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Not a witch hunt -- a treasure hunt: GLTB persons

Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés | Jul. 27, 2010 El Rio Debajo del Rio

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In our rural immigrant family, we had an entire gaggle of old women who were devotees of little St Francis of the animals. They loved him because he spoke to the birds and the creatures. ?Like we do.? They liked Francis because he worked hard outdoors. ?Like we do.? They liked him too because they considered him a village healer. ?Like us.?

The old people spoke of Francis? spiritual wounds and that St. Francis was thereby endlessly hungry to find the next draught of medicine, meaning finding fresh evidence of God?s really, really *real* presence on earth. Sometimes, they called him ?Little Bird-Boy.? To them St. Francis had clear sight and could understand any creature because he carried the eternal heart of a child.

Thus...

> One day a wounded man found his way to St. Francis, saying that he could not find even one person who would treat his suffering. He told story after story of all those who had passed him by, even though they saw he was hurt. Francis gently asked if the man could remain near and not go.
>
> The weakened man hung his head and whispered yes. So, Francis set aside all else and tended to the man, bringing water and spices and herbs. Tenderly Francis began to wash the man?s wounded body. As he did, the man?s wound began to brighten and close over, and the man?s soul became calm.
>
> Looking up into Francis? eyes, the man began to weep, saying that for years he?d scorned those who had tried but failed to help him prior; those who came fast with slow cures that were painful and not the right kind; those who had been disgusted with him and passed him by, and those who had not shown even merest respect.
>
> And here he was now, the man wept, being healed by one who was not the least repulsed by him, one who had the kindest touch at last.
>
> Francis dried the man?s tears with the hem of his soft robe, saying it was not he, Francis, but rather God?s love for the man, pouring through Francis... that such love-pouring was God?s secret cure for so much.
>
> Later, Francis walked into the woods to speak privately with God. Without meaning to, he burst

> into tears while telling God how he was moved by the hurt man who had come to him, and how he, Francis himself, felt so well and so grateful to the man, after. He thanked God for being allowed to tend to God up close once more, to touch the body of God dearly again, through another soul.

The old women who tell this story in our family, often ended by cackling and nodding at each other in some sublime crone-ish agreement. One or the other of the old ones would always close with the call: *If you?re lucky, God will show up for a bath unannounced.*

And another old one would give the responsorial: *The only miracle medicine we have is each other*.

When gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people were considered perverts

When I went to university and then into a post-doc psychoanalytic training program practicing as a clinician, our professors had drilled us on the DSM (the Diagnostic Statistical Manual used nationwide to diagnose mental disorders). At that time, in the very early 1970s, the psychiatric panels that put together the DSM stated unequivocally that homosexuality was to be diagnosed as a perversion.

Should any poor soul in therapy mention such factor to us; they were to be marked down as perverted, as though the higher ups had decided we clinicians were to be in the position of grading human conduct instead of being healers of the human soul.

I refused to diagnose any gay person, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered person under the perversion category because of their simple desire to love and be loved in spirit, mind and body by another age-proper and consenting person.

I might diagnose ?adjustment reaction,? even though some of my supervisors back then harshly argued with me that the diagnosis needed to be under the ?perversion? category. I would argue back that the person?s issues, in the main, were not caused by a mal-adaptation in the GLBT patients? souls, psyches, minds or hearts, but by the relentlessly mindless, heartless, scathing culture around them.

What, rather than who, was actually unwell?

In truth? It was clear to many of us who were young students back then, that though we tried to give respect to our professors, we could also see that it was the psychiatric theory that seemed unwell, not the homosexual person.

Many of us had not grown up like some of our most intellectually elegant professors, who though brilliant, had often lived sequestered lives back then, carried from car to house, house to car, very often experiencing only a very narrow slice of society. They traveled amongst others only as tourists and without long-term friendships with non-academic people from different economic classes, religions, ethnic heritages and racial groups. As we used to say it back then, they had no street creds.

Surely we ourselves were a raggle-taggle band of students of no economic significance or much consequence whatsoever. Many of us came from parents who had not been able to finish high school, in my case, not even elementary school. Still I hope we had something useful and evidential to offer back then: hearts and minds educated by direct experience with the humanity of GLBT people rather than theoretical or rote attitudes.

