinda has been called a “literary juggernaut” by journalists and a “uniquely gifted storyteller” by critics. She was selected as a national finalist for the coveted Lambda Literary Award for Best Debut Fiction in 2004. She uses her writing to tell universal stories that apply to all cross-sections of society. She writes about life, not lifestyles. She is the author of *Fire & Brimstone*, *The Highest Price for Passion*, *Strapped*, *Sins of the Mother*, *The CatHouse*, *Walk like a Man*, and *Undercover*. She is residing in Mississippi with her wife, is a mother to a daughter and son, and a grandmother to her beautiful grandson.



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Cesar Ceballos

is a respected architect, artist, and world traveler uses colors to express the geometry of nature, light to enhance the volume and drama in a painting inspired by his travels, his watercolor and drawing techniques spark the imagination. His recent achievements include juried exhibitions through in-person and virtual displays, with artworks to be published in Europe and USA. He exhibits regularly at City Lights Art Gallery in Henderson, Nevada. He belongs to the Urban Sketchers of Las Vegas, serves on the Board of Directors for the American Institute of Architects Las Vegas Chapter and mentors architecture students at UNLV School of Architecture.



Jaime Cepero

an Afro-Latinx Queer Actor, Writer, and Activist, most well known for playing the prickly Ellis Boyd on NBC's musical drama SMASH, from executive producer Stephen Spielberg. Other credits include Television: Connecting (NBC), MESS (HereTV/Amazon). Film: DADDY, DATING MY MOTHER, JESS, I AM MICHAEL, THE GAME PLAN. Tours: PORGY & BESS 75th Anniversary National. Off-Broadway: NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD: THE MUSICAL! (Ben) Theater Row. Regional: HAIR (Claude) Dallas Theater Center, GODSPELL (Judas) ACT Connecticut. JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR GOSPEL (Simon) Alliance Theater, YOU WILL NEVA ENTER OUR HIGH HOLY LAND OF BLACKNESS... (Marco Polo) Long Wharf Theater, CHOIR BOY (US Pharrus/David) The Geffen Playhouse. As a composer his musical Francois & The Rebels (a punk rock telling of the 1791 Haitian Revolution) was part of MTF musicals 4X15 Workshop, JOE'S PUB New Musicals Concert Program, and a selected showcase in the New Works Series at New York Theater Barn. His original song was finalist in the Times Square Alliance City Songwriting Competition, and his poetry was chosen for publishing in the new Peace In The Valley

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Anthology of Queer Poetry to be released internationally this fall. He is the founder of Intersectional Voices Collective, a black & queer lead artist coalition, and a co-organizer of the March On Broadway movement for racial justice & equity in the American Theater. This work has lead him to curate dozens of social justice rallies, march demonstrations, and LGBTQ centered public events. He is Leo sun with a Scorpio rising, a Venus in Cancer, and a Virgo moon.

Mommie and Big Daddy

Parents of four who believe that all children should be loved and accepted as they are. They respect all pronouns and strive to provide a safe space for the LGBTQIA+ community and their allies.



Vincenzo Cohen

is an Italian classically trained nature painter, poet, and photographer. He has a MFA from Fine Arts Academy and a Master's of Archeology from the la Sapienza University in Rome. Over the years, simultaneously with the study of the figurative arts, Vincenzo has been dedicated to writing, especially poetry. Polyhedric artist, his eclectic production is the result of a continuous process of historical-scientific research addressed to the representation of cultural content with a social and naturalistic background. His work consists in reworking of life and travel experiences through an expressionist language, by means of photography and through the poetic expression. Behind Vincenzo's practice, there is great devotion, dedication, and suffering.

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Yohanes Soubirius De Santo

prolific teacher and artist with exhibitions in Indonesia, Turkey, Australia, Unites States, Singapore, Johannesburg, England, and Germany. He has won numerous awards and loves to connect with those who appreciate his work. **Instagram** @soubirius.



