NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

In the closet, denying ourselves

Kate Childs Graham | May. 21, 2009

This past week, a film premiered that has everyone talking about outing. The film, *Outrage*, seeks to ?out? policymakers who, while opposing the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, are they themselves gay.

Now, I have always maintained an anti-outing stance; that is, I believe that it is up to an individual to decide when, where, why and how they tell people that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender. At the same time, I believe that anyone who is against LGBT rights has a flawed stance, regardless of their individual sexual orientation or gender identity.

On the other hand, I understand the anger some may feel toward people who, in their view, are being hypocritical. For me, though, I feel more frustrated with the societal pressures that force people to deny their true selves and stay in the closet.

My freshman year of college, while I was out to a few close friends and family back home, I was not ready to come out in this new environment I was living in. I thought coming out in college would jeopardize my chances at making friends, being class president, acting in plays and so on. I thought coming out in college would forever relegate me to the freaks table and that was something I was not yet willing to do.

And while I was not ready to come out, I did meet and fall for my first girlfriend. A relationship bloomed which was to become a first in a long string of relationships shrouded in secrecy, fear and shame. One time during that year, a classmate thought she had seen evidence of our relationship and started a rumor that spread to, what at the time felt like, the whole school. I was devastated. I cried. I shouted. I denied it emphatically.

Looking back on those closeted days of secrecy, I no longer feel any real animosity towards the people who sought to out me, even though it was often just for a good piece of gossip. What really strikes my heart when I recall those painful memories is the lack of support from my classmates, my friends, my teachers or my church to shed the secret that had weighed me down since I was in middle school. What bothers me is that I felt as if, for them and for myself, I had to deny it.

These stories of outing, denial, being ashamed of one?s identity and lacking support from the community are all too common and remind me a bit of Peter:

> ?One of the high priest?s attendants saw Peter sitting there at the fire, and she stared at him and said, ?This one was with Jesus, too!?
> But Peter denied it. ?I don?t know him!? he said.
> A little later, someone else noticed Peter and remarked, ?You?re one of them too!?
> But Peter said, ?No, I?m not.?
> About an hour later, someone else insisted, ?Surely this fellow was with them, too. He even talks like a Galilean.?
> ?I don?t even know what you are talking about!? Peter said.?

When Peter denied that he knew Jesus, he was also denying a part of himself, his identity as a follower of Jesus. He denied both Jesus and his identity because of the societal pressure to do so. And the moment in which Peter denied himself -- that moment when the cock crowed -- ultimately led to Jesus? death.

I believe that Jesus died so that no one would have to deny their true selves -- whether Christian or Jew, woman or man, slave or free, gay or straight?well, you all know the song.

Jesus died so that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people would not be afraid to come out of the closet. Jesus died so that policymakers would not have to deny their sexual orientation and lobby against the rights of LGBT persons to prove that denial. Jesus died so that leaders in our church would not be ashamed to have a relationship with a partner of the same sex (or opposite sex, for that matter) and resort to great and unethical lengths to cover up these relationships. Jesus died so that we could all be true to ourselves and to God.

In the end, while I am sure that outing anyone is immoral and unjust, I am equally convinced that we must change the social structures that keep people in the closet -- whatever closet it may be. Only then will we be able to break down all of those walls that divide us. Only then will we be able to live our lives free of fear and shame. Only then will we be able to be our truest selves. And that is just as, I believe, Jesus would want it.

Kate Childs Graham writes for **ReligionDispatches.org** [1] *and* **YoungAdultCatholics-Blog.com** [2].
She also serves on the Women?s Ordination Conference board of directors and the Call to Action Next Generation Leadership Team.

Source URL (retrieved on *08/02/2014 - 04:37*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/closet-denying-ourselves

Links:
[1] http://ReligionDispatches.org
[2] http://YoungAdultCatholics-Blog.com