

A Word about the Contest and the Entries:

“Why the Gay Rights Movement Is the Moral Equivalent of the Civil Rights Movement”

The essays you are about to read are all remarkable, highly creative, and indicative of the thinking that lies behind those of us who are solidly in the gay rights struggle from the Christian perspective. They are also all from straight pastors.

It was my hope that this contest would generate interest in clergy that would translate into a serious dialogue across America. That remains to be seen. What is clear is that this contest did not immediately attract the interest of mainline clergy. We had only three entries. Since the minimum number required to award a prize was twenty-five (which at the time seemed a low but fair number), there is no winner.

My hope is that these essays will be beacons of light that will illumine many readers and, in a small way, contribute to the opening of our churches, whole-heartedly, to our LGBT brothers and sisters. Each essay is well worth your time and will reward you with much food for thought, as they did me.

I wish to personally thank each essayist for taking the time to think through this issue and reflect so thoughtfully on it. As writer Jim Briney remarked to me, upon learning there would be no contest winner, “I commend you for the idea and the initiative to establish the essay contest. It gave me the opportunity to collect my thoughts and to precipitate a dialogue where I am.” This sentiment expressed in one way or another by all the essayists made me realize that maybe this contest wasn’t a failure after all.

Should anyone wish to correspond with an essayist, if you e-mail me at info@clergyunited.org, I will pass along the contact information.

Yours for an inclusive church and world,
Rev. Steve Kindle
Clergy United, Inc.

Why the gay rights movement IS the moral equivalent of the civil rights movement

by James Briney

I am the parent to three young people, a daughter that came with the marriage, a son my wife and I adopted, and a young man in college. My wife and our daughter are of Native American descent. Our son is Hispanic. The young man we parent is African-American. A gay man who is a trusted friend and ally employs our son and mentors our grandson. Our dearest friends include women well past the age of seventy, who have been a lesbian couple over four decades.

I have argued successfully for the denominational inclusion of a start-up congregation that is comprised of and led by women and men who are gay. I preach the gospel based on my understanding of Christ and minister to people who have a hard time embracing the realities of the faith that instructs me. It is not in my experience to demonize or marginalize human beings on the basis of their skin color or their sexual identity.

I encourage people to think, and to learn how to think if necessary. I engage in conversations and correspondence with churchmen and women who agonize over their love of the church and affection for me, and whether our denomination is on the wrong path when it comes to advocating gay rights.

I have held responsible positions in the public sector, the private sector and in the church, encountering and working with all sorts of people. I have lived in an Anglican Benedictine monastery in relative seclusion and served in positions of public trust in view of the masses. This essay on the gay rights movement is informed and guided by my experience, friendships and education, as well as my vocation.

I think the gay rights movement is the moral equivalent of the civil rights movement. Both are movements directed at changing how majorities think and behave. Both are movements aimed at freeing the behaviors and attitudes that accompany internalized oppression; that causes people of color and gays to think less than well of them selves.

The fact that there are far fewer gay people in the world than people of color does not negate the reality that at least as many people will be affected by the gay rights movement, as the civil rights movement. The notion of doing the greatest good for the greatest number is evident in both movements, aimed at liberating the oppressed and their oppressors.

It has been said that Americans learn about geography through war. In recent years we have come to see that it is how we learn about religion too. The gay rights movement is how we are learning the difference between a pedophile and a homosexual. The gay rights movement is presenting the opportunity to overcome our ignorance.

In some respects the moral equivalency and necessity of the civil rights movement and the gay rights movement is rooted in the misapplication of scripture. Out of context and with great abuses it has been argued far too long in the name of God that people of color and homosexuals are 'lesser than' those who are not.

Just as there is a genetic predisposition to skin color there is a genetic path to sexual identity. Just as there are gradations of skin color, there are a variety of orientations across the gender spectrum that is broader than absolute female and male categories.

Sexual preferences and gender identities can be the product of our distress and how we act out to display that distress. Whatever arguments contribute to this debate there is no reality that dictates the color of one's skin as a choice, or as a response to distress. Yet, the gay rights movement is the moral equivalent of the civil rights movement because the outcome is imperative to the progress of human relationships and the acceptance and understanding of self. Thanks to the gay rights movement the conversation we all must have is underway. It is taking place in private, in legislative bodies and in the church.