Andru Defeye

Whether sharing stages with legendary beat poets or your favorite Hip Hop emcees, Andru Defeye's unorthodox writing and performance style has made him a fixture behind microphones around the country. 2020 saw the release of his critically critically acclaimed *Frequency* album followed shortly after by his crowning as the youngest Poet Laureate in California capitol history, 2020 - 2022. From Sacramento to Staten Island and SXSW, Andru Defeye served as the Director of Communications for Sol Collective from 2009-2020. In 2014 Defeye founded Zero Forbidden Goals, a support system for creatives dedicated to innovating arts equity, experiences, and education. ZFG's guerrilla art activations including National Guerrilla Poetry Month, *Chainlink Poetry*, and *The Intersection* have been covered and recreated around the globe. Website: www.guerrillapoet.com



Rev. Esih Efuru

is a Newark, NJ, native who has been in love with her imagination since age 6. She majored in English at Rutgers University, where she wrote and performed her poetry and began her career as a vocalist/songwriter with the New Jersey House music group INTENSE. An anointed Pastor, psalmist, and motivational speaker, Eshi has used her writing and multi-dimensional artistry to inspire people to embrace lives of triumph and determination for over twenty years. She has written a novel (*Earth*), and *Daughter, Pre-K Memoir, Consilience*, and many blogs.



Rev. Bob Ellis

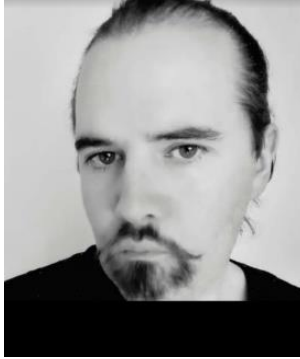
has been teaching Bible classes and seminars since 1972, on a quest for the truth about God through Jesus Christ. For Bob, it's not enough to simply grasp sound doctrine and believe the "right" things. He wanted the information to mean something; to make a difference in the way life is lived. He wanted to find the real joy and peace that Jesus promised and the abundant life that He came to give us. So, Bob's approach to scripture is not to find a replacement for the Old Testament Mosaic Law, so that we can build a standard no one can live up to and continue to live our lives in guilt and fear. His goal was and is to find the way of freedom, relating to the LORD in righteousness by practicing the presence of God through faith by grace. Photo of Rev. Bob Ellis and husband, Jimmy Winchell.



Rev. Dawn Flynn

Born Duane Flynn in Pontiac, MI. Grew up in a Christian family. She has a MS in Entomology and is pursuing a PHD. She has been married for 43 years to her beautiful wife, Pam. She has two sons and is the local pastor of New Life MCC located in Gastonia, NC. She is the author of *God Does Love Me, My Trans Journey to Finding My True Self*. She was also featured within the film *Proper Pronouns*.

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Alan Garrigan

is a writer, and musician. He completed an MA in literature (2021). He has had his poems featured in some Small presses and e-zines. He enjoys spoken word and particularly, conceptual and ecopoetry. He hopes to pursue research in the area of poetry studies.



LaToya Hankins

is the author of *SBF Seeking*, and *K-Rho: The Sweet Taste of Sisterhood*. The North Carolina native is an East Carolina University graduate who her Bachelor of Arts degree in with a minor in political science. She is a proud member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. and currently serves as Service Committee Chair of the organization's Chapel Hill, NC graduate chapter. Hankins currently works for the State of the North Carolina. Prior to her current employment, she worked seven and half years in the field of journalism. Website: <http://latoyahankins.com>

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C.H.

a parent who loves their children and fights to be the best parent possible.



K.H.

an activist for all things good and kind. An educator and computer nerd by day, an avid reader by night.



Kat M. Harris MTh

Graduate of UNCCCharlotte and Liberty University. Perpetual student and encourager. Native of New Orleans and a resident of the Lower 9th Ward. Embodies the Golden Rule, "treat others how you want to be treated". A shy extrovert who does not meet strangers and a jack of all trades and master of some. Just wants to get into the gates of Heaven.

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Shauna D. Harris

author of two books, *Coworkers and Other Dangerous Creatures* and *Running the Asylum* (Cherry Office Romance Series).

Insatiable K

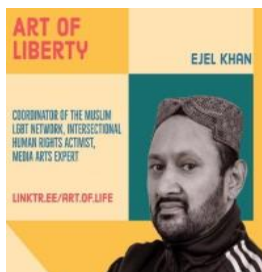
an erotic writer that came out of retirement to participate in this anthology. A staunch Christian and believer of the Trinity. Her works have been published in GBF, KUMA e-zine and other black lesbian publications.



Colin James

has a couple of chapbooks of poetry published. *Dreams of the Really Annoying* from Writing Knights Press and *A Thoroughness Not Deprived of Absurdity* from Piski's Porch Press and a book of poems, *Resisting Probability*, from Sagging Meniscus Press. Formally from the UK he now resides in Massachusetts.

