

**When Reality Confronts Ideology: My Experiences as a Gay Christian.**

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As the old song goes: "I ain't gonna study war no more". I have always abhorred conflict. When stories of war, terrorism, violence or abuse, physical or mental, in any shape or form are shown in the media, be they real or fictional I simply turn off. It is not part of the world I want to live in or even acknowledge, and I long for reconciliation to take place between the warring factions. I find it relatively simple to ignore such matters: I just switch off. But dealing with internal conflict is not so easy, and when two parts of one's brain are at war reconciliation is hard to achieve.

Some people's brains are "wired" so that they become "artistic", "musical", "mathematical" or "philosophical", "spiritual" etc. and studies continue into how this occurs. Questions regarding brain "wiring" in terms of sexuality and in particular sexual orientation still remain largely unanswered, as do those concerning religious belief. My brain developed such that I simultaneously became unquestionably and unchangeably gay and also irresistibly drawn to Christian faith. Sexual orientation and faith bring no conflict for most heterosexual Christians (although problems can arise in other areas relating to faith and sexuality), but for me, brought up in a seriously Christian home, the conflict between the reality of being gay and my Christian ideology began in early adolescence and continued for many years.

I did not choose to be gay. I am gay. That's the reality. I did choose to be a Christian. Although I left the God of my childhood in my early twenties I returned to faith some years later. I made that ideological choice. I could have chosen one of several religions - or indeed none. But the Christian ideology, if I may call it such, made most sense to me. It was something I both needed and wanted. And that brought conflict.

For most of my life unquenchable, irresistible voices strove for supremacy. "Be proud" chanted the Gay Liberation Front. "Laugh at me" minced Inman and Clary. But I am not of those "types". "Unclean" screamed the Religious Right. "God loves you as you are" preached the Liberal Left. But my Christianity was not of those "types". My internal voices were strong: "You can't be gay and Christian; that's what the Bible says." My growing Christian faith was quite at odds with whom I had discovered myself to be and it was a minefield. I believed what I had been taught - all homosexuals were bound for hell - but that belief was incompatible with my belief in a loving, forgiving God. For years reality and ideology warred unceasingly in my head. I needed answers and resolution. I could not change my sexual orientation, and God did not appear to want to change that part of me. My life-experience clearly demonstrated that God loved me (and for me as a scientist proof meant truth), and I could not walk out on God a second time. Self-acceptance and self-fulfilment were not bed-fellows. But how to reconcile all this? Something had to give. Reality did not change, so ideology had to. My understanding of the Bible as the Word of God demanded reassessment. In particular, passages supposedly referring to homosexuality had to be studied in depth. I had so much to re-learn. As time

went by I learned much from other Christians, gay and straight. I discovered new hermeneutical and exegetical approaches I had not imagined possible (not just on the gay issue) and I have a huge debt of gratitude to those who helped me on my journey.<sup>1</sup> Now, thankfully my internal conflicts are resolved. The reality of my neural system and the ideology of my beliefs are in harmony and, thank God, I am at peace with both.

External conflicts still exist. A while ago I "came out" to my local church. The reaction was seismic. I had some great support but also fierce opposition. But although life became hell once again "externally" I was able to remain at peace, for the "internal" conflict had ceased. Other external conflicts (e.g. Phelps of Westborough) continue, and although they can be unpleasant they are nothing compared to the internal ones of the past. I learned much from those tough times, including how to walk away from blinkered vision, wilful ignorance, prejudice and bigotry.

I have experienced much throughout my wonderful life. I could have written from many other areas: my career as an analytical spectroscopist, my interests in art, music, hiking, traveling, gardening, photography (and more beside) have all contributed to my hugely rich and varied life. But my experience of being gay and choosing Christianity has probably provided the challenges that have taught me most. Experiences may be painful, pleasurable, profound and sometimes life-changing, and if we do not learn from them we waste them. My conflict between reality and ideology, painful though it was, has been resolved. I have learned much, much more than just how one can be gay and Christian. I have experienced the real world of real people who experience similar conflicts and I hope now I am in a position to help others in similar struggles.

Here I briefly share a little of my experience, not of work, pleasure or interests, but of being: being gay and being Christian. It is my hope that in briefly sharing these meanderings some readers of this short article will be moved to engage in thoughtful dialogue with others who are in some way "other". Recognising reality and gently re-moulding ideologies with sincerity, understanding and a genuine desire for healing both internal and external conflict is sorely needed in today's world.

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<sup>1</sup> Two books profoundly influenced me: "Gay Travels in the Muslim World" (Luongo (Ed.), 2009) which records heart-rending accounts of young gay Muslim men and their struggles in similar situations, and "Stranger at the Gate" (White, 1995), which is the autobiography of a gay Christian minister, telling how the reality of his being and the ideology of his Christian faith came into harmony.