The overriding issue that matches up with civil and gay rights is that discrimination on the basis skin color and sexual orientation is abhorrent. Homophobia in all its manifestations and iterations is an insidious form of bigotry. As a pastor I understand that 'queers and bigots' along with everyone else, including myself are welcome to work on their stuff in the safe, thoughtful and loving presence that too many pastors give lip service to and too few congregations practice.

Jesus turned the tables upside down on the Old Testament understanding of God and taught that we are to love one another as Christ loves us. His message cuts both ways. The gay rights movement is enlightening parties on both sides of the gay/straight divide, as Christ calls us to examine our own way of relating to people. When Christ said: 'You must love one another as I have loved you' he did not equivocate or make exceptions.

I have served enough congregations to know that people who have a hard time loving everyone living in the Grace of God are in churches on any given Sunday with gays, lesbians, transgender and transsexual people, or their parents. Whatever their difficulties may be I aim to see straight people extending grace to gays and the other way around.

Far too long too many of the mainline denominations have turned their backs on what Christ lived and died for. They have gone along with political ideologies that marginalize the few and have pandered to the most base of human instincts in order to promote self-serving agendas. They have smeared their politics of privilege and exclusivity all over the body of Christ.

Christ did not use force to impose what he believed on others. Neither did Gandhi. Neither did Dr. King. The civil rights movement and the gay rights movement are equivalent because they are progressive. They are non-violent at their center. Both require redress in the courts and in the congress, in our legislatures, in our faith communities and in our hearts. Both movements require leadership.

For as long as I am a pastor and teacher I will continue to welcome all who choose to worship God, without making anyone feel bad for being themselves. I believe that people of differing views deserve thoughtful opportunities to examine what they think and believe. I believe the gay rights movement is creating such opportunities. The issue of gay rights is significant enough to claim equivalent status with the civil rights movement. It is teaching us to look for the 'content of the character' imbedded in the soul of every human being. When we recognize the value of another human being, regardless the color of their skin or their sexual identity, we are becoming citizens in the kingdom of God while we are alive.

By treating one another as our brothers and our sisters, gay and straight, we are acting in accordance with our faith in ways that match up with our baptismal identity. This identity transcends everything internal and external that otherwise defines us.

The gay rights movement is borne of integrity. I have faith that the gay rights movement is a companion to all that is good. Believing the gay rights movement is equivalent to the civil rights movement is a call to action. Whatever our struggles, at the end of our lives our integrity and our faith is what we take to the grave.

I was born and raised in Pontiac, Michigan after World War Two. The high school I attended had been built for seventeen hundred students. By the time I was a senior in 1965 there were thirty-four hundred students in the same building. Half were white and half were black. One night walking home from a football game with four others, over a dozen young people attacked us. Some were on bicycles. We were grabbed, punched, hit with boards that had nails in them and otherwise beaten. I was treated at the hospital and released.

The police came to the home of my parents and asked for a report. I had nothing to report except to confirm that the group I was in was white and the gang that attacked us was black. The next day in the locker room at school a young black man approached me with questions about the attack. He was an imposing figure. He had been held back one or more grades and was known for his fearsome disposition.

As the locker room cleared he asked me the same questions the police had asked me the night before: 'Was the attack provoked?' 'Who did this to you?' Then he asked a question of his own: 'Why didn't you tell the police I did it, or some other nigger?' I said it was dark and that I did not recognize anyone and that it had happened fast. He walked away.

Two days later in the same setting he approached me again, and again the locker room cleared. When I asked him if he knew anything about the young people who had been beaten the day before, he said: 'You won't have any more trouble.' When I asked him why, he said: 'Some of the little brothers have to learn to make distinctions.'

Years later in the kitchen of a modest home in another Midwestern city I sat with an elderly woman at her kitchen table. She had a seventh grade education and her husband had left school in the sixth grade to work the farm. She asked me about 'all this business going on in Massachusetts' referring to the law upholding gay marriage. I figured that she and her husband would leave the church I was serving at the time, but said what I thought anyway which is pretty much what I have spelled out in this essay. Her husband had been listening from the hallway. He entered the kitchen. They looked at one another and said: 'Well, that's what we think too.'

