

Sr. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Lake Worth, Florida



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South Florida



UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

A monthly forum on the third *Saturday* of each month from 6:30 to 7:30 P.M. following Evening Prayer at 6
Most Forums are led by Dr. Richard T. Nolan

Retired Priest-in-Residence, St. Andrew's Church; Philosophy & Religion Professor Emeritus; Editor of www.philosophy-religion.org
Saturday, August 19, 2006

Tonight's Topic -

"LGBT PEOPLE: ASSIMILATE, INTEGRATE, OR STAY SEPARATE?"

Is it a sell-out to the prevailing culture when lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals voluntarily live in the mainstream? Do "conventional" as well as LGBT people prefer that LGBT folks stay/socialize/live among "their own kind?"

A Prayer To Be Said In Unison

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who has committed to your Church the care and nurture of all the faithful; Enlighten with wisdom those who teach and those who learn, that, rejoicing in the knowledge of your truth, they may worship and serve you from generation to generation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1. SOME DEFINITIONS

assimilate

1. To incorporate and absorb into the mind: assimilate knowledge.
2. To make similar; cause to resemble.
3. To absorb (immigrants or a culturally distinct group) into the prevailing culture.

integrate

1. To make into a whole by bringing all parts together; unify.
2.
 - a. To join with something else; unite.
 - b. To make part of a larger unit: integrated the new procedures into the work routine.
3.
 - a. To open to people of all races or ethnic groups without restriction; desegregate.
 - b. To admit (a racial or ethnic group) to equal membership in an institution or society.

2. DOES COMPASS'S MISSION STATEMENT IMPLY ASSIMILATION, INTEGRATION, AND/OR SEPARATISM? See <http://www.compassglcc.com/>.

Compass aims to diminish stereotypes by challenging long-standing misconceptions about the character of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. We accomplish this by emboldening our youth, promoting pride in our community, and acting as an educator, advocate, health service provider, and focal point for community organizing.

3. EXCERPTS FROM "ASSIMILATION AND ITS MEANING -

The End of Gay Culture" in THE NEW REPUBLIC ONLINE by Andrew Sullivan

"Slowly but unmistakably, gay culture is ending. You see it beyond the poignant transformation of P-town: on the streets of the big cities, on university campuses, in the suburbs where gay couples have settled, and in the entrails of the Internet. In fact, it is beginning to dawn on many that the very concept of gay culture may one day disappear altogether. By that, I do not mean that homosexual men and lesbians will not exist--or that they won't create a community of sorts and a culture that sets them in some ways apart. I mean simply that what encompasses gay culture itself will expand into such a diverse set of subcultures that "gayness" alone will cease to tell you very much about any individual. The distinction between gay and straight culture will become so blurred, so fractured, and so intermingled that it may become more helpful not to examine them separately at all.

"The tiny, rich space that gay men and women once created for themselves was, after all, the best they could do. In a metaphor coined by the philosopher Michael Walzer, they gilded a cage of exclusion with magnificent ornaments; they spoke to its isolation and pain; they described and maintained it with dignity and considerable beauty. But it was still a cage. And the thing that kept gay people together, that unified them into one homogeneous unit, and that defined the parameters of their culture and the limits of their dreams, were the bars on that cage. Past the ashes of thousands and through the courage of those who came before the plague and those who survived it, those bars are now slowly but inexorably being pried apart. The next generation may well be as free of that cage as any minority ever can be; and they will redefine gayness on its own terms and not on the terms of hostile outsiders. Nothing will stop this, since it is occurring in the psyches and souls of a new generation: a new consciousness that is immune to any law and propelled by the momentum of human freedom itself. While we should treasure the past, there is no recovering it. The futures--and they will be multiple--are just beginning."

4. THE THREAT OF ASSIMILATION by Paul Varnell

Originally appeared June 28, 2000, in the Chicago Free Press.

We go through this every year. The annual Gay Pride parade brings on the same old chest pounding, breast beating, or tub thumping about diversity, normalization, inclusion, representativeness, self-expression, flamboyance, and much more.

Even as gays and lesbians make economic and social progress in society at large, we seem to make no progress in our internal arguments or rhetoric. Most gays just tune it out — probably rightly.

A favorite current target for the socio-cultural left is the menace of gay "assimilation." "Sex Panic" founder Michael Warner has written of "the trouble with normal." Activist Urvashi Vaid has written of the hostility she feels for bourgeois gay men.

Many other have gleaned in this same field. The latest to add his voice is Mattachine Society co-founder Harry Hay who told the San Francisco Chronicle, "The assimilationist movement is running us into the ground. Most gay people want to be like everyone else."

Hay thinks this is A Bad Thing.

But it is not very clear what Hay means by the "assimilationist movement." There is no organized movement telling gays and lesbians to move, say, to the suburbs and behave like heterosexuals. Besides, that is not really what is happening.