Myth-busting

So there we were, activists, street poets, artists and writers studying psychology, and our GLBT friends did not seem like ?other? to us, despite what we were being taught. Nor, were GLBT people untouchable. Nor sinful.

Nor busily weaving the hand-baskets we?d all be rowing toward hell in if we did anything other than condemn, complain about, and critique them.

If anything, those we knew who were comadres and copadres, and others who became our patients, were often more alive in heart and soul and creative life than a good many heterosexuals -- often by virtue of the broken hearts caused by the over-culture that GLBT persons carried. Their broken-hearted determination to live, love and create right back in the face of all that, both despite it and because of it, was often breathtaking.

As we deepened our knowledge through contact with GLBT persons over the decades, we did not find they were carrying some disorder that was ?catching.? Nor perverted. They were not trying to ?proselytize? and ?convert? children. As trained observers of human behavior, many of us did not find that GLBT persons? mothers were any more clinging or ?grand-mal overbearing? than mothers of a good many heterosexual men.

We did not find that lesbians were tougher than heterosexual women -- a warrior is a warrior because of the timber of the soul, regardless of how and who one loves. In fact, if there was a similarity between women, regardless, one might be wounded in youth by being told to teeter around and act ?feminine? when in fact striding was built into her body and spirit from conception. Another kind of hobbling might have come to a girl as she was encouraged to ?be anything you want,? but to keep it within acceptable limits, just the same.

Born As Treasure

In my 38 years of clinical practice, consulting with hundreds of GLBT persons, I have not yet met one who ?chose? one of the most challenging and scorned lifestyles of our times: to be gay. They just are as they are born. Complete. Born as treasure.

Not alien at all. But, in personal sexual attraction, different. *Not* different however, in heart, spirit and soul. *Not* different in aspirations, creative drive, imagination, caring, loyalty, inventiveness. It?s an understatement to say that GLBT people are just like us and just like our professors and parents and everyone one else. That is, they are regularly irregular and perfectly imperfect people who glow and flow toward fealty, toward loving and being loved. They were heat sealed from conception with the same hopes and happiness all of us long for and move toward. And they have about the same proportion of neurotic concerns about garden variety matters of life as the rest of us did and do. Except for one thing.

The Only Miracle Medicine We Have Is Each Other.

There has for decades been one huge difference between heterosexual and GLBT people. As a psychoanalyst hearing the night dreams and day thoughts of patients who are unarmored in the consulting room, I know that to be born gay or lesbian, bi-sexual or transgendered carries a far extra rations of being shamed by others, by the culture, and sometimes, most wounding, by one?s family.

Not a one-time wounding. A continuous one. One carried on without cease on television. On radio. In newspapers. In print. In pulpits. Now, online. Daily scorn; assertions that certain people by virtue of *being*, are intractably unworthy. Speaking and fuming and slandering and misrepresenting innocent people, and treating their psyches and hearts as though each person is an unreliable car being parted out: this one part good, the rest bad/wrong/weak/ and ought be gotten severed and disposed of.

It was and is easy to see why GLBT people often are forced to be intractable when it comes to being insulted (Your being is sinful), patronized (love the person, hate the sin), and being treated as though less than human (Matthew Shepard). It is also easy to see why some GLBT persons carry a certain quickness to duck. And some, to hide. Daily carpet bombing of your heart by the over-culture, makes one that way. You don?t become inured to it. You become either muted or militant.

All these reactions are actually solid and useful psychological adaptations to being assaulted. They provide additional self-protection if the strafing comes f`rom within one?s own family, the one place in the world that is supposed to be safe for the soul. They provide additional self-protection when people of God encourage parents to pound or shun their GLBT children, which is an evil interference in the incontrovertible and ever-reconciling sacred bond between child and parents that no one ought interfere with.

Given all these matters of long standing, these many decades of struggle by GLBT persons, I find it now of note that Senator Barack Obama, a biracial man is speaking with care and legal regard for GLBT persons. It?s one of those moments in time that I am glad I have lived long enough to see the day.