I lived next door to a Jewish family when I was growing up. Every Sunday I would wait for the phone to ring knowing that it meant I would be invited over for the traditional brunch of lox and bagels with cream cheese, sliced hard-boiled egg, tomato and lettuce. One Friday evening when I was about 13 our neighbor who was president of his temple invited me to go services.

He took my tiny hand in his enormous hand and we walked several blocks. In those days it took ten men to make a minion. At one minute to seven our neighbor looked at the

eight other Jewish men present, they nodded and he said: 'Jimmy, tonight you are a man. You make our minion.'

My suitemate in college was a Jewish man. Years after graduation I learned something about his father that even he did not know. When his dad graduated from medical school in the 40's he was stationed in a MASH-like setting in an isolated part of the United States. Upon his arrival, an envelope addressed to him contained the key to his office and a note that said: 'Good luck.' When the corpse of an infant appeared at his office there was no indication where it came from. He told me that before he went home that night he made the sign of the cross to baptize the baby, figuring that God would sort it out.

For a time I lived in Laramie, Wyoming. When Matthew Shepard was murdered for being gay, I remembered a Thanksgiving in the late 70's. I managed apartment complexes in return for a place to stay and \$25.00 a month. On one side Egyptian brothers were my neighbors. On the other side three young men from Iran. I prepared a feast and invited both sets of neighbors to join me. They did without incident, although one attendee was said to be a bodyguard.

I have shared these vignettes from various times in my life to demonstrate that the conclusions I have reached about civil rights and gay rights are not theoretical or made of whole cloth. Neither are they apocryphal stories without meaning or purpose. In my experience affirming others begins with noticing who our neighbors are. I am grateful that when I make contact with people I encounter that I am rewarded with the gift of friendship and mutual understanding.

I am convinced by these stories and many others, also of my own experience, that God does not expect anything of us that we are not already able to do. I am convinced that we have opportunities all the time to initiate relationships with people who represent a wide range of life experience and perceptions from which we can learn.

The other night a gay black man called my wife from New York City. They have been friends throughout their adult lives. She knew he was gay before he did. She knew his mother in Detroit and loved her. I know this man too. We talked and listened to each other and we laughed. In so doing we participated in the gay rights movement while enjoying our friendship.

Another friend of twenty-five years prides himself on using shocking language when he hangs out with acquaintances at the local coffee shop in the community of his childhood. He has a history of using language that he says he does not mean anything by when he refers to gays. When I called him on his language and his thinking a serious conversation ensued, something he rarely gets to have. In the lengthy conversations that followed he came to the conclusion that he did not have a problem with gays, he had a problem with himself.

The friend of my wife who called to talk about the death of his mother ended up sharing the intimate details of his life. My friend who used demeaning language is working through his attitudes and is demonstrating a change in his thinking. These men, one of culture and the other of wealth, give me hope.

I love the people I get to know in this life because they are honest with me and with themselves. It is a privilege having the conversation of friends when the dialogue turns to

the gay rights movement, with no agenda that blurs the mandate to love one another as Christ loves us.

When we engage our friends and strangers the potential for relationship, dialogue, and understanding emerges. We get to appreciate the commonalities hidden and revealed in diversity. We become partners in the struggle for the rights of everyone we meet. I trust and pray that everyone who reads this essay will be informed by the arguments presented and inspired by the stories told, to make the case that the gay rights movement is the moral equivalent of the civil rights movement.

Why the gay rights movement IS the moral equivalent of the civil rights movement
by William J. Sappenfield

Tolerance is inadequate.

In the past a tolerant society was seen as an ideal that would end racial injustice and guarantee dignity for all ethnic groups. Fifty years later it is clear that tolerance is an early step on a long journey to mutual acceptance, understanding, and appreciation. It is an important step, to be sure. Racial tolerance brings an end to overt hostility. Tolerant people do not teach their children to hate or exclude others from their communities. Tolerance allows us to form enforceable, measurable rules such as shared drinking fountains, integrated schools, and mixed seating in theaters.

The early step of tolerance that was taken so long ago toward racial equality is now being attempted on the journey to justice for people of diverse sexuality. It is the same goal: to stop hatred. It can be a foundation upon which to build enforceable, measurable rules of fairness such as insurance benefits for same-sex partners, the right to adopt children, employment openings, and housing opportunities. In the present case of justice for people of all sexual identities, as in the case of justice for people of all races, tolerance has the advantage of being enforceable. However, it still falls short of the goal: mutual appreciation and a shared community.