And who is this "us" Hay refers to? It cannot be gays because they are the ones doing it. Hay himself says "most gays" want to be like everyone else.

The point Hay is missing is that it is false to say that gays want to be like everyone else. Gays are already pretty much like everyone else. And this is what Hay, Warner, Vaid and so many others on the cultural left are really unhappy about. And it is why they constantly denounce most of the actually existing gay community.

Their disappointment probably derives ultimately from the ancient Marxist beliefs that the proletariat was the natural vehicle of revolution.

Since the gay left views gays as marginalized and oppressed in the same way classical Marxist thought the proletariat was, they have the same expectations for gays. So when gays do not live up to those expectations, they denounce gays as traitors to, uh, well, the expectations of the gay left.

(The proletariat similarly disappointed classical Marxists: It turned out to be the most conservative social class of all. The workers did not want a revolution; they wanted higher wages and shorter hours.)

The gay left assumed (or hoped) that coming out was a politically transformative act that would somehow (it was never quite clear why) transform torpid, bourgeois closeted gays into zealous out-of-the-closet social radicals. Their message was not simply "Come out" but rather: "Come out and adopt our beliefs and act the way we think you should."

It turned out, of course, that coming out was a transformative process, but psychologically transformative, not politically transformative. Coming out acted along vectors of increased self-esteem, enhanced personal integrity, and a sense of individual empowerment.

Gays who came out of the closet were the very last people willing to be told what to do with their lives. On the contrary, most of them felt more capable of self-determination than they had ever felt before. Trying to tell gays how to act out their liberation just does not work.

There are plenty of ironies here. Harry Hay, long a member of the American Communist Party during its most Stalinist phase, says he has always been seeking brotherhood.

Referring to a 1930s labor strike he participated in (on Party orders) he told the Chronicle, "The brotherhood was intense. You couldn't be a part of that and not have your life changed."

Hay apparently hoped to find something similar among gays. But as a leader of Mattachine, Hay apparently carried over the Communist Party tendency to be directive and controlling. He claimed to be seeking universal brotherhood, but there are hints he did not always get along so well with actually existing individuals.

If so, it need not be surprising. It is a common enough syndrome among highly ideological people. If you have specific aims and expectations for how people should be, most people are going to disappoint your expectations and turn out to be unworthy. And if they fail to move toward your dream then, of course, they are traitors.

This seems to be the source of Hay's current animus as well as that of the others.

Most gays and lesbians, it seems, want to live happy, healthy, prosperous, fulfilled lives, pretty much the way their friends, relatives, and neighbors do. This perfectly reasonable desire is what is denounced as "assimilation."

But the word "assimilation" is somewhat disingenuous if it is meant to imply that gays are thereby sacrificing something that is part of their natural character or essential nature. No one is urging gays to sacrifice anything inherent in or natural to being gay or lesbian, and clearly gays do not see themselves as doing that.

Much the opposite, in fact. More and more gays are insisting that they be accepted for who they are wherever they happen to be and however they want to live.

Better words for this process might be "inclusion" or "integration" — words that suggest that a person is regarded and treated equally at the same time he remains fully himself. Whatever you call this, it would seem to be not a betrayal of the gay movement, but its triumph.

5. SOME FALLIBLE CHRISTIAN REFLECTIONS – by RTN

The words "family" and "community" are thrown around loosely in advertising and to identify a supposed group that has a lot in common. The black community, the Roman Catholic family, the gay community, etc. can suggest that "they're all alike." Patently false.

I think that some of us have discovered that we have more than one "community" -- as defined by Houghton Mifflin (excerpts):

- I. a. A group of people living in the same locality and under the same government.**
- b. The district or locality in which such a group lives.**

- II. a. A group of people having common interests: the scientific community; the international business community.**
- b. A group viewed as forming a distinct segment of society: the gay community; the community of color.]**

- III. a. Similarity or identity: a community of interests.**
- b. Sharing, participation, and fellowship.**

- IV. Society as a whole; the public.**

I'm not sure whether within each overlapping category we are integrated and/or assimilated. Certainly, as a gay couple or as individuals, we are not embraced/welcome by some/many in each major category. What does that mean re integrate/assimilate/separatism? I'm not sure.

For Bob and me: Our common identity as baptized "children of God" is who we are most fundamentally, and our vocation is the living out Jesus' "Summary of the Law" (love God, neighbor, and self). This unifying factor is what holds in perspective all of our communities, roles, etc. in which we are participants to one extent or another. Each of us is a "child of God," called to love and be loved; within that context our sexual orientation is homosexual; our roles include educator, priest, writer, retiree, and so on; our ancestries and race are such and such - and so on. But as children of God we seem not to be fully integrated or assimilated among sociological categories of relationships.

A larger question: To what extent should Christians be assimilated, integrated, or separate? For Christians, are there inevitable degrees of "misfitting" with most/all communities?