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Coming out as sacrament

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religion, historically, was really the interaction among physics, cosmology and religion. Even after Darwin, physics and cosmology were still the most prominent sciences, and therefore the bulk of interest in science and religion was oriented towards them. It is only with the recent tremendous experimental (and financial) success of geneticists in cloning living organisms and the ethical implications of such work that theology is now taking biological science very seriously. While a chapter introducing the issues faced by religious ethics in terms of genetic manipulation is warranted and conspicuously missing (given its importance and urgency since this technology is already readily available), the volume contains enough good introductory material to deserve a wide reading among those interested in the interaction between modern biology and liberal Christianity.

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Coming Out as Sacrament

Chris Glaser

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998
155 pages, \$23.95 Softcover

Welcoming But Not Affirming

Stanley J. Grenz

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998
210 pages, \$29.95 Softcover

These two books, from the same publisher, are on the popular and contentious topic of homosexuality and the church. The first, by well-known gay church activist, Chris Glaser, is firmly in the queer liberationist genre. The other, by Vancouver evangelical professor, Stanley J. Grenz, is just as forthrightly in the "love the sinner, hate the sin" category.

Glaser's book, while using the language of sacrament, really models a queer hermeneutic for our time. It is not actually as deeply rooted in sacramental piety and imagery as the title might lead one to expect. This is not surprising given Glaser's self-conscious Presbyterian roots. In a book that is exciting because of its creative use of scriptural text and story, Glaser shows other gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered (and any one else who for reasons of solidarity or self-enlightenment cares to read it) how to appropriate biblical myth in light of our lives and experience. It is a good application of the method of faith` Marcus Borg

envisions in *Meeting Jesus Again for the Very First Time*.

This quote, from the middle of the book, sums up Glaser's purpose and method: "Sacraments act out the myths of God's Word in history. Coming out as sacrament means recognizing God's Word acting in our own life, delivering us from the closet, guiding and sustaining us..." While Glaser succeeds admirably in exploring this theme, it seems to digress from time to time, and is sprinkled with a few too many self-references.

Glaser's use of familiar and unfamiliar scriptural story and image, will make another powerful contribution to the queer theological liberation movement. His exploration of the Biblical theme of the scapegoat, and how it has been used against queers, but can be transformed, as we "come out" of our scapegoat experience, resist the temptation to scapegoat others, and offer our queer selves as living sacrifices, is but one example of Glaser's "out of the closet" use of biblical text.

Another useful aspect of Glaser's book is its collection of liturgical resources, seven rituals which could very meaningfully be used by groups of worshippers without respect of sexual orientation, to be in solidarity with queers on the margins. One of these, "A Call To Repentance" deserves particular attention, in a time when liberalizing churches are seeking to offer welcome and affirmation, without stopping to repent of the history of pain, discrimination and oppression.

Grenz's book, on the other hand, is another attempt to contain homosexuality, and refute the arguments of the theological wing of the gay liberation movement. In a sweeping review of the most well-known exegetical studies that have re-interpreted the biblical texts on "homosexuality", Grenz concludes that none of them are convincing, nor warrant a rejection of the traditional interpretations condemning homosexuality.

Grenz likewise sums up the files on the teachings of the church, biblical authority, sexual ethics, and the possibility of blessed, same gender relationships. In each instance he concludes the liberalizing tendencies of our time are wrong-headed, displeasing to God, and morally depraved. For example, his argument against lesbian and gay unions, is based on a theology of marriage (imputing far more to marriage than most Lutherans would). He describes marriage, and the sacred quality of the sexual act between a man and a woman as "the uniting of the two foundational ways of being human" and a symbol for the exclusive, inviolate bond between Yahweh and the People of God, Christ and the Church – a task to which loving, committed gay and lesbian relationships are, in Grenz's view, unequal, because of their sexual deficiency.

There are two good things about Grenz's book. First, he spells out his intent (and hints broadly at his conclusions) at the beginning of the book and each chapter. He does not say that his book is biased, although in his footnotes he has

no difficulty labelling liberal authors as such. There aren't really any surprises after you've read the introduction, just the inexorable plodding to each hostile conclusion. This is a book that preaches to the converted, namely evangelical Christians who cannot imagine a world that includes healthy homosexuals, or, for that matter ever meeting one in their church. The second good thing is the exhaustive footnotes, which in effect provide a comprehensive bibliography of the best queer liberationist scholars and thinkers of our time. (The bibliography *per se*, while reflecting a balance of sources, is not surprisingly weighted with more conservative authors, largely unknown outside fundamental circles.) In the end, it is clear that only sexually abstaining homosexuals who see their Christian calling as the life-long containment of their sexual orientation will find welcome in Grenz's kind of church.

Interestingly, Grenz makes several references to Glaser's thought, albeit, with the intent of discrediting it. In an oblique way, Glaser, with his word "theoclosetization" is referring to Grenz's theology: codified, gate-keeping, calcified ways of limiting the Spirit, and breaking the spirit of the people of God, and in this instance God's queer people.

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Speaking of Stewardship: Model Sermons on Money and Possessions

William G. Carter, Editor
Louisville: Geneva Press, 1998
148 pages, \$23.95 Paperback

Have you ever read a book that is so stirring you want to read it again, but you don't want to read it again? You like it, but you fear it? I have! Wonder of wonders, it's a book of sermons. Some would say that it is hard enough to pay attention to one sermon delivered live, oral, in real-time. Putting twenty-three sermons in print for people to read is a sure path to 'Dullsville'. Not so with this collection!

Here are a few reasons why I liked reading them and would even recommend their re-reading. First, the catchy titles pull me in, making me want to know what they stand for ("Grace and Grab", "RSVP", "Marvellous Mammon", "The Top Five Reasons Why I don't Tithe Yet", "Don't Touch the Chicken Until We See if They are Hungry"). Second, these are high quality sermons. There's hardly a bad, boring one in the bunch. A few of them come from well known homileicians like Fred Craddock, Charles Rice, Thomas Troeger, but most are by local pastors of