

*DignityUSA works for respect and justice for people of all sexual orientations, genders and gender identities—especially gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons—in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy, and support.*

## Reforming the Roman Catholic Church

By John J. McNeill

It should be evident to all that the paternalistic hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church has lost contact with the Spirit of God and is no longer its instrument. The clergy sexual-abuse crisis, the effort of the hierarchy to cover that up, and the attitude in the hierarchy that their primary objective is not to convey the message of Christ but to do anything to protect their own power, prestige, and wealth has made their very existence idolatrous. The hierarchy as presently constituted is the exact opposite to the movement based on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that Jesus announced at the Last Supper.



John J. McNeill

The perfect example of that loss of contact with the Holy Spirit occurred when Pope John Paul II heaped all sorts of honors and privileges on Marcial Maciel Degollado, the founder of the religious society Legion of Christ (the Legionaries), a pedophile who bought his way into the Vatican. At the same time, Pope John Paul humiliated and deposed the saintly Pedro Arrupe, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). Archbishop Rembert Weakland made this comment about Arrupe:

“Arrupe resembled perfectly what I imagined St. Ignatius would have looked like. He laughed easily and made us all feel at home. For the next two years I found myself working closely with him. I counted that relationship as one of my great blessings during my years as primate. As I came to know him better and better, I realized he was the most saintly person I had ever encountered, free of all bias, truly compassionate, deeply prayerful, trusting of others, and intellectually very sharp. Perhaps his experiences in Japan during the war, his presence at Hiroshima with the dropping of the atom bomb in August 1945, and his many years as a superior contributed to making such a holy and yet totally human personality. If from all the people I have known in my life in the Church, I had to select only one for sainthood, it would be Pedro Arrupe.”

This spiritual blindness that prevented the hierarchy from being able to recognize the evil of Degollado and the saintliness

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of Pedro Arrupe is a clear sign of their lack of contact with the Spirit of God.

This process whereby members of the hierarchy lose their commission from God and need to be reformed and replaced has occurred several times in the history of the Jewish-Christian church. Ezekiel sees God in a vision detaching himself from the Temple in Jerusalem in the form of a chariot becoming flexible and mobile (Ezekiel 10). Ezekiel then has a vision of God upbraiding the shepherds (the hierarchy) of Israel (the Temple Priests) for having failed to feed his sheep and abandoning them, to meet their own self interest (Ezekiel 34:1-10). This is an exact parallel with what is happening in the Roman Catholic Church at this point in history.

God then revealed a new understanding of shepherding in which God himself would be the shepherd, “Behold I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep!” (Ezekiel 34:11-12).

Judaism and Christianity are both religions of the collapsing Temple. There is always a connection between the collapse of the Temple and the Spirit of God bringing into existence a new form of shepherding. It was the collapse of the Temple in 587 BC which led to the creation of text-based Judaism. And, again, the collapse of the Temple in 70 AD which led to the creation of Rabbinic Judaism.

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In every case the collapse is part of God's plan to get through to his people and help them to get beyond something that is no longer worthy of them. It took a long time, but only after Ezekiel achieved a certain form of indifference to the fate of the Temple was he able to receive the vision from God of God himself shepherding his people without any intermediary.

In the gospel of John, Jesus identifies the new Temple with his body and the body of all who have received the indwelling Spirit. I am sure that anyone who has experienced God's love and has been freed from self-rejection, and then takes the final step under the guidance of God's Spirit of freeing themselves from external Church authority, will also hear the call to ministry in their hearts. In this very process they have become members of the Church of the Holy Spirit.

There is no doubt in my mind that we are at present in a new stage of the collapsing Temple and the emergence of a new form of shepherding. In the 13th century, Joachim of Flores saw three stages in the development of God's church. The first was the Church of obedience to the Father, the Church of Israel; the second was the Church of the Son, Jesus, which he identified with the hierarchical Catholic church. He prophesied that there would come the day when the hierarchical church, becoming superfluous, would in time dissolve and in its place would emerge the Church of the Holy Spirit. I believe that time is now.

Ministry in the Church of the Holy Spirit will come from a direct call of the Holy Spirit to any baptized person from within their spiritual self-awareness. The task of authority will be to listen prayerfully to what the Holy Spirit is saying through the people of God. All authority will proceed from the bottom up and not from the top down. Every community should prayerfully discern spirits to select among their members the one whom God is calling to leadership. That individual could be a man or woman, married or single, gay or straight! The Church of the Holy Spirit must become a totally democratic church with no caste system, no higher or lower; rather, totally equal, women with men, gays with straights; everyone possessing the Holy Spirit within them; everyone an authority.

For example, who knows what God wants from women? Obviously, only women can discern what God is asking of them. The task of authority in the evolving Church of the Holy Spirit is to enter into dialogue with its women members and discern carefully what God is saying to the Church through its female members.

Another example, who knows what God wants from the lesbian and gay members of the Church? Obviously, only the lesbians and gays! No one can tell us from outside what God wants of us. We are alone in knowing with an experiential knowledge that our love for each other contains the divine spirit and brings with it the kind of peace and joy that indicates the presence of the Holy Spirit.

How, then, can we help the Holy Spirit in her task of transforming the hierarchical Roman Catholic Church into the

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Begun in 1969 in San Diego, CA under the leadership of Fr. Patrick Nidorf, OSA, first as a counseling group and then a support group in Los Angeles, DignityUSA has been a national organization since 1973 uniting GLBT Catholics, their families and friends.

DignityUSA is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose national office is located in the Greater Boston area, with chapters located throughout the United States.

Members gather at local chapters, periodic regional meetings and biennial national conventions.