TOLERANCE

By definition, tolerance is the ability to allow deviation from “standard behavior”. It is willingness to put up with something that is wrong. It calls upon the “tolerant one” for sacrifice. By his or her good graces and by his or her strength, the one who is tolerant grants favor to those who are less than ideal. He or she is willing to forgo the usual requirements expected of others.

As the goal of racial tolerance was legislated into existence, one step at a time, it became clear that tolerance is inadequate.

Integrated schools, homogenous neighborhoods, and equal opportunity employment – once the goals of the civil rights movement – became recognized as a way to stop oppression but they did not promote acceptance. They did nothing to celebrate African-American culture, encourage historically Black institutions, or search for expressly Black contributions to American life.

Within a generation of groundbreaking legislation and court decisions that established hard-won laws of tolerance, some African American leaders were raising previously unthinkable questions. Is tolerance a worthy goal? Does tolerance mean being an indistinguishable part of society? A person’s race is part of her or his identity; must that aspect of a person be ignored in the name of tolerance? Can equivalence be over-promoted to the detriment of the unique gifts each individual carries?

America has legislated racial tolerance and found that its journey is still not over. Tolerance is inadequate. Community requires appreciation, celebration, and reception. We must recognize that our culture is stronger because of all of its members.

Now America finds itself making the same journey as we talk to, with, and about those of our citizens who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and trans-gendered. In the early

years of the twenty-first century we are at the stage of the journey where an official stance of public tolerance is a noteworthy goal. Again, the efforts usually take the form of legislating against overt hostility and against state-sanctioned oppression. Financial institutions, home owners associations, and insurance companies all fall under legal regulations. Efforts to allow all people access to those institutions, regardless of their sexuality, are early milestones along the way. Tolerance is an early step that must be taken. It is not the goal.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Public education is, again, a particularly neuralgic issue in the pursuit of fairness. We (rightly) see children as especially vulnerable. We often (wrongly) see social progress as a threat to them. Just as the racial integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957 was an emotional cataclysm that still resonates in our society so, today, the acknowledgement of all sexual identities in public schools is a focal point of anxiety. There is debate about depicting a variety of families in textbooks. The portrayal of homosexual people in a public school drama can draw protests. It is time to re-assert the lessons of fifty years ago: Living in the world as it actually exists is a valuable educational experience. Just as our society is made up of a variety of races, our society is also made up of people with a variety of sexual identities. Our public schools must not be exempt from reality nor from legally-enforced tolerance. It's a minimal standard, but that's where we are on this journey.

VIOLENCE

Violence is objectively evil. Violence is such an affront to right-thinking that it can, counter-intuitively, distract forces for progress from the more mundane, but far more pervasive issues of basic rights and justice.

For the century between the assassinations of Lincoln and King the horror of violence against African Americans was all too common in our nation. Slavery was over but lynching, bombs, and beatings could rivet the attention of Americans with revulsion and with a deceptively identifiable enemy. A citizen, clergyman, or politician could take refuge in denouncing violence against Black people and, thus, hide from any need to address equal wages, voting rights, or housing opportunities. The declaration that firebombing a church is wrong has the virtue of truth. But to call making such a statement an act of social valor is setting the heroism bar pretty low.

In our journey of living into a sexually diverse society we have been horrified by acts of violence and murder against people because of their sexuality. Violence is measurable. It is a visible evil that we can readily prove and are anxious to prosecute. Violence is easy to condemn but, even if those who committed the crimes were all in prison, we would be but little closer to achieving a reconciled community.

The elimination of violence against gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and trans-gendered people is an obvious goal with an obvious benefit. But it would only benefit those who have violence directed against them. It would do nothing about the pervasive oppression of discrimination, insults, rejection, and ill-reasoned public declarations.

Countless people who will never be subjected to physical violence will, nevertheless, be subjected to the outrage of a public debate on the subject of their intrinsic worth.

The eradication of physical violence against people because of their sexual orientation is such a prominent goal that we must guard against it becoming the only goal.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Personal experience and public policy can never be completely separated.

