

Gays, the Bible, and fundamentalism

Here is an excellent quick reference on just about everything that's wrong with the argument that says, "The Bible is opposed to homosexuality." -- Troy

Source: <http://secure.agoramedia.com/newsletters/viewissue.asp?nlid=6&email=trpatlake@WILDBLUE.NET&d=B6A1E9E9FFC6054692ABB>

Bishop Spong Q&A

Kenneth Jacobson from Frazee, Minnesota, writes:

[Word] has been received that a California Episcopal Diocese (San Joaquin) has reached the second stage in voting to leave the national Episcopal Communion over the issue of homosexuality. The media is describing the anti-gay position as biblical, the pro-gay as being against Bible teaching. After reading *Living in Sin* and *The Sins of Scripture*, I cannot believe that it is that simple. Reporters are not doing their job of careful investigation.

- Have these biblical stories and texts that are quoted to support the anti-gay position ever been read, analyzed, thoroughly debated, and defended in bishops' conferences? These are supposedly intelligent people who respect scholarship. How can they support exclusion on such flimsy evidence?
- Am I wrong to think this struggle among Episcopalians might be a healthy thing, and that resistance from the highest levels might be a way of teaching and illuminating facts and reality, exposing the prejudice for the evil it is?
- Where is all this going? What could or should be done to bring about a rational and acceptable result? Your thoughts and your comments would be very much appreciated.

Dear Kenneth,

It is not fair to expect secular journalists to be biblical scholars, nor should it be anticipated that they would spend the necessary time to research the issue. It is for that reason that they tend to accept uncritically the oft-repeated Evangelical Protestant and Conservative Roman Catholic definitions that the Bible is anti-gay. If these people were honest, they would have to admit that the Bible is also pro-slavery and anti-women.

There is also a widely accepted mentality that if the Bible is opposed, the idea must be wrong. That is little more than nonsensical fundamentalism. The rise of democracy was contrary to the "clear teaching of the Bible." as the debate over the forced signing of the Magna Carta by King John of England in 1215 revealed. The Bible was quoted to prove that Galileo was wrong; that Darwin was wrong; that Freud was wrong; and that allowing women to be educated, to vote, to enter the professions, and to be ordained was wrong. So the fact that the Bible is quoted to prove that homosexuality is evil and to be condemned is hardly a strong argument, given the history of how many times the Bible has been wrong. I believe that most bishops know this but the Episcopal Church has some fundamentalist bishops and a few who are "fellow travelers" with fundamentalists

The Bible was written between the years 1000 B.C.E. and 135 C.E. Our knowledge of almost everything has increased exponentially since that time. It is the height of ignorance to continue using the Bible as an encyclopedia of knowledge to keep dying prejudices intact. The media seems to cooperate in perpetuating that long ago abandoned biblical attitude.

That is not surprising since the religious people keep quoting it to justify their continued state of unenlightenment. That attitude is hardly worthy of the time it takes to engage it. I do not debate with members of the flat Earth society either. Prejudices all die. The first sign that death is imminent comes when the prejudice is debated publicly. The tragedy is that church leaders back the wrong side of the conflict, which is happening today from the Pope to the Archbishop of Canterbury to the current crop of Evangelical leaders. That too will pass and the debate on homosexuality will be just one more embarrassment in Christian history.

- John Shelby Spong

Bishop John Shelby Spong is the author of several well-known books on the Bible and fundamentalism.