The **QV** encourages the exchange of opinions, book reviews, reflections, background information, resource materials and essays and articles by established speakers and professionals touching on spirituality, human sexuality and its expression, and the mission of DignityUSA. Of special interest are personal experiences and what has worked well in areas of pastoral ministry, human and social justice issues, leadership, chapter and faith community building.

Opinions expressed in reflections, reviews, letters, etc., are those of their authors and not necessarily those of DignityUSA.

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democratic Church of the Holy Spirit? As I see it, the whole Protestant reformation was a premature and aborted attempt to bring about that transformation. Many Protestant communions have developed a much more democratic structure, closer to the Church of the Holy Spirit that Jesus intended. The Roman Catholic Church, in the spirit of ecumenism and respecting the charism, i.e., the special gifts the Holy Spirit has granted the Protestant churches, should open itself to a humble dialogue to see what it can learn from their successes and failures. A similar dialogue should be held with all the world's major religions.

The urgent necessity for reform makes the call of a new world-wide Church council imperative! But if the new council is just a repetition of Vatican II with only male hierarchs present, it will necessarily fail to undertake a radical transformation of the

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Church. The very existence of the hierarchy is the problem and we cannot expect the hierarchy to vote themselves out of existence.

The Second Vatican Council took the first step when it redefined the Church as “the People of God.” The new council, then, must be a council that truly represents “the People of God.” The Second Vatican Council also set the agenda for the world council of “the People of God” when it restated the Christian doctrine of freedom of conscience:

Every man has in his heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor. In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals and from social relationships (Vatican Council II, 1966, n. 16, pp. 213-214).

Three major considerations and tasks for the new council will be:

- How to guarantee that church leadership makes its primary task to listen carefully to what the Holy Spirit is saying to it through the people of God,
- How to organize the church so that every baptized member has a say, or at least a representation, in the governing body of the church,
- To seek out what church organization respects the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in every member of the church.

Let us all pray to the Holy Spirit to come and rescue the Roman Catholic Church from its present bondage to a male clerical hierarchy!

*Editor’s notes: John J. McNeill, a renowned author, theologian, psychotherapist, and gay activist, has ministered as priest and psychotherapist to lesbians and gays for over 39 years. He helped found Dignity/New York to provide a safe and loving community within the Catholic Church for gay people. He has given retreats for lesbians and gays at Kirkridge, an ecumenical retreat center in Bangor, Pennsylvania, for over 34 years.*

*John has written four books on gay spirituality: The Church and the Homosexual; Taking a Chance on God; Freedom, Glorious Freedom, and Sex as God Intended: A Reflection on Human Sexuality as Play. He published an autobiography, Both Feet Planted Firmly in Midair: My Spiritual Journey, on his spiritual journey as a gay priest. A new edition of Freedom, Glorious Freedom just released by Lethe Press is available in paperback from the publisher and from Amazon.com.*

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*In 1997, John was honored with DignityUSA's first ever Lifetime Achievement Award.*

*In January 2009, John released "An Open Letter to Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Levada, Cardinal George, and all Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in the World on the Issue of Homosexuality" reprinted with permission in DignityUSA's QV: Quarterly Voice 1st Quarter 2009.*  
<http://www.dignityusa.org/qv/qv-1stquarter-2009>.

*New Ways Ministry honored John during its 2009 Bridge Building Award luncheon in October 2009.*

*John is a member of Dignity/Ft. Lauderdale and Dignity/New York.*

*For more information visit [www.johnmcneill.com](http://www.johnmcneill.com) and his blog at <http://johnmcneillspiritualtransformation.blogspot.com>* ▼

## **Revisiting The Mystical Body of Christ**

*By Marie Sweeney, Dignity/Columbus (Ohio)*

As a relatively new member of DignityUSA, a married heterosexual woman, and a person called to priesthood since I was a child, I'd like to add my voice to the on-going conversation about DignityUSA as part of the Roman Catholic Church.

I have been a formal member of DignityUSA for five years. Previously I had been in an institutional pastoral position where the members from the local Dignity chapter were overtly and lovingly supportive of me, and where I was able to provide some voice to their minority experience in my preaching and teaching. When it was clear that the ministry of preaching would no longer be available to me, I opted to join DignityUSA and Dignity/Columbus, not to preach, but to make a deeper commitment with those whom I shared a faithful church-on-the-fringe experience. I came to Dignity, not feeling like an outsider, but building on relationships already formed by our shared faith in the God who calls us to live and love fully. It was a matter of relationship, not Church order, not shared life style. I am a distinct minority in our chapter. Currently there is one other woman and her male husband. This is not a source of discomfort for me (and I dare say, not for them), but rather a source of profound complementarity, a blessed relationship. I am a greedy person of faith: greedy to hear the gospel lived from an experience different from my own; greedy to know the intimacy of faith in a community that is enriching my lived experience of God among us. I use very traditional Catholic language to claim this as an experience of the Mystical Body of Christ.

The Mystical Body of Christ has long been used to describe the Church in the world. It is the institutional approach to Church that is the basis for the question of membership. I do not start my ecclesiology from this perspective of either/or, but rather from the mystical approach of both/and. The institutional

Church has long accepted the reality of mystical participation beyond the limits of Church order. We have the notions of baptism of desire and baptism by fire — inclusion in the Mystical Body without formal celebration of the sacraments of initiation, but through relationship. We have the historical experience of the desert fathers and mothers of the early Church who certainly did not confer with their bishops on the orthodoxy of what they were teaching. They were recognized as holy not through Church authorities, but through the mentoring relationships with pilgrims seeking a deeper faith. We have the long experience of mystics like Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Sienna, and John of the Cross whose spiritual lives resonated far beyond official Church teaching, and whose writings were sometimes suppressed. But because they opted to offer a minority perspective to the entire body, because they remained in relationship, we name them today as saints.