The strength of personal experience is its ability to change minds. The goal of racial diversity has been aided immeasurably by the personal experiences of those who were constrained by public policy to attend integrated schools, serve in socially diverse military units, and work in legally compliant industries. Overarching, impersonal, public policy opened opportunities to participate in public life one personal experience at a time. Rather than thinking about race or ethnicity, most Americans now call upon their personal experiences with individual people when they speak of racial justice.

As we move forward in our understanding of human sexuality, discussions often center on personal experience. People are more likely to found their reasoning on a gay co-worker or a lesbian family member than on a talk-radio assertion or an opinion poll.

On the other hand, the limitation of personal experience is that it is too subjective to be a basis for public policy. It would have been impossible to vote for civil rights legislation if members of congress had no more to offer than an assertion that they had positive experiences with a racially diverse group of people. Negative experiences could be cited just as easily. Regulations must be set on standards of truth and common welfare.

Anecdotes about positive contributions and salutary qualities of lesbian and gay individuals are welcome and instructive. However, if we admit those anecdotes into evidence for setting public policy, we will have to also allow individual stories of destructive behavior and harmful associations.

Public policy must be based on objective truth and principles of dignity and justice. Our nation's laws and our public discourse transcend individual experiences, whether they are positive or not.

Our journey on the road to a society that is welcoming and just for people of all sexual identities has far to go. We can learn from the civil rights effort that continues to lead in the direction we must take. Tolerance is the next step and it is to be prized, but it is not the ultimate goal. As our nation's experience has taught us in the last fifty years, we must not stop short of a recognition of the image of God in every face we see.

*The Gay Movement IS the Moral Equivalent of the Civil Rights Movement or
Life is too short to be white...and straight.*

by Donna Schaper

In the world of the goat – shorthand for scapegoating – the beat goes on. The beatings go on. There really isn't much difference between anti-Semitism, homophobia, racism and sexism: they all count on their being a goat, someone on whom to blame what is feared in the self.

The possibilities for goating are endless. With Jews the "Goat" is greed, women it is softness, gays it is sex, blacks it is laziness. The goat is what needs to be sacrificed, murdered, destroyed, and made holy by violence. We lay the goat we have slain on a holy altar, barbecue it, and act like we have done something for God. We have not – but at least our own suffering goes away for a while and is replaced by the intensity of violent energy.

A review of goating history (state side) travels through witches and Jews, then Italians and Irish immigrants. Before that slaves were otherized, goatized, to justify white supremacy and use of them. God gets called in on the oddest missions! Lately in a new twist of the ancient twistedness, immigrants are no longer called just immigrants, a privilege the Irish and Italians enjoyed while they were demonized. "Illegal" appears to be the word of necessity to attach to immigrants. Gays are likewise scapegoated as all that is wrong with America. There is a serious paranoid pattern in Christian cultures – and the need to blame somebody for something is ever present. Its source is the sacrifice, the burnt offering and the substitution of Jesus as Christ goat. The big word for this is atonement, the price paid for our sins. To change any of the isms we have to change the way we substitute Jesus and cross for salvation. We have to atone for the atonement theory.

First we must define some terms. If the violence and the goating is clear enough, what is its source? Its source is what I call "whiteness", what I could call "Westernness" or culturally abused atonement theology, lined up to shoot the others who threaten to reveal our own suffering.

We can define Western whiteness as the bland, nearly unconscious, color devoid externalization of fault. James Cone puts it well when he says, "White Folk want everything but the burden." What we do to gays and blacks is to blame them for what we refuse to imagine is wrong in ourselves. (I know that homophobia is not restricted to whites. It is an equal opportunity employer. Nevertheless it comes from the white theology for the other.) Externalization and "goating" is deep within our psyche: it is almost as though we take the color and puzzlements of life and move them, physically, in somebody else's house, taking all the color and joy out of our own. Blacks are lazy, we are not. We just sit on our couch with our clicker, imagining that we are hard at work. Gays are dirty, we are not. We just masturbate in our car in traffic and imagine no one sees us. We wouldn't have "fun" sex at home. Of course these are exaggerations: some whites are sexy and some are puzzled by their own laziness. Mythically and culturally, however, we externalize at a great rate.