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Ejel Khan

Coordinator of the Muslim LGBT Network, Intersectional Human Rights Activist and Media Arts Expert. Ejel's story can be found on **Youtube** Ejel's Story | **Facebook**: Muslim LGBT Network | **Instagram** Muslim LGBT Network.

T. Apples

a native of New Orleans. Writes fan-fiction and loves to read books.

Tyler Everett Kibbey

is a scholar of language, religion, and violence currently pursuing a PhD in Linguistics & Register Studies at the University of Humboldt – Berlin. Originally from Tennessee, he received his Bachelor's in Interdisciplinary Linguistics from the University of Tennessee and his Master's in Linguistic Theory and Typology from the University of Kentucky. His work focuses on the linguistic encoding of anti-LGBTQ+ religious ideologies in Theo-political faith systems.



Mother Wilhelmenia B. King

a Church Mother and member of the St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church in Charlotte, NC. She is the leader of the Missions Department. Under her leadership the church has helped to feed thousands within the community. She is a mother and grandmother. She loves the Lord and embodies the Golden Rule.



Kel M.

is a gentle non-binary soul, trying to survive in a world not meant or solely designed for them. Kel’s message to the masses is to “Stay safe all and watch out for each other”. They are an advocate for autoimmune diseases.



Gladys Mannas-Stevens

is a retired licensed social worker with a history of working in mental health. She has found her writing voice within poetry and fiction during the Covid-19 pandemic. Her poems were published in an anthology of local poets in the Charlotte, NC area and exhibited in Poetry Month at the Davidson Public Library in Concord, NC. She is a native of Harlem, New York City and find my writing reflecting my passion for sharing images of growing up in Harlem. She is a graduate of the New York University School of Social Work and pursued further graduate work at the doctoral program in Fordham University School of Social Welfare. One of her most important roles is Mother/Grandmother of two adult sons and five grandchildren. She is passionate about her salvation through Jesus Christ. Her favorite hobbies are playing scrabble and searching for seashells on the beaches of North and South Carolina.



B. Maximus

is a cisgender ally to the LGBTQ+ community. He is a quiet soul that has been spoiled by his choices in life. He believes that all are created equal and should have the same rights as others.



Arneitha McCall-Johnson

is a retired Registered Nurse who worked in the nursing profession for over 40 years. I loved every moment of my career. She worked in many areas of nursing including teaching students to prepare for careers as Licensed Practical Nurses. She is a native of Laurinburg, NC and was raised on a farm with her parents and seven siblings. She married Melvin Johnson and was blessed with two beautiful children, three grandchildren and one great-grandson. She loves her church and its members, and the Lord. Her hobbies and interests are varied and include avid reading, crafting, gardening and most recently learning and playing Pickleball.

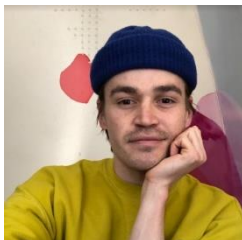
JM

A prolific mathematician who loves everyone.



Rev. Clifford Matthews Jr. MDIV

is the Pastor of the St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church located in Charlotte, NC. Rev. Matthews is a United States Air Force Veteran. He was awarded the Air Force Achievement Medal. He received the call to ministry at age 14. He is currently working on a Doctorate degree.



Nathanael Myers

was born in Glendale, Arizona, is a creator and mover from the Sonoran Desert. He earned a Bachelor of Fine Art in Studio Art, with an emphasis in Two-Dimensional Forms, from the University of Arizona. Myers' work has been shown in multiple solo exhibitions notably at the Lionel-Rombach Gallery in Tucson, Arizona and in Brooklyn, New York, and various national group exhibitions including the United Nations, Tucson Museum of Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson, and at Christie's Auction House in New York City. Within his movement practice, he has held ensemble, principle, and soloist roles with both dance and theater companies, as well as choreographing multiple works. A multi-media artist, Myers works in site-specific movement, explores the kinship and strength of interdisciplinary study, the crux of his creative praxis lies 'the divide of self', the symbiosis of identifying with the LGBTQ community and an established belief system, and the 'pursuit of shalom', articulating experiences of bliss and collective human sensations. Markedly, Myers has been recognized by both press and awards including Arizona Public Media, the Community Foundation for Southern Arts, the Arizona Commission of the Arts, UrbanGlass, and the Rauschenberg Grant through the NYFA. He currently is a part of a Writing Fellowship through the Honor's College at his alma mater and an artistic fellowship under Dickie's x Collab partnership, 'The Future of Work'. His latest work is 'a howl is a prayer too'. The co-authored book centered on words only given airtime in the walls of religion instead of the ether of faith. Reclaiming, reorganizing, redefining, these holy words, establishing a newfound kinship and mystery to their power and significance, 'a howl is a prayer too' is a contemporary reconstitution of benedictions of calling hearts.
Website: www.nategmyers.com

This version of the book is not to be sold.