We are a church of Tradition with a capital "T", and a church of tradition with a small "t." And both have their necessary roles within the universal Mystical Body of Christ. And I dare claim that currently, the organization of DignityUSA at the national and local chapter levels contributes the small "t" to the institution that we claim as ours, the Roman Catholic Church. Do we really think that the liturgical and theological changes of Vatican II all happened among those clerics gathered in Rome for those few short years in the early '60s? Of course not. People like Yves Congar, Pierre Teilhard, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Mary Luke Tobin had been living and experimenting with new and innovative ways of being Church, again the small "t", not to sever relationship with the Church but to enrich it. Not all of what they proposed was readily accepted, however their contributions to the Mystical Body of Christ continue to bless and influence us today. The function of DignityUSA, along with other reform groups who claim the Roman Catholic Church as home, is not to teach Tradition, but to contribute to tradition as part of the Mystical Body of Christ. In this vein, valid and licit are simply not applicable. We're not offering a normative experience to be embraced by the entire Church. We are living a faith life appropriate to our experience and faith needs that creates both relatedness and tension, trusting that the Spirit will make what she will of our discerned efforts. Through this Spirit, our Roman Catholic Church as institution will eventually come to the naming of Tradition through time and experience. That time is not now. That determination is not ours to make. DignityUSA's unique gift is the addressing, as well as we are able, sexual issues for the Church: sexual identity, sexual orientation, gender role and definition, and sexual ethics. To dissent in place is our vocation within this Mystical Body of Christ. By being one of these voices of "the other" within the institution, we pray to contribute to a fuller communion, a more inclusive Body that can with more integrity influence the entire world.

Sometimes the institutional Church today acts as if we have always been monolithic. Nothing could be further from the truth. Remember it was Paul of Tarsus who began incorporating gentile Christ believers into the Body which he describes so

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eloquently in 1 Corinthians 12. This was his contribution to tradition. It was not until Peter had his own revelation (Acts 10:9-16), and Paul confronted Peter and the Jerusalem church leadership later (Acts 15:1-21), that this practice could become Tradition. It took time, experience and some confrontation and conversion for followers of Christ to move beyond simply a sect of Judaism. The Roman Catholic Church (not the Jerusalem Catholic Church!) was born from tension. Monolithic practice has never been the case, and if it becomes so, our beloved Church must die from lack of creative tension. Then, how can Christ's transforming presence be proclaimed?

As I write, my husband and I are currently on vacation, and are relishing the contemplative activity that is snorkeling. Yesterday we were at a site that provided an image for the dynamic I am trying to describe. The underwater world was a veritable garden of coral — delicate Christmas tree and flower corals; rigid brain and stag horn coral and toxic fire coral; soft green and purple sea fans, anemones, and black spiked sea urchins. Among this garden moved creatures of every imaginable shape and color: black and white eagle rays, schools of brilliant blue tangs, chameleon-like lizard fish, trumpet fish and flounder, shape-changing squid and octopus, multiple varieties of parrot fish, and turtles—elegant graceful turtles. And all of them were reliant on one another. Parrot fish eating coral and creating sand, small wrasse cleaning larger species, soft coral providing camouflage to the more vulnerable fish, turtles eating grass so that the “field” might grow, large-eyed squirrel fish shielding themselves from light under the hard coral. It took this wide diversity, all of it, to create and sustain this amazing scene. It is this complementarity, this relationship of mutual reliance on one another, which creates what is in the final outcome: true communion. Approaching Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, there is no need to prioritize, no sense in trying to “order” one experience as preferable to the other. All are needed for true Communion.

Is DignityUSA part of the Roman Catholic Church? We are. We are essential to the Church's survival. Our life of faith is not normative nor does it need to be. We are simply called to contribute within the Mystical Body of Christ as other prophets and mystics have before us, dissenting in place, providing the opportunity for fuller Communion, providing a more powerful witness for God-with-us — all of us. ▼

## Reflections on QV First Quarter 2010 Issue

By Jim Marion, Director, Institute for Spiritual Awareness, Washington, D.C.

I was so impressed by the issue on “Misogyny and Homophobia” that, for the first time, I sent congratulations to editor Bill Welch. For many years now, as a result of my own experiences, study, and contemplative insights, I have been

convinced that women's liberation and gay liberation are intimately connected, with the latter being a subset or a fruit of the former. You cannot have one without the other. My friend Fr. John J. McNeill explains this connection brilliantly in his essay, as does the philosopher Richard Tarnas whose work McNeill cites. Similarly in my 2000 book, *Putting on the Mind of Christ: The Inner Work of Christian Spirituality*, in a shortened and slightly edited version, I wrote:

Another mistake Christians have made has been the equating of Eve (and therefore all women) with the negative. St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas were the most influential proponents of this view. Today some Christians are applying the same logic to persons of same-sex expression. This tends to create great personal and societal imbalance, injustice, suffering, persecution, tyranny, and even warfare. In the extreme it always ends up justifying murder.

Why did St. Augustine and St. Thomas (and Christianity in general following them) equate women with the negative and, by extension, males who act effeminately or assume the receptor role in anal penetration? I believe it was because, in terms of human consciousness development, the mental or rational level had not yet been clearly differentiated from the emotional/biological. Human identity, therefore, had not yet clearly transcended the emotional/biological. In mythology, women, are associated with both the biological and the emotional—the lower part of human nature (in the judgment of those such as Augustine and Thomas). Therefore, the rational mind (the “male”) had to be freed from the biological/emotional in order for human identity to ascend to the rational level.

