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March 10, 1985

Professor Walter Capps  
Department of Religious Studies  
University of California, Santa Barbara  
Santa Barbara, CA 93106

Dear Walter:

I don't know if you'll remember me or not but you had the distinction of being the first person on the faculty that I told about my being gay.

That you accepted that revelation with such grace and warmth was instrumental in facilitating my "coming out" process along positive lines.

Unfortunately not everyone was so accepting and I was finally hounded unmercifully by my department chairman into leaving the University after twenty years of service.

In some ways it was a blessing because my life here in the desert with my partner of the last ten years is idyllic and I'm now finding the time to write - a life-long ambition. But that's not why I'm writing to you.

Alex and I were reading the Sunday L.A. Times this morning and I came across the article on your Vietnam course at UCSB.

I'm not often moved to tears by newspaper articles but this time I was. I'm not sure if the emotions it called up had to do with the whole Vietnam situation or your involvement in the course itself.

I suspect that what went through my mind had to do with my perception of you as perhaps the most humane person I ever knew at the University. That you would conceive of and produce such a course seemed as inevitable as it was natural.

I was struck also by the curious parallel between the experiences of your participants as having "come out of the closet" after seventeen years of being afraid to. How similar to the experiences of our gay and lesbian citizens who fight their own kind of war, suffering not too dissimilar kinds of discrimination, until for some the self-hate becomes an intolerable burden and they finally take away the keyhole behind which people can no longer whisper about them.

Having just finished a piece to send to our local newspaper in response

to a series of hysterical anti-homosexual articles by local ministers and a "clinical psychologist," I was moved to write and tell you how much of a positive influence you had and continue to have on my life.

I'm taking the liberty of sending to you a copy along with my best wishes to you and yours and for your continued success at the University. The University of California and the Department of Religious Studies are the better for your presence.

Warm regards,

Gary N. Hess  
Robert Alex Fournier  
69-801 Ramon Rd., #182  
Cathedral City, CA 92234

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Gary". The signature is stylized with a large, looping flourish at the end.

February 24, 1985

EDITOR, THE DESERT SUN:

That The Desert Sun has, since late last summer, devoted so much print attention to the issue of homosexuality confirms on the one hand that it is an important issue, made all the more so by the spread of AIDS, and on the other hand that it is not likely to be resolved by even the best of journalistic intentions to present both sides of the question.

The publication recently of views expressed by a group of local ministers and a clinical psychologist represents an earnest attempt on the part of this newspaper to provide balance in the discussion. But at the same time it is clear that no medium of communication is obligated to become the platform for continuous and perhaps even tedious debate over such issues. But the fact remains that there has been a huge increase in public awareness that there is an important social issue involved. These battles also tend to expose the public to images of gay men and lesbians that are visibly compelling contradictions to the exotic stereotypes promoted by anti-gay mythology.

In view of this perhaps it's time to get back to the basics. When the strident few can publicly defame the at least ten percent of the population who happen to have a sexual orientation different from their own and do it with utter disregard for factual evidence and ethical responsibility then the readership is being done a profound disservice.

Since these latest viewpoints have a very strong moral tone it might be helpful to recall Robert Louis Stevenson's advice from A Christmas Sermon:

"If thy morals make thee dreary, depend upon it they are wrong. I do not say give them up, for they may be all thou hast; but conceal them like a vice, lest they spoil the lives of better and simpler people."

Fundamentally, we need to clearly understand the difference between morals and ethics. Morals bestow their allegiance on social rules and habits of thought absorbed unreflectively by us as small children, permeating our being, conscious and unconscious.

Unmodified by maturity and education they tend to persist into adulthood and are accepted unquestioningly without regard for the fact that moral values are not universal. They vary from civilization to civilization, country to country, state to state, city to city and even within neighborhoods, becoming an incredibly complex web of contradictions. Why, for example, does Christianity, which represents a religious construct for only 35% of the world's population, presume to establish and attempt to enforce moral standards for the remaining 65%, all of whom can't be leading immoral lives?

Now ethics, on the other hand, bestow their allegiance on such things as truth, honesty and integrity as well as on kindness and fair-play. Such qualities exist in all societies and differ hardly at all from one society to the next. It is an unfortunate fact that those who are most obsessed with moral values are at the same time unmindful of ethical values and principles which ought to be used when dealing with those with whom they disagree.

What we have, then, in the viewpoint of these ministers is a system of moral values based on Biblical writings representing attitudes and beliefs of people who lived some 2,000 to 3,000 years ago who were responding to specific social situations. Lifting Biblical passages from their literary setting and brandishing those teachings - such as those regarding homosexuality - to the exclusion of others is to engage in an ethically indefensible activity.

In the words of Professor Gerald Larue of U.S.C.'s School of Religion:

"If rules in the Corinthian correspondence about women keeping silent in the churches and covering their heads during worship are quietly ignored in our 20th. century culture, why are the statements about homosexuality selected as peculiarly authoritative and pertinent? Those who use the Bible as a weapon should be consistent - accept all of it, or justify the selection of a few passages to the exclusion of others. Better yet, they might apply selected biblical passages to their own lives, not to the lives of others.

For a long time, some religious leaders have recognized that humanistic concerns - awareness of the personhood of individuals, love of one another and compassionate concern for one's neighbor - are key concepts of the Bible...