Consider Senator Larry Craig for a minute. Talk about denial getting us in trouble with the truth. I don't ordinarily feel compassion for Republicans but this man is breaking my heart. Nina Burleigh in The Huffington Post carried an incredible story about Gay

Republicans, most of whom didn't add Senator Craig's cell phone mishap to their resume of hiddenness but resembled his self-deceit. (Not everyone heard but indeed he called someone he thought was a press pal and told him how to manipulate his story. It turned out he had "misdialed." With the Craigs of the world, the excuses run wild.) "Prick any conservative," Burleigh says, "and the Kink oozes out. The rockier the rib, the more likely you'll find pink lingerie under the trousers or a bull whip and machete in the beside table." We may find Senator Craig's self-deceit either pathetic or humorous or tragic – or all three. The message of the Haggards and the Foleys and now the Craigs, however, begs us to repent deceit. Why hide in bathrooms? Burleigh's argument is that conservatives are so afraid of their own sexual interests that they want the government to save them from themselves – thus the punishmentalist legislation.

The key to ungoating goating is grace: it is to accept the fact that some whites are lazy, some Jews greedy, some fundamentalists over-sexed (what a concept!), and the like. When we know we are not perfect, we "goat" less. Goating is such a habit with us that we must always go deeper to find out why – and how -- we do it.

THE PLOT THICKENS

Being "Alien" is bad enough. Being blamed for being alien is worse. Being blamed for your poverty is also pretty rotten. "It's your fault!" Having a demonic alien seems to pacify something in people. Gays get a little different language: they are not normal, implying that normal is good. But the demonizing, externalizing, scapegoating pattern is the same. You can almost hear its hatred winding up, like a pitcher about to throw a fast ball. When the phrase "You people" comes out, watch out. When the phrase, "Them" comes out, duck. When the phrase "Not like ordinary people" shows up, put on your bullet proof vest or at least your helmet. The OTHERIZING is the pattern that links the civil rights movement, the gay movement and many others. Those people, you people, the people not known as people but the ones known as them are the problem. We "normal" people no longer have a problem: we gave it to you to carry. Some folk want everything but the burden.

By normal I mean me. White, Straight, uncomfortable with people who are not. The poverty of the normal white straight person is extraordinary. We are spiritually homeless. We are in need of shelter – and we look for shelter in all the wrong places. We look for shelter in acting as though we are better than everyone else. We look for our goodness by making other people look bad. The gay rights movement and the civil rights movement are alike in being on the receiving end of the demonizing. "They" make "us" uncomfortable. That is the main thing that joins the movements: the externalization on the one called the other who then becomes the goat in the system. We look good in cheap ways. We look good in ways we don't pay for. We get a virtue bargain by making others less than we think we are. We then add institutional power – health insurance, segregated schools – to our cultural and mythical superiority and live dull lives. The lies are too deep to allow life to be exciting. Excitement is the tension between the is and the ought. Excitement knows whom you really are and that you are ok anyway. "I'm not ok, you're not ok, and that's ok," is Bill Coffin's best line. That is excitement. That is a level playing field. That is colorful living; it has tension, exposed, rather than hidden.

Life is just way too short to be white. One way or another the lies will catch up with us. And why do we tell lies? To protect ourselves from the truth. We think we are protecting "others" but that is a lie on top of a lie.

Unfortunately there is a great expense in this way of being. It only looks like a bargain. In fact, it is extraordinarily expensive. “If you are not who I think you are, then I am not who I think I am”, said James Baldwin. The deceits and fictions wear away at our soul. White people become “white”, vacated of color, empty vessels of false virtue, supported not just by the psychological games of white privilege but the systemic intrusions of same in schools, on jobs, and in real estate patterns. The white man’s burden becomes something OTHERS carry. “I may be straight but I am not narrow” is a telling slogan: it names the problem of what happens to those who are anti gay. We/ they become narrow.

We also live in communities that share our values. We are very likely to be corrected as long as we stay “white.” I can tell my system (a liberal congregation with a great history in the Avant Garde in Greenwich Village) that life is too short to be white till I am blue (colored) in my face but they are not that interested.

A well-educated black woman took an internship at my church. One of my ultra liberal congregants said to her, “It must be hard on you being at a church where every one is so well educated.” That happened two months ago.