This shifting of human identity from identification with the biological/emotional to identification with the rational mind has been the principal spiritual task of the last two thousand years. Augustine, Thomas, and many other Christians played important roles in helping human consciousness make this transition — a task substantially completed in the advanced countries only in the last couple hundred years. It was only when reason was fully differentiated from the biological/emotional, and when human identity had transcended the biological/emotional, that women's liberation began during the eighteenth century. That is because the purely rational worldview, stripped of mythic, biological, and emotional confusions, sees men and women as equals.

In the process of this transition to rational consciousness, however, as so often happens in individual consciousness development, Western society was not content to differentiate reason from the body and emotions. It went much farther. It made a god of reason and judged reason (the male) superior. Society, including the Church, then used reason to suppress the

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biological, the emotional, the sexual, and the feminine. The result was a patriarchal system of oppression as well as civilian and military exploitation of Mother Earth by reason's technologies.

With respect to Christian spirituality, I believe it is no accident that the modern apparitions of Jesus' Mother Mary, beginning in the first half of the nineteenth century and increasing in number even today, have been roughly contemporaneous with the rise of women's liberation. The apparitions are one indication that the spiritual balance between the male and female principles must now be restored. If humans as a whole are to progress beyond reason into the psychic and other higher levels of consciousness, the restoration of the feminine spiritual principle ("God as woman" in shorthand) is essential. Mary's appearances reflect the importance God places on such a rebalancing.

This great shift in spiritual consciousness, which is essential for the further spiritual evolution of humans, is occurring all over the planet and cannot be stopped. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, the inner engine of human spiritual evolution. I am grateful that it was honored and expressed so well in the 1st Quarter 2010 issue of *QV: Quarterly Voice*.

Another question addressed within the last two issues is whether DignityUSA should call itself Roman Catholic. Disagreeing with my friend Daniel Helminiak, I believe we certainly should. We have been told that we are sinful, that we are psychologically ill, and that we are disordered. It has taken many of us decades to overcome the interiorized homophobia we suffered by accepting these labels. Should we now interiorize the label of non-Catholic because a few bishops consider us, and others including nuns who disagree with them, "so-called Catholics?" Certainly not. We should also remember that current Roman Catholic Church teaching on homosexuality is based on natural law, not the gospel, and that the bishops have no more competence in deciding questions of natural law than any other reasonable person. If anyone is an expert on homosexuality and natural law it is us, not the bishops. So, we should in no case allow others to write us out of the Church.

*Editor's note: Jim Marion, a member of DignityUSA, is the founder and Director of the Institute for Spiritual Awareness in Washington, D.C. and one of the founding members of Ken Wilber's Institute for Integral Spirituality. Marion, the author of Putting on the Mind of Christ: The Inner Work of Christian Spirituality, and The Death of the Mythic God, the Rise of Evolutionary Spirituality, studied for the Catholic priesthood and later undertook divinity studies at the interdenominational Hartford Seminary. He also obtained a law degree from Boston University. From 1973 to 2004, Marion was a public policy lawyer in Washington, D.C., including service in the Carter Administration and as counsel to a committee of Congress. Since his first book was published in 2000, Marion has spoken about spirituality, mysticism and human consciousness development at many conferences, workshops and churches. Marion lives in Washington, D.C.* ▼

**Be Somebody or Die**

By the Rev. Dr. Stephen Johnson

I attended DignityUSA's 40th Anniversary Convention in July 2009 in San Francisco to honor a friend of many years. I was impressed with the quality, love, and dedication of the people with whom I spoke. I read about the principal liturgical celebration which was part of the packet and reluctantly realized that I could not participate. No one knew me and so I went on. Then my brother Daniel Helminiak spoke for me in the *QV: Quarterly Voice* for 4th Quarter 2009.

There were three articles in response to that in the *QV* for 1st Qtr 2010. All were written thoughtfully and articulately. Two spoke of the pain of being GLBT in the Roman Catholic Church and how could I do anything but say "Amen." The only thing I would dispute is that having 90% of Roman Catholics accepting of gays would do no good. The people are the Church and they can change the Church. The "Barque of Peter," in a bid to maintain a steadfast course for centuries, takes a long time to change direction. That is good because its function is to guard the deposit of faith. However, the rigidity is painful to people whose lifetimes are too short. Despite the difficulties with the institutional church, the Roman Catholic Church is my family and I will not read anyone out of it.

Victoria Rue's article in the same issue is similarly well-written and insightful, but it speaks clearly to my fear that DignityUSA is moving out of the Roman Catholic Church. The church of my childhood lacked the sacraments and told me to check my brain at the door. The Roman church spoke very differently. I found a home. I stay because it is my Family and I love it. The Church will be changed by those who stay.

Victoria wants to include everyone. Bravo! The door must always be seen as open. She rightly speaks in her liturgy of celebrating the mystical Body of Christ, but it is not the sacramental Body of Christ. She wants atonement, redemption, and violence removed. In doing so, she removes Jesus' self-understanding, the core of the gospel, and the conduct of our brothers and sisters in faith. In her words, I see Jesus as teacher and brother, but not Lord. To be true to that, she should cease calling herself WomanPriest and title herself WomanMinister. A priest offers sacrifice. To find an ecclesiology, I suggest she look at the Quakers, a pneumatic Model of God's People.

