

“...when people say ‘love the sinner hate the sin’ it doesn’t sound quite the same way to a homosexual”

Adam Hamilton, Church of the Resurrection

“I live in fear. I live in silence, knowing that the church that I love may be ultimately doomed to hurt me.”

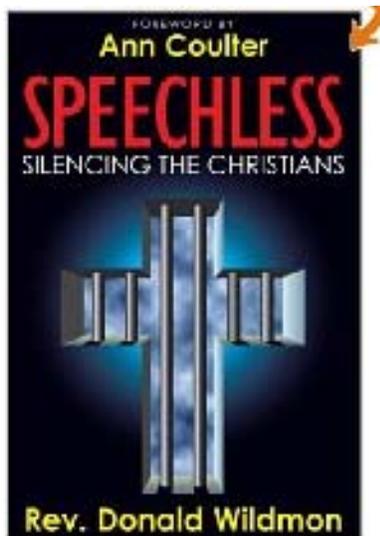
North Alabama Young Adult Clergy Person.

### **Homophobia: Part 1 What it is?**

Homophobia is a complex and multifaceted social evil, understood best through a direct-indirect polarity. Direct homophobia is explicitly hateful or derogatory speech or actions toward homosexual persons or behaviors. Indirect homophobia include passive and institutional oppressions. Passive homophobia is composed of cultural norms and behaviors which affirm the normality and superiority of heterosexuality and institutional homophobia encompasses policies, practices and declarations of a governing group, whether civic, private or ecclesial.

**Direct homophobia** is easy to recognize; hateful statements, heterosexist jokes, tolerance for hate crimes (or work against expanded hate crime legislation), and outspoken support of exclusive policies are a few simple examples of direct homophobia. Direct hatred affects the sense-of-belonging, self esteem, identities and (therefore) participation of LGBT persons and their friends and family in the church.

Surprisingly common in the church, direct heterosexism occasionally comes in the form of negating the liberating work of LGBT advocates. For example, in this book (to the left), conservatives claim that the



demand for equal rights for LGBT folks oppressively silences Christians. As one can see from the very cover, this powerful tactic of “defense by offense” conveys a sense of “oppression” The illustration and title convey the powerful emotional message: *How can the cross be filled with prison bars? What a terrible crime!* Ironically, those claiming oppression do not recognize the privilege of the class, status and power to publish a book decrying their “speechlessness.”

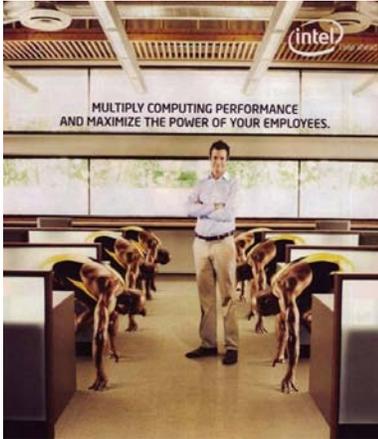
One of the key hypotheses in this book posits that relinquishing unjust privileges is an form of oppression. The authors claim that the work of LGBT advocates is oppressive to their hateful views, and thus negate the rights of LGBT persons to advocate for equal rights (or be protected from hate-speech and crimes). This denial of the value of diverse voices reinforces the homophobic status quo.

The Book, *Holy Bullies and Headless Monsters* (Alvin A. McEwen, Xlibris, 2007) details much of the how and history of organized church homophobia in the political and cultural arenas.

Some of the most painful experiences of homophobia are difficult for LGTB people to define or name because of their **passive** nature. Among these are seemingly petty realities which are only powerful because they are repeated dozens, hundreds, even thousands of times each day, and because – outside

of academic circles - they are rarely named although they are part of the fabric which binds together our culture.

Advertising is an excellent microcosm in which to observe passive oppression, because recent studies in the field of both communication and sociology acknowledge the power of advertising to reflect and



reinforce social assumptions and values. One example of the petty ways in which advertising demeans racial minorities is perfectly illustrated in this picture (to the left) from Intel. Note the boss is white but the “subordinate” employees are African-American, and they are BOWING to the white one. I am not claiming that Intel intends this racism, but the message is clear regardless of the advertiser’s intention. (A more complete critique of this advertisement and this phenomenon is found at <http://brotherpeacemaker.wordpress.com/2007/08/07/racism-inside-and-out/>). Again, a single ad is not the “proof” of contemporary institutionalized racism, but merely an example supported by the thousands of images published every day on television, billboards, internet, and in print media like newspapers.