The same woman was asked to sing gospel songs. No one knew that she knew opera. She was other and in her cage and someone had thrown away the key. It is of course an interpretive cage. She has the key and her interpreter is actually the one locked up.

She preaches a sermon, which says nothing about the congregation being racist. A member of long standing gets up and says the congregation is not racist, that many people have paid their dues in the movement. Life for him is NOT too short to be white. He had a lot to defend and hold on to.

A Malaysian man tells his parents he is gay. They say, “Just don’t tell your sister.” Why not? Because she couldn’t handle it, which is to say they couldn’t handle it because the lie we tell is the one that hides us from ourselves.

Bigotry is an equal opportunity employer. It is not just for people of color or gays but also Jews and immigrants. It also internalizes with the great dance of the devil, the “twist”, and we find Jews demonizing immigrants and blacks demonizing gays. Anybody who is not part of the power sorority or fraternity is fair game to be scapegoated. How else would people in power hold on to our power, save by putting others down? As much as we would like to think that the Gay and Civil Rights and Anti-Semitism movements have put themselves out of business by their successful achievement of goals, unfortunately, the truth is different.. There is plenty left to do – and it starts with noticing how the scapegoating pattern works and also just how unnecessary it is.

THE ALTERNATIVE

There is another way. It starts with reconceptualizing Jesus as other than a goat. He becomes a grace not a goat. It moves to a powerful idea that scriptures (of all varieties) are right when they say, “The stranger is the ROUTE to God.” The route. You can’t get to God except through the strange and the stranger, the strange about yourself and the stranger you are trying to avoid. It moves to another picture of human goodness and power. We are not good because of ourselves, we are good by grace.

Power is exciting when it is not damning. The atonement theology keeps us with a disempowered Jesus, who “lost” the war with the devil, took on all our sins and recommends that we do the same to others.

Since we still need power, we find it in phony, graceless, domineering ways. We flip into the ever so white and Western concept of domination. The concept of power as domination and the dominating other is what the 2/3 world, mostly people we call “of color”, are so sick of. Domination is what the goating folk are after. Being on top is EVERYTHING TO THEM. But it is not everything to either Jesus or God. The alternative to being one among many -- as opposed to penthoused with the guard at the door -- is not powerlessness. It is not a choice between no power and power. The alternative to power of a different kind – the power to inspire, support and empower, rather than to conquer, kill and destroy. Imagine white, heterosexual folk using THOSE kinds of power! What a different world it would be! God’s power does not come through sacrificial love expressed in his death by dying on the cross. God’s power comes to us as we connect with each other.

The goating starts in the misinterpretation of scriptures. We turn our beloved Savior into King Goat. We focus on Jesus’ murder rather than on his life and the dance of distortion begins.

In some extreme views, focus on Jesus’ murder as God ordained sacrifice entails the weird idea that the Roman death system was actually part of God’s plan. What kind of God requires blood lust or a human sacrifice to satisfy his own rage at children? What kind of God wants me on top and others of God’s children beneath me? Jesus knew that the domination system might kill him, and it did. The fact that even death couldn’t conquer life, however, was a mind bogglingly powerful revelation for Jesus’ followers, past and present. Life after death, as interesting as it is, does not prelude or take precedence over life before death.

What is the opposite of atonement theology? That Jesus is the mark and measure of conquering love and partnership. That nobody needs to be a goat or to have a goat. Sacrifice is Sacer Ficio, the holy doing of loving power.

Genuine Christianity knows there is another way to see Jesus than as the goat that was fried by the powerless. The very self-donation or kenotic emptying of the self of the self is the pattern Jesus of the scriptures did – and it is the solution. Jesus did not die for our sins. He died because bad domination power caught him in the act of challenging it at its deepest level.

The lies we tell about the other are the keys that trap us. “The other, “said Rumi, “is yourself, in the mirror.”

Listen to James Cone show this in Jesus-like love of white folk. “You must accept white people and accept them with love. They are in effect still trapped in a history, which they do not understand. We cannot be free until they are.”

Becoming free is loving our enemies, as Cone does. It is understanding that Jesus is not King Goat, nor crucified King, but instead a partner with us in love of who we are, as we are, flawed, and still held by an astonishing grace.