

Jerry Falwell praised the performances of queer theater major Glenn Scofield Williams.

Not long after, Falwell's music minister told me they were doing a premiere of a contemporary opera based on the passion of Christ. Falwell had told him that I would make a good Jesus. "I'd be honored to audition for the role," I told the music minister. "Oh, no," the minister replied. "If Dr. Falwell wants you to be Jesus, no audition is required."

Somewhere in my junior year, I began pulling away from Falwell and fundamentalism. I was studying the Bible in depth and in earnest, seeing if it contained true answers for me. I was beginning a long, slow walk away from Christianity and toward self-empowerment. I was trying to find a way to walk inside a Christian philosophical framework without the burden of literalism. I found the Bible, literally taken, more and more difficult to swallow.

At one moment of crisis, I went forward during an altar call, to see if someone could help me with the burdens of my emerging identity. One of the assistant pastors shook my hand, led me to a room behind and below the pulpit and asked me about my problem. I told him I wasn't sure, but I might be a homosexual. His body jolted as if he'd been slapped, and he wiped his hand repeatedly on his trouser leg. He quickly put me in touch with a young pastor who, he said, would "help me with my sin." Needless to say, neither men had anything to offer: no advice, no counsel, no cure. They prayed with me uncomfortably for a few sessions, then found too many conflicts to meet with me again.

Within the confines of a literal interpretation of the Bible, the fundamentalist has nothing to offer: no love, no mercy, no understanding, no grace. In the end, Christianity only works if it is divorced from any literalist stance. Only when a Christian truly believes that "love is of God and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God" can they see that we love, therefore we are of God.

Falwell was wrong. He did not understand the weight of mercy, the strength, diversity and flexibility of love, and God's ability to be bigger than the limitations of bigotry.

In 1983, I was working graveyard shift at 7-Eleven, trying to make enough money to finish my degree and finally get out of Lynchburg, Va. In the middle of the night, Falwell came to the store. He was alone, driving his big Jeep himself, looking small and vulnerable outside the glare of the television camera lights. He wandered around the store a bit, finally grabbing two cans of dog food and a bottle of NyQuil. The kind with the alcohol in it. He brought them to the counter and pulled out his wallet.

"How are you, Dr. Falwell," I said, ringing up his purchases.

He smiled his best beatific smile at me, but I could tell he was working to remember my face.

"Drama major at Liberty," I helped.

"Ah, Glenn, yes," he said. He had an uncanny ability to remember names. "You haven't graduated yet, have you?"

"Not yet," I said, "but I will."

In his wallet, he didn't have a whole lot of cash. This was before ATMs. "Looks like I'm short," he said, laying what he had out on the counter.

"Don't worry about it," I said. "I've got it." I pulled out a couple of bucks, and together we paid for his purchases. He thanked me and smiled and left with his stuff. I said nothing to him about the NyQuil.

Truth is, part of me is glad Falwell's gone. But I don't want Falwell in hell. I don't hope he is suffering the hellfire torments with which he cursed us and other outsiders. I only wish the blinding light of cleansing enlightenment to burn the hate and fear from his lost, misguided soul and guide him back to compassion again. ☪

GLENN SCOFIELD WILLIAMS writes poetry, prose, plays, periodica and porn in Portland.

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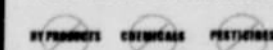
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