Even when direct oppression is unacceptable in “polite company” *passive* homophobia often partners with *institutionalized* oppression, continuing to reinforce oppressive social values. Within The United Methodist Church, the most clear examples of our institutionalized homophobia come directly from our second-most-guiding book. The Book of Discipline paragraphs 161.c, 161g, 304.3, and 612.19 have various degrees of clear policies which explicitly disinvite homosexual persons from full participation, and single homosexuality out for special treatment and exclusion.

Particularly painful passages should be noted:

- “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching” (161.g);
- the listing of an explicit ban against “promot[ing] the acceptance of homosexuality” (612.19);
- “self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not” recognized with credentials for ordination (304.3).

We must therefore ask ourselves about direct, institutional and passive heterosexism in our church.



The stories of Homophobia collected from Facebook and by LA reveal to us a number of ways in which our young adults have in the last five to ten years experienced the church’s special contempt for homosexuality. Some mention directly hateful comments taught in youth ministry settings, others the silence enforced by church presumptions of heterosexuality. One young persons tells of the time when sexuality interfered with the teamwork on a mission trip, and a talented musician poignantly describes the pain caused when a church refused to hire him because he was open about his orientation.

### **Homophobia Part 3: Church and Theological Angles:**

To educate and empower our congregations about homophobia, we must not ignore the real pain experienced daily when our churches condemn rather than love God's children. However, we must also encourage them to see the positive value to the church that comes from fully including all people, and encourage more honest and comprehensive discussions of sexuality and gender. We must help our churches move beyond simplistic understandings of biblical readings and traditional values, and replace the falsehood of heteronormativity with the integrity and honesty to talk about sexuality, hospitality and families. Like Peter in Acts 10, we must move beyond dietary restrictions upon the kingdom of God and focus upon the humanity and desire to know God in those we once called "alien and stranger."

#### **Education on sexuality, gender and "LGBTQ" must be central to any anti-homophobic work.**

The very best resources on sexuality and gender are:

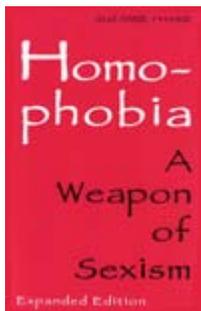
- ❖ *And God Loves Each One*, Ann Thompson Cook, info at <http://www.godloveseachone.org/> (sexuality) (An enculturated Hispanic edition, *Dio Nos Ama Por Igual* is also available)
- ❖ *Made in God's Image*, Ann Thompson Cook, info at <http://www.madeinimage.org/> (gender)
- ❖ Oliveto, Karen P., Traci W. West, and Kelly Turney, *Talking About Homosexuality: A Congregational Resource*, (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005).

Other powerful resources for primary understandings of sexuality and Christianity are available from RMN.

Anti-homophobic writings are mostly clustered in the business, higher education and sociological fields, and specific writing about reducing or ending homophobia within faith communities is generally done in a community organizing model, most powerfully by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Institute for Welcoming Resources, and their partners organizations (of which RMN is one). See [www.welcomingresources.org](http://www.welcomingresources.org)

#### **Other strong resources on Church Homophobia (and alternatives) include:**

Flunder, Yvette A. *Where the Edge Gathers: Building a Community of Radical Inclusion*. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005).



Pharr, Suzanne. *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism*. (Berkeley: Chardon Press, 1997)



Griffin, Horace L. *Their Own Receive Them Not: African American Lesbians & Gays in Black Churches*. (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2006).

**Pastoral Care books with a special eye towards LGBTQ Issues:**

Bess, Howard H., *Pastor, I Am Gay*, (Palmer, Alaska: Palmer Publishing Company, 1995)

Boesser, Sara L., *Silent Lives: How High a Price?*, (Lanham, MA: Hamilton Books, 2004)

Gold, Mitchell, and Mindy Drucker, *Crisis: 40 Stories Revealing the Personal, Social, and Religious Pain and Trauma of Growing Up Gay in America*, (Austin, TX: Greenleaf Book Group, 2008)

**Homophobia Part 3: Some Basic Resources on Homophobia and Sexuality:**

Homophobia: How We All Pay The Price is Warren Blumenfeld's analysis of this problem and why everyone concerned with the decline of civility in America needs to be concerned about it.

Frontline's "Are you homophobic?" quiz:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/assault/etc/quiz.html>

The American Psychological Association Help Center online article "Sexual orientation and homosexuality" is a very clear and cogent foundation of sexuality from a scientific perspective.

<http://www.apahelpcenter.org/articles/article.php?id=31>

Alliant International University "Rockaway Institute" for LGBT studies

<http://www.alliant.edu/wps/wcm/connect/website/Home/Research+and+Public+Services/Research+Institutes/Rockway+Institute/>