

Loving the Sinner, Hating the Sin: Lady Calls Bullshit

Recently, one of Dan Savage's readers wrote him a letter refuting Savage's claim that conservative Christians bear culpability for hostility toward gays—especially LGBTQ youth. Despite evidence to the contrary, including the spate of queer suicides, the reader's rant: Christ's followers are dedicated to "true" Biblical teachings; they politely disagree with homosexuality, thus hold no responsibility for any resurgence of bigoted hysteria. The gist of Savage's reply ("In Your Image"): Even polite love-the-sinner-hate-the-sin indoctrination hastens the culture war threatening our mere existence.

Religion is often beyond reproach. Dare question peoples' faiths in an invisible wish-granting genie in the sky—sacrilege. You become a crusader against freedom, a hedonist wanting to convert the whole of society into whores and atheists. But differentiating between personal spirituality and concerted religious oppression isn't sacrilege—it's survival.

I know. I lived it. I spent my impressionable youth attending services several times a week. The sermons, the teachings? Social commentary, political agendas, a dearth of careful examinations of religious texts, holy books that took centuries to assemble, pieced together slowly by sundry people. Most Christians (especially extreme social conservatives) refute this easily verifiable fact; they swear, with all the faith they can muster, each holy text's



LADY
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by Daniel Borgen

On Facebook, a cousin declared: "We love Daniel, but don't support his life choices." All hell broke loose. (I didn't say: I disapprove of your closet alcoholism and unhappy marriage.) This backdoor, polite judgment will never again roll off my back.

writer had a fireside chat with the Almighty.

The translate-the-Bible-literally people aren't new, although they're often gussied up with fancy new names (such as Tea Party, Oregon Citizens Alliance). In my old Pentecostal church, I knew them as my pastor, youth leader and Sunday school teacher. Their obsession with beating us over the head with fervently anti-gay principles—and their odd emphasis

on *gay* above all else—seemed rooted in a particular agenda: creating anti-queer Christian armies and forever sowing seeds of doubt in vulnerable, confused queer youth.

As one desperately seeking approval from those entrusted with my well-being, I took their teachings to heart. My church performed dramatic, elaborate "altar calls," when elders brought me down in front of the congregation, praying sin after sin out of me—emphasizing masculinity, manhood. "Daniel, Jesus says your destiny is to be a missionary. You'll bring endless masses to truth, doing it with your faithful wife beside you." As I started to grapple with my difference, I was terrified, hopeless.

My church called gays "filthy abominations," "disgusting perverts." Preachers, sweaty and spitting, railed impassionedly against the "vile homosexual agenda." And, oh yes, there were "demons of homosexuality." Homelessness? Poverty? War? Nary a mention. The preaching still haunts me, especially when old Pentecostal ghosts come a-calling. Will I ever purge it?

At a recent family function, my (very) ill aunt declared, "Be grateful, your family loves you. They love the sinner and hate the sin. That's more than some people have." A la Savage, I call bullshit. Queers are under siege for *living*. On Facebook, a cousin declared: "We love Daniel, but don't support his life choices." All hell broke loose. This backdoor, polite

judgment will never again roll off my back. Choose not to love and respect who I am—not just tolerate, then lose me. Blood isn't the end-all, be-all of our relationships.

And hope thrives. In high school, I realized there was a bigger, better life out there for me. With the help of trusted instructors and confidantes, ones who fed me literary greats and provided me the impetus to question everything, I survived—and thrived. Now I have a beloved queer family along with straight allies surrounding me. I know parents who say to their children, "whomever you bring home someday," consciously avoiding the gender assignments ingrained in our culture. That is hope. Progress may be arduous, slow, but change is inevitable. And it's coming.

To any young person happening upon this: Don't abandon hope. There's still plenty I'm sure of, but this I can declare with utter certainty: No matter who says so, you are not sick, abnormal or in transit to hell—or alone. Our gay "elders" led the charge; rely on their wisdom, their experience. Contact Q Center or SMYRC—forge your own family there. Email me, I'll direct you. You have a long life ahead. And you might be the next Dan Savage. ☪

A lady recommends reading What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality. Find it at Powell's. Email DANIEL@JUSTOUT.COM.

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