I mention Senator Obama, because I am familiar with the downplay of GLBT persons in various layers of the black community prior to the last fifteen years as well as previous reluctance to publicly discuss AIDS. Though other candidates for president have also given their vision for granting what I?d call a long overdue parity for GLBT persons, that Obama steps right up, knocking over any remaining and unnecessary cultural shibboleths, is brave.

He says he supports civil unions and federal rights for LGBT Couples including the right to assist their loved ones in times of emergency, equal health insurance, employment benefits, property and adoption rights. He?s for repealing the Defense of Marriage Act, authored by former Congressman Bob Barr. (I covered the Libertarian National Convention last week where Barr was elected to the party to run for President. That?ll be another story for another time.)

Have we really finally arrived at a time when we realize that the only miracle medicine we have is each other? I am encouraged.

A religious point of view with a dash of levity

I know that many disagree with the stance that GLBT persons are beloved by God just as they are. I know that some use the word ?abomination,? saying that in their view homosexuality actually, as one minister shouted at me, ?literally makes God sick.?

But, about 15 years ago, Amendment Two was passed in Colorado barring GLBT persons from what I understood as equal rights under the law. The statewide referendum was cooked up by several Christian men, saying GLBTs wanted ?special rights? rather than just regular rights. To top it off, some folks tried to create a war by telling blacks that GLBT?s were portraying themselves as suffering from the same inequalities blacks had struggled with in decades past.

The ballot was machinated in legalese and the question asked backward, so if you were wanting to vote yes, you had to mark no. If you wanted to vote no, you had to mark yes.

Because the men who had engineered Amendment Two here, had targeted Ohio to be next on their ?ban GLBT persons? statewide referendum list, I arranged immediately to go on performance tour to do a fund-raising benefit in Cincinnati for a GLBT bookstore run by women. I was told I?d likely be facing demonstrators from a loud and uncivil religious group there the night of the public performance.

Feeling bright in the Holy Spirit, I?d published a piece defending GLBT persons in *Publisher?s Weekly*, and amongst other nice pieces of hate mail and hate-faxes that came in afterward, someone had gotten my phone number and called unexpectedly. I picked up the hone and the stranger, a man, on the other end of the line greeted me with, ?You fat, Commie lesbian!?

I was startled and the words just jumped out of my mouth: ?Listen you, I resent being called fat!? And I slammed the phone down.

I knew from experience in other matters of speaking out that people can sometimes be not very loving, and most bewildering of all -- selfsame people sometimes call themselves Christlike.

So, as tensions tightened around the Ohio trip, I called my friend Martin Marty, who has one of the most blessed and beautiful minds in the world. I told him about my forthcoming challenge in Ohio, saying I didn?t want to in any way accidentally encourage my audience to start shouting epithets in retaliation, that I disagreed entirely with calling detractors names like ?christo-fascists? and the like.

Martin, bless him, said,

> Listen Dr. E, just tell them that out of all the hundreds of pages of the Bible, there are less than six inches devoted to who ought put tab A into slot B or slot C or not.
>
> Tell them that there are pages and pages devoted to laws against divorce, and that the punishment for that is stoning.
>
> Then, tell them, the foremost leader of the Southern Baptist Convention got divorced last year, and what happened? He still seems to be alive.

And that, dear reader, is just what I did. And with love I hope.

And if you have need, and you find it of your heart, I hope that you will too.

There?s much more to tend to in concert with our GLBT brothers and sisters. And there are others to lean toward too. Two spiritual medicines we all were born to carry are love-pouring and laughter. There is not need to go find, learn, buy or beg these gifts. Everyone is born with both, not matter to whom one is attracted. When we are world weary and wonder how to find these two gifts, remember little St. Francis of the birds and the animals. There?s the clearest clue, the heart of a child.

CODA

On that Ohio sojourn, is how I unexpectedly came to the honor of being christened an ?honorary lesbian,? by the magnificent GLBT crowd overflowing the Ohio theatre that night. In levity, I offered to crown them all honorary heterosexuals in return. If good-hearted laughter is prayer, then we prayed and prayed all evening long.

**A person who is a pedophile is not in any way related to GLBT persons. People who are pedophiles can be heterosexual, or any other sexual configuration. The issue in the latter is sexual intrusion and assault on underage children.

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