

Quotes from Rev. Dan Smith

As pastor of West Hollywood Presbyterian Church, which has an aggressive outreach program to the lesbian/gay community, I know the personal devastation and dehumanization that accompanies the reigning sexual ethic in the Christian church. It is a mean-spirited, unjust and just plain cruel ethic. I, for one, live for the day when the obnoxious, vulgar, patronizing voices of oppression will cease speaking from within the church; for the day when it will be as spiritually and socially unacceptable to speak against lesbians and gays as it now is to be fascist or racist.

Sex is good... Sex feels good, sex is an essential part of the coming out process, sex is enriching to one's personal life; it is...life empowering...refreshing and enjoyable. How long must we hear cunning words of condemnation in professions of love? When will the church stand up and say the truth: To be gay or lesbian is one's birthright; the right to be the person you really are.

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"Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality and Social Justice," which embodies this simple truth, has created one of the greatest controversies the church has witnessed in decades. "God's frozen people"--an epithet often applied to our Calvinist disposition of doing everything "decently and in order"--have again confronted the issue that generates enough heat to melt the rigid demeanor of our due process. That issue of course, is sex and sexuality.

The hidden, and potentially explosive issue, in the debate about church attitudes toward sexuality is patriarchy – the cultural and religious moral code that gives heterosexual men the right to control women's and gay men's bodies and human dignity. The Christian church is one of the most patriarchal institutions in the history of the Western world.

Wherever we went, and we traveled across the country, we heard members of the church denounce the evil of homosexuality. But when we asked the complaining Presbyterians if they personally knew a gay or lesbian member, their answer was invariably, "no."

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Then when we listened to the gay and lesbian Christians of the Presbyterian faith. They were rational, caring, kind, loving people - certainly far more Christian than their adversaries.

We also heard from women who had been sexually abused by clergy, we listened to women who had been physically abused by their husbands. We were told about children who were victims of incest or rape. We soon learned that the issue of homosexuality was a pretext to disguise the real issues involved in the struggle of understanding sexuality.

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What the church has done is equate what is sexist and heterosexist with what is moral and just. Overturning this equation – indeed, the very thought of doing so – would be as radical as Martin Luther’s insistence that celibacy is not the highest spiritual gift and that priests should be allowed to marry. That idea, among others, led to the Reformation. It’s no exaggeration to argue that the issues of sexuality, including gender justice and the quality of loving relationships, could trigger a second reformation.

We must develop an ethic of sexuality in the church that exhibits mutuality and fairness not only for male and female, but also for lesbian and gay [and trans and gender non-conforming] people and for heterosexuals equally...It is our calling to reach out to others whom we have devalued because of our historical conditioning, to welcome and include them with mutuality and acceptance in our common life together.