Victoria rightly observes that power has too often been used to control people; I agree. Jesus did not come in power but in authority, which is why Jesus can suffer violence for merely being Himself. A priest exercises authority: I would retain that while sharing power with others in the Church — a call for collegiality. Why women cannot exercise all the offices in the Church that do not require the authority of Holy Orders is a naked use of power which undercuts the official teaching that women are not inferior, yet they cannot hold priesthood.

Talented and holy women could and should hold most offices in the Church. For example, since the Congregation for

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the Doctrine of the Faith is a teaching office, one could perhaps see the Prefect being ordained, but what is there in the congregation that supervises orders of religious life for women and men that a non-ordained woman is unable to lead? Similarly, though present church law requires a cardinal to be a bishop, there is no reason that a lay person, a lay woman, could not be a cardinal. I would like to be a fly on the wall at the next Conclave!

The Eucharist is a foreshadowing of the paschal feast of the Kingdom and pilgrim's food on the way. Victoria's vision is different but not catholic.

DignityUSA must be someone or die. If it chooses Victoria's vision or perspective, I fear it will wither away. Whatever course DignityUSA chooses, the bonds of love must never fail.

*Editor's notes: Rev. Johnson, a priest in the Southwest United States, holds a master's degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and a doctorate in ministry from an ecumenical school of theology.*

**The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has a dark history. It was established by Pope Paul III in 1542 as the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition. The body was renamed the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office in 1908 by Pope Saint Pius X, or simply the Holy Office. The name was changed to Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on December 7, 1965. In 1983, "Sacred" was dropped from the names of Vatican Congregations, and so the dicastery adopted its current name Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.**

*I concur with the question posed by the author, "...what is there in the congregation that supervises orders of religious life for women and men that a non-ordained woman is unable to lead?" I would add, why shouldn't educated, competent women religious and lay persons be considered for leadership positions in other Congregations such as Causes of Saints and Evangelization of People?* ▼



**Maryknoll Father Roy Bourgeois' National Tour: Shattering the Glass Ceiling**

By Leo N. Egashira  
From Dignity/Seattle's May 2010 Newsletter with permission.

On Saturday, April 10, 2010, Father Roy Bourgeois spoke about Shattering the Glass Ceiling, his promotion of women to the Catholic Priesthood. The Call To Action Western Washington-sponsored event was held at St. Mark's (Episcopal) Cathedral in Seattle, an irony not lost on the approximately 150 people who attended.



Leo Egashira

He started with the words, "First, I apologize to women for being silent so long." He then recounted his faith journey: Roy grew up in Louisiana in a traditional Cajun Catholic town, where the status quo was accepted without question. There was no critique of church or foreign policy. In the 1960s, he volunteered for military duty in Vietnam. The incredible suffering he witnessed was the turning point in his life. He turned and looked to God for answers. Someone recommended the Maryknoll Missionary Order. And, as Fr. Bourgeois states, "Being a male, I was able to pursue my call."

He was ordained in 1972 and sent to work in the slums of La Paz, Bolivia for five years, and became acutely aware that the U.S. government supported the military dictatorship that oppressed the common people. It was easy to see why Latin America gave birth to Liberation Theology, which was not top-down, but circular, epitomized by the belief that "We are Church." Fr. Bourgeois' questioning and activism got him arrested and deported from Bolivia.

Back in the U.S., he became even more aware of other disingenuous U.S. activities in Latin America. In 1980 Fr. Bourgeois became involved in issues surrounding U.S. policy in El Salvador after four U.S. churchwomen—two of them his friends—were raped and killed by Salvadorian soldiers. The U.S. not only supplied weapons to the Salvadorian military, but trained the soldiers who were killing peasants, opposition leaders, and activist Church workers. In 1990, Fr. Bourgeois went to the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA—or as he calls it "School of Assassins") at Fort Benning, Georgia and started the SOA Watch movement ([www.SOAW.org](http://www.SOAW.org)) that seeks to close the SOA through vigils and fasts, demonstrations, and nonviolent protest, as well as media and legislative work. What started with ten protesters in 1990 grew to 15,000 protesters by November 2009.

While opposing foreign policy injustices, Fr. Bourgeois became aware of women religious oppression. He listed four compelling arguments:

1. The call for priesthood comes from our God. Who am I to negate women's call?

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**Maryknoll Father Roy Bourgeois' National Tour: Shattering the Glass Ceiling**  
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2. The current policy is rooted in sexism, which is immoral.
3. It implies that men are worthy, but women are not. With the serious scandals in the institutional church, we know better. If we had women priests, and yes, a woman pope, this cover-up would not have been possible.
4. It is a grave insult to an all-loving God, who made men and women of equal dignity.

What reason does the Vatican offer? Tradition—Jesus only chose male apostles. But, there is a problem with this rationale: Mary Magdalene was the first witness to the resurrection, while the male apostles were hiding. And, only women were present at both the crucifixion and resurrection. Society didn't believe in women then. 2000 years later, the Church still doesn't believe in women.

Fr. Bourgeois decided that he could not remain silent, for silence is the voice of complicity. A few years ago, during a live Vatican Radio interview, he blurted out, "There will never be justice until women can be ordained." The Italian interpreter stopped, yanked the microphone, and the radio station started playing a Gregorian Chant!

In August of 2008, Fr. Bourgeois was invited to attend, give a homily, and jointly preside at the ordination of a Roman Catholic Womanpriest (RCWP) in Kentucky. In less than three months, he received a letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ("pretty fast compared to the Vatican's reaction to the sex scandals!") stating that he had "caused a church scandal," and to recant in 30 days or be excommunicated. Fr. Bourgeois sent a letter within two weeks. There has been no communication since then.

Following Fr. Bourgeois' presentation, RCWP ordinand Diane Whelan of Olympia, WA related her own journey. She was ordained Saturday, May 22, 2010, in Olympia, WA.