Carla Y. Nix

is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana. She and her family currently live in Crystal Springs, Mississippi after being dislocated due to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. She and her husband of 39 years are the parents of three adult children. Carla is enjoying retirement now, but is a ministry leader, writer, inspirational speaker, trainer/coach, and mentor. Carla authored the books *“Live on Purpose”* and *“The Weight of Unforgiveness”*. She is the founder of the non-profit organization “Walk on Purpose”, a women’s empowerment group named “Queendom”, and a support group named “Changing the Face of Depression”. She was also asked to serve as moderator and administrator for another support group named “Unshackled From Depression”. Her greatest loves are God, her family, and serving others.



Andre Pace

He is an artist that takes a Retrospective by the verbal remains of the Image, identifying these elements, sees them afresh with expanded expressions of color and patterns. It’s not gender nor does identity. The complicated issues still matter, leaving visible traces of Contemporary Art and mix media design works.



Drew Pissarra

is the author of *InfinityStanding Up* a collection of gay love Sonnets published by Capturing Fire Press, and *You're Pretty Gay*, a book of short stories published by Chaffinch Press. He is also a recent literary grant recipient from Café Royal Cultural Foundation and from Curious Elixirs: Curious Creators. Photo by Steven Burton.



Mykal Shannon

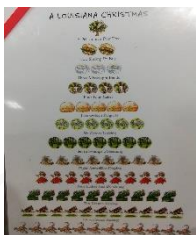
is a retired law enforcement sergeant who now resides in Asheboro, NC. He has been an activist representing a voice for marginalized communities and social injustices in the south, for more than 20 years. He has started his own fellowship, DYNAMIC FAITH MINISTRIES, that focuses on providing a safe space for those who have felt ostracized in other religious entities. He has served on many boards and been a collective part of a host of events. He was also featured within the film Proper Pronouns. These efforts have helped to create awareness of issues affecting many existing on the margins of social stratus spheres, especially those in the transgender community.

This version of the book is not to be sold.



Rev. Alonya Smith

is a native of South Carolina. She is the mother of one son and has eight beautiful grand kids. She is a graduate of Vorhees College. She is very outgoing, humorous, and is very family oriented.



TT

is a native of New Orleans. He is a poet and songwriter. He supports his friends within the LGBT community, and they consider him a powerful ally.



Elder Rev. Kevin E. Taylor

Senior Pastor of Unity of Fellowship Church NewArk is a noted author (*JADED, UNCLUTTER, BECAUSE HE LIVES, IT'S TIME FOR SOME ACTION, ENVY:the darkest shade of green, GET OFF YOUR ASS, AND DO SOMETHING and MEET THE HENDERSONS*). Taylor is an accomplished TV producer/writer, and he has interviewed legends, superstar artists and up and coming stars. He is the Manager of the Pride Center in Newark, NJ and a proud father of Ga'Vel Qwame and grandfather of 3! And 2022 will bring the release of a new *novel* “*MOMMA, PLEASE!*” and *SELF / ISH: GET FULL OF YOURSELF WITHOUT GUILT*, which will have an accompanying Guided Journal.

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VELA:

Bulgarian born VELA lives and works in Berlin since 1998. VELA is Firing up the Berlin independent art scene as a sculptor, installation artist, performer, and a musician/DJ. Vela is fascinated by the properties of steel and welding, as well as by the dynamics of interactions between shapes of interactions between small parts in a bigger picture, VELA plays with structures and shapes, creating sculptures, which are addressing social dynamics, while often referring to the animal world. Her sculptures are often presented in collaborations with performance and dance artists, as well as in the context of theatre and movies. Her love for steel and the industrial shows not only in her visual art, but also in the sound of her own music productions and DJ sets. **Website:** www.metalpig.de | **Instagram:** metal.pig