Perhaps the greatest perversion of all is to use the Bible as a social weapon that harms, hurts and dehumanizes."

It is ironic that some religious leaders, while professing to know all there is to know about the teachings of Jesus Christ, in reality know nothing of His convictions which unwaveringly centered around kindness, compassion and fairplay and the dignity and sanctity of all persons.

The words of Thomas Jefferson provide a fitting summary of the foregoing discussion and describe, prophetically, the contemporary phenomenon of Jerry Falwell and some other fundamentalist church leaders:

"The purest system of morals ever before preached to man has been adulterated and sophisticated by artificial constructions, into a mere contrivance to filch wealth and power to themselves... while they themselves are the greatest obstacle to the advancement of the real doctrines of Jesus, and do, in fact, constitute the real Anti-Christ."

But to leave the discussion at this point without addressing some of the more militant points-of-view expressed in these latest articles would be, in effect, authenticating them.

First, it must be observed that for a clinical psychologist to so flagrantly and irresponsibly mix religion with his professional opinions regarding human behavior is insulting to those for whom religion is a motivating force for good in their lives, leading them down paths of tolerance, love and compassion for all persons.

And then it might be assumed from his comments that because of his professional position he represents the views of his colleagues in the American Psychological Association. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Eleven years ago the American Psychological Association took homosexuality off their list of mental illnesses and asserted also that it was not a "perversion" nor was it a "personality disorder."

It was recognized even then by the psychological and psychiatric fraternity that homosexuals who came to see them were not, for the most part, disturbed by their homosexual feelings but rather by their recognition that society was filled with loathing and disgust for them and would, in fact, wish to eradicate them from the face of the earth as Hitler did during World War II to nearly 250,000 homosexuals in the death camps.

The belief among many mental health professionals in those days that homosexuality was a mental illness, and thus conceivably capable of "treatment" was probably the result of their uncritical acceptance of common stereotypes and the fact that they overgeneralized from their patient's situations to the entire homosexual population who were not their patients.

In 1981 the results of a four-year study by 31 natural and social scientists were approved by a division of the American Psychological Association. Based on documented, scientific research and not just the opinion of psychiatrists the study concluded that homosexuality is as healthy and biologically normal as heterosexuality, and attempts to "cure" gay people are "ethically questionable." It went on to say "trying to change someone runs into very grave problems. This whole idea of conversion leads to questions of whether the person is acting freely or is just reacting to traditional societal pressure."

To understand how gay and lesbian people feel it might be helpful to imagine, for a moment, that heterosexuals were the minority and that the majority homosexual population subjected you to rampant discrimination, unreasoned stigma with consequent personal alienation and loneliness. As a heterosexual you would know that your sexual feelings toward the opposite sex were genuine and would have no desire to convert. You would simply wish to be left alone to live your life as you saw fit. But surrounded with all that hate it might distort your feelings about yourself. Prevented by society from establishing a long-term relationship you might seek gratification in the streets and thus have promiscuity added to your list of sins. All in all it might even lead you to more bizarre behavior and even suicide. You'd hardly consider it a "gay" life.

Clearly, of course, a predominantly heterosexual society is necessary for propagation even though they seem to be overdoing it with consequent problems of widespread hunger, crime and pollution. But why is

it that certain people in society have this irrational fear and even hate for those who are different?

One answer to this question revolves around the fact that most people who are strongly prejudiced against homosexuals are also authoritarian and conservative in their social attitudes. They are most likely not to support broad civil rights for women, blacks and other minorities. They share a belief in the importance of rigid roles for the continuation of society, and they believe in the acceptability of authoritarian techniques to enforce their social beliefs.

And so changes in the roles of women and blacks, or changes in the system of government and society, all clearly pose threats to many men who presently enjoy the advantages of power and exploitation in society. Homosexuals also pose a threat along with women, for example, because they do not support the male-dominant power system.

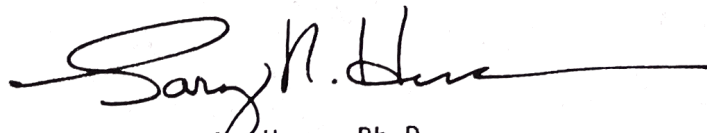
The phenomenon of homophobia, then, which is defined as the irrational fear or intolerance of homosexuality, is just another tool in the arsenal of those who believe in the maintenance by men of a society where men control power through regulating sex roles. It defines and enforces sex-role distinctions and the associated distribution of power. It facilitates social control and is part of the regulation of sexuality and work. It is basically inhumane, inflexible and totally out-of-step with the mainstream of enlightened understanding. It is a tragic waste of human energy when there are so many important things to be done.

Perhaps most tragic of all, though, is the price paid for homophobia by the many men for whom power and maintenance of macho posturing is very dear indeed, especially in terms of their personal relationships with men and women, and the delimitation of legitimate male interests, activities and emotions.

Homophobia, so well illustrated in the latest articles, has a great potential for abuse as an instrument for social control because it tends to distract well-meaning people from the real problems of society having to do with crime, family violence, political corruption and a host of societal ills, which in comparison with the phenomenon

of two people loving each other regardless of their gender, seem to be far more deserving of our attention.

Finally, may it gently be observed that if the public does not wish to confront gay and lesbian people as an angry, persecuted and rebellious minority then it should simply cease treating them like one.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary N. Hess". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Gary N. Hess, Ph.D.  
Cathedral City