- During a question and answer period facilitated by both speakers, a few more major points were emphasized:
- The Church cannot address sexism without addressing the Church's addiction to power and the status and privileges that power confers.
  - Rarely do people voluntarily give up power.
  - Change will come from the bottom-up, not top-down
  - There is a very real need for a Vatican III to talk about mandatory celibacy and women's ordination—two issues not addressed in Vatican II.

The following day, April 11th, Father Bourgeois spoke on "A Struggle for Justice in Latin America" at Evergreen State College in Olympia. During May 2010, he will continue his tour in New York State and Toronto. For a full schedule of Fr. Bourgeois' speaking tour, as well as information on how to book him to speak to your group, please visit <http://www.soaw.org/article.php?id=412>.

*Editor's notes: The School of the Americas has been renamed the "Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation" (WHISC or WHINSEC). The WHINSEC, located at Ft. Benning, Georgia, provides professional education and training for civilian, military, and law enforcement students from nations throughout the Western Hemisphere. It is now part of the U.S. Department of Defense and was established under the Defense Authorization Act for FY01 (2001)*

*Leo N. Egashira is a member of DignityUSA's National Board of Directors and serves as Publications Committee Chairperson. He is also a longtime member of Dignity/Seattle and serves as the chapter's newsletter editor.* ▼

**BOOK RELEASE ANNOUNCEMENT**

**Equality, Dignity, and Same-Sex Marriage: A Rights Disagreement in Democratic Societies**

By Man Yee Karen Lee

This book investigates the concepts of equality and dignity under same-sex marriage jurisprudence. Having surveyed the multinational developments of same-sex marriage and arguments from proponents and opponents, the writer studies the two concepts with an aim to revealing their inadequacies as grounds for contentious rights claims such as same-sex marriage. To truly live up to the spirit of equality and equal dignity, the writer argues that the seemingly uncompromising disagreement over the issue requires people to explore common ground to make room for deliberation. It also requires the disagreeing parties to acknowledge that their disagreement is about the best interpretation of fundamental values that everyone shares, and not confrontation between conflicting worldviews, neither of which is comprehensible to the other.

- Chapter 1  
Same-sex Marriage: History, Law, and Disagreements
- Chapter 2  
The Classic Concept of Equality and the Case for Same-sex Marriage
- Chapter 3  
Human Dignity and Same-sex Marriage
- Chapter 4  
Human Dignity and its Role in the Equality Jurisprudence
- Looking Back and Looking Forward
- Bibliography, Index.

Man Yee Karen Lee, Ph.D. (2009) in Laws, University of Hong Kong, is a law lecturer at Hong Kong Shue Yan University. She wrote "Universal Human Dignity: Some Reflections in the Asian Context", (2008) *Asian Journal of Comparative Law*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Art 10.

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## People of Faith in the LGBT Community: Overcoming Bipolarity in Britain

By Ihar Ivanou, Co-editor, *Quest Bulletin*, *Quest*, United Kingdom. Reprinted with permission.

This paper was prepared for the Belarusian National LGBT Conference in Minsk, 26 November 2009

Bipolarity in the title of the text has nothing to do with the bipolar affective disorder; rather it signifies a situation of two poles which despite of being parts of the same body - are staying away from each other as far as possible...something like the two poles of our planet.

### Constructed character of our identity

The first ever Month Against Homophobia in Belarus which took place in April 2009 started with showing a documentary, **Fish Can't Fly** about American lesbian and gay Christians who wasted years and lots of money in pursuit of becoming heterosexuals. The so-called reparative therapy did not work in their cases and the film narrated their touching stories.

I guessed then that the organisers did not plan anything symbolic for the night, so I had an honour both to present the film and to explain to the audience that the documentary would be about people who quite often are marginalised in the LGBT community itself. It was a good occasion to remind myself and my brothers and sisters that any community, association and group, – even the most marginalised and persecuted, – is capable of closing its eyes and disregarding those who for one or another reason do not confirm the spontaneously created moulds of social identity, thinking and behaviour. The LGBT community is not an exception — the same processes take place within it as outside, because exactly the same anthropological mechanisms shape all our interactions.

No one group is isolated from the outside world and therefore cannot control entirely its own identity. What is outside influences what we are paying attention to and what we are fighting with; it influences our vocabulary, desires etc. Often this influence can be discerned in our reactions, for example reactions to criticism or conceptualisation of us by those who have no direct relation to us. The list of institutions and voices which take part in discussion about LGBT people, in shaping our identity, in directing us and even provoking us on certain understandings, desires and behaviours can be very, very long. Among them are family, school, the government, medicine, the subculture of night clubs etc. One of the most vocal, consistent and provocative voices belongs to the churches and in the first place to their ministers.

### Love the sinner, hate the sin?

Often church ministers explain their negative attitude to gays by caring for children, family, the moral health of society, procreation and even by caring for gays themselves. As a rule one of two paradigms can be seen in there: homosexuality as perversion or homosexuality as an illness or disorder. Often those two ideas intertwine on the same lips. Perversion calls for punishment and isolation: the society protects itself by criminalisation and stripping “perverse ones” of certain rights.

The tune of illness - in the first appearance - sounds less violently as its fans are trying to distinguish sexual orientation from acting on it. The orientation itself or inclination - as often is being spoken about it is not something homosexual people should be blamed for, however there cannot be justification for sexual relations, qualified by some as unnatural behaviour and sin. Hence, in the eyes of those who see homosexuality as a disorder, gay people need help and compassion, not punishment.

A consistent teaching on that matter is quite a late development. For example, the Catholic Church started shaping it only in the 1970s. The current Catechism of the Catholic Church dedicates to homosexuality three statements in the context of vocation for chastity. They are saying that homosexuality took different forms in different times and its genesis is mainly unexplained. Tradition, however, the Catechism says, - always perceived same-sex sexual relations as disordered in the sense that they are against natural law. In other words, against the order of the created world. According to the Catechism, people with same-sex attraction should be treated with respect, compassion and sensitivity, and without unjust discrimination. At the same time the Church has called homosexual people to sexual abstinence.

The Catechism may sound generous compared to those who would call gay people perverts. However, it's only the bones on which more flesh has been and is being added. The Catholic hierarchy in some countries, most noticeably in the USA, campaigned for banning gay people from certain professions. The Catholic hierarchy consistently and around the globe attempts to block the legalisation of same-sex civil partnerships and non-religious marriages, as well as adoption rights of same-sex partners. Such discrimination in civil rights is taken as just and acceptable by those who shape the “official” Catholic teaching and policy.

I have met people who sincerely believed that the model of pathologising homosexuality provides the possibility of a just and compassionate attitude to gays, that it is the best they could offer. In such a case, a basic problem is unavoidable: pathologising something always has moral consequences; it always leads to systematic stigmatising and marginalising of those who are regarded ill or disordered. For example, in spite of beautiful words about the unacceptability of unjust discrimination of gay people, Catholic schools in Britain are quite helpless in the case of homophobic bullying. Many thousands of boys and girls are victims of that bullying; many of them are even not sure about their sexual orientation. This is an example of how pathologising a particular form of human desire makes people and society unable to care for and rescue others. The ancient Christian principle “Love the sinner, hate the sin” does not work in such a complex society as the one we live in.

### Eye for eye

Gays often pay back to organised religions with the same currency: with a negative and even categorical refusal to acknowledge that religion may have a positive role in the lives of gay people. Peter Tatchell arguably the most well-known gay

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activist of our time - said once that “The Bible is to gays what Mein Kampf is to Jews. It is the theory and practice of Homo-Holocaust.” Although most LGBT activists would not subscribe to such views, the strategy of some LGBT organisations is directed not only to strengthening the secular character of the civil institutes of society and the separation of the state and religion, but also to marginalisation of religious institutes in social life. The secular character of the state should be welcomed. Marriage, education, army, legal and judicial systems - all these create a secular society - should be beyond religious control. However, it does not mean that all aspects of social life have to be beyond religious influence. Belief, including a religious belief, is one of the authentic manifestations of humanity, a certain instinct. Those who have belief have the same rights as those who do not carry any particular beliefs, who do not know or are searching, as well as those who believe in the absence of God. The LGBT community is struggling with the idea of equal rights for people of faith. As any other social group, the LGBT community has its own internalised myths and stereotypes which to a great extent are the products of confrontations and struggles in which the community has been involved for various reasons. The LGBT community has its own longstanding enemies and organised religion is one of them. Many accusations against those enemies if they were directed against gay people - would provoke a strong discomfort in the LGBT community.

A friend of mine is convinced that in our age it is easier to say that one is gay than that one believes and practices a religious faith. This illustrates well the limitations of commonly assumed identities like gay, lesbian etc. LGBT people themselves can easily find themselves on the receiving end of the LGBT community’s religiophobia - especially those queers who would never dare to swap their religious communities for the LGBT one. Over the years, I have met a number of such people. Their number is especially large among those who instead of gay bars and clubs frequent gay websites like Gaydar, QGuys, GayRomeo and similar. A lot of their visitors are closeted men, many of them would never identify themselves with being gay and the LGBT community. A large proportion of them practice religion; belonging to a faith community is one of the paramount aspects of their lives. An image of an iceberg where the part hidden under the water is much larger than the visible one comes to my mind. The thought that our work and struggles will affect many more people than we see now, should encourage us to critical reflection, to being careful in choosing words and being open to various manifestations of being human.

Peter Tatchell’s words quoted above were said ten years ago. Today, that would probably be impossible. In the last decade, the LGBT community has faced the challenges posed by Islam and the first experience of engaging with Muslims was not a happy one. The leaders of the Muslim LGBT group publicly criticised islamophobic attitudes of LGBT activists and pointed to the negative consequences of such attitudes for the well-being of Muslim gays and lesbians. It seems to me that the situation

has radically changed after the introduction of Civil Partnerships and allowing child adoption by same-sex couples. The British Government takes into account opinions of religious organisations as it has taken the view that an ethnically and religiously diverse society is better than the monolithic one. For such a society, equality of faiths and various identities is an indispensable, fundamental principle. LGBT organisations had to learn to take into account the needs and ways of thinking of people of faith. As it happened, the LGBT community itself had already had the mainly unexplored potential and abilities for that in the form of religious LGBT groups and organisations.

**Religious groups - invisible part of the LGBT community**

What are those groups and organisations like? Many of them have been around for several decades and include a few dozen to several hundred members each. The exceptions are rare, the most noticeable is the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (LGCM) which has around 1,500 members. It is an umbrella organisation for a number of groups - Anglican, Presbyterian, Evangelical, Catholic and others. LGCM actively participates in public campaigns, comments on and reacts to events and collaborates with secular organisations. It is one of very few religious LGBT organisations which can afford a paid worker. Other groups rely entirely on voluntary workers.

Among Christian organisations, there are Catholic ones - Quest and the Soho Masses Pastoral Council [United Kingdom]. The [last] organises Catholic Masses - with the permission of the local Archbishop - for LGBT Catholics in London. There are several Anglican groups in the country. A small group, but well-known even beyond Britain, is the Courage ministry of Jeremy Marks [not affiliated with Fr. John Harvey, OSFS’s Courage Ministry] who is himself a Baptist. Quakers, who are very friendly to LGBT people, have their own group too. A lot of LGBT people of faith have found a home at the Metropolitan Community Church which originated in the Pentecostal movement in the USA and has communities in a number of large British cities.

Among non-Christian LGBT groups, there is a Muslim one, Imaan, and the Jewish Gay and Lesbian Group; also, Buddhist and Krishna groups participated in last year’s London Pride parade.

All of them are different, with different aims, activities, problems and resources. Several years ago, there arose an interest for mutual knowledge of each other and cooperation among the groups. This found its reflection in some of those groups’ conferences. Until recently, they hardly ever joined their voices to the work of secular organisations for human rights and equality. Not because they did not share their values, as their existence itself was already a struggle for and witness to those rights. Rather, the language and imagery used by people of faith is not identical to the normative language and imagery of the secular world. Recently, I spoke to young gay Catholics in London. They were equivocally against participation of their group in what they called “politics” - for example, debates on

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same-sex marriages. At the same time, it was clear that a partnership recognised by society was what they wanted and aspired to.

**Finding the voice**

When in 2003 the Government initiated a public consultation about proposed legislation on Civil Partnerships, many organisations, including religious ones, as well as individuals, made their submissions. A publicly-expressed opinion of people of faith and their communities was not equivocal. Nobody could assert anymore that believers think alike, that everyone of them is appalled by “the distraction and simulation of the traditional family”. Believing gays and lesbians witnessed about themselves, their struggles and hopes related to acknowledging their relationships of love, commitment and mutual care by the wider society. The Government got a clear sign what society at large wants and that those expectations were well thought through and representative. At the same time, the black and white world of two opposing camps, the churches and the LGBT community, has changed: it received more colours and became more complex.

This process received its continuation in two conferences organised by LGCM in 2007 and 2009. The first was called *Faith, Homophobia and Human Rights*. Over fifty religious, social justice and professional groups, as well as trade unions took part. Both conferences aimed to discuss the conflict perhaps, unavoidable - between public expression of faith and public expression of same-sex relationships. The participants of the 2007 Conference adopted a statement calling for the recognition of the equality of all people and challenging religion-inspired homophobia. The Statement also asserted that “full civil rights for LGBT individuals are not only consistent with the right to religious freedom, but are rooted in the best and fundamental teachings of all major faiths”. The Conference participants called for comprehensive anti-discriminatory legislation which would put religious belief and sexual orientation on the same level with other characteristics that must not discriminated against: race, gender, disability, age.

One of the results of the second conference, *Faith, Homophobia, Transphobia and Human Rights*, was an initiative of a more formal cooperation of faith and secular organisations and establishing a dialogue with the governmental institutions like the Equality and Human Rights Commission. At the end of 2009, that initiative took the name the **Cutting Edge Consortium** and came out with its first campaign for rejecting exemptions for religious organisations in the forthcoming Equality Bill. The idea of the Consortium is to unite groups and individuals of faith and those who do not associate themselves with any belief, but who share a humanistic vision of freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as equality, social justice and basic human rights. Effectively, it is an attempt to create a representative forum able to speak in the name of a large number of LGBT people of faith and enter into a dialogue with other LGBT, governmental and social institutions.

When asked about the outcomes of the Conferences and the first steps of the Consortium, as well as why governmental bodies, trade unions and large businesses would want to participate in such initiatives, one of the initiators explained that the most important fruit has been that millions of people could see that not only religious leaders and fundamentalist groups could speak about faith and in the name of people of faith. There are millions of other voices which categorically reject homophobia and see no justification for it either in religion or conscience. At the same time, secular institutions are keen on creating the climate conducive to social and business development. For example, trade unions are interested in protecting their members from discrimination, including on the grounds of sexual orientation and faith.

**About ‘Out in Scripture’**

The United Kingdom is not the only country where this change of attitude towards people of faith happens. An interesting example took place in the USA where for three years the largest secular LGBT organisation, **Human Rights Campaign**, was creating a collection of commentaries on the Revised Common Lectionary - the Bible readings used for Sunday celebrations in many Protestant churches around the world. Over 100 scholars and pastors from eleven Christian denominations participated in composing those conversations where the comments on scripture are placed “alongside the real life experiences and concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of faith and our allies”. Those reflections, entitled *Out in Scripture*, are available on the Human Rights Campaign’s website designed to help gay Christians to “consider your life of faith and put that faith into action”.

**Perspectives**

It is important to remember that unjustifiably sharp words towards religious leaders, especially those who put religious faith in opposition to liberal values, may create a barrier for people of faith to become part of the LGBT community. Separation of churches from the state is one thing; marginalising religious groups from social life is totally different. Constructive dialogue of LGBT people with churches is possible, especially where the conversation is about the well-being of society and particular individuals. People of faith in the LGBT community can be a bridge between the secular movement and churches, as well as a witness to the fact that there is no contradiction in being gay and living out faith.

We all should live with the belief that things are changing for the better. Just over two centuries ago very few people thought that keeping slaves was a sin. Today, very few would doubt that. One hundred years ago those who believed in the fundamental character of freedom of conscience were regarded as heretics by the Catholic Church. However, for fifty years now the Church has been campaigning for that freedom around the world. There are many more examples like that.

*Editor’s note: Quest UK is an organization similar to DignityUSA. The above article is from the quest bulletin for Spring 2010. Quest’s website is [www.questgaycatholic.org.uk](http://www.questgaycatholic.org.uk)* ▼