

Homophobia, Part 1 of 2: The Angry Visitor

"Are you Professor Theophilus?"

I turned. "That's me. Come in."

"My name's Lawrence. I'm gay, and I came to complain about your talk about constitutional liberties yesterday. It was bigoted and homophobic. I'm filing a formal protest to the people who run the Student Union speakers series."

At least he's direct, I thought. I waved him to a seat.

"Help me out, Mr. Lawrence. How could —"

"Just Lawrence."

"Thank you. Now how could my talk have been 'bigoted and homophobic' when it didn't even mention homosexuality?"

"I didn't actually hear the talk itself. I came in during Q&A."

"I see. And what did I say during Q&A?"

"You said gays have sex with animals."

I'm used to this sort of thing, so I merely observed, "I'm afraid you weren't listening carefully."

"I remember distinctly," he declared. "A girl asked your opinion of laws against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and you said gays have sex with animals."

"No, What I said was 'sexual orientation' can mean many things. Some people are 'sexually oriented' toward the opposite sex; others toward the same sex; others toward children; others toward animals; others toward cadavers. I said that I wondered where this trend of calling all orientations equal will end."

"Then you admit that gays don't have sex with animals?"

"You brought that up," I reminded him. "I have no information about who might do such things. I'm only suggesting that not all 'orientations' are morally equivalent."

He said nothing, but showed no inclination to leave. "Do *you* think all 'orientations' are morally equivalent?" I queried.

"I won't even dignify that question with an answer," he said. "But I know what you think of my orientation. I'm sick of you phony Christians with your filthy hypocrisy about the love of God."

"So you've heard from someone that I'm a Christian."

"Who hasn't? The holy, the sanctimonious, the Most Excellent Professor Theophilus of Post-Everything State University — what else would he be? The whole school reeks of you, of you and the other so-called Christian so-called professors. That's why I walked in on your Q&A. I wanted to see you spit venom."

"My goodness. Have I said anything venomous?"

"It's what you're thinking that's venomous."

"I see," I smiled. "Why don't you stop being bashful, and tell me what's bothering you?"

"You must think you're funny."

"I'm serious. Tell your complaints one by one, and I'll answer them."

"You couldn't answer them. I have too many."

"Try me. I'll give short answers."

He cocked his head and peered at me. "You mean it, don't you?"

"I wouldn't say it if I didn't."

"One at a time?"

"One at a time."

"All right, here's the first. Christians are hypocrites. You're always running down gays, but what about the other things your Bible condemns, like divorce and remarriage? It's other people's sins that bother you, not your own."

I laughed. "If you'd spent any time around me, you'd know that I'm just as hard on the sins of heterosexuals as on those of homosexuals. Easy divorce is a prime example of how one bad thing leads to another — in our case the loss of the ability to make any distinctions about sexual acts at all."

Ignoring the reply, he went on to his next complaint. "You're intolerant. You reject people like me just because we're different than you."

"Me reject you?" I said. "Aren't you the one who rejects what is different than yourself? Don't you reject the challenge of the other sex?"

"I don't need the other sex. I have a committed relationship with my partner."

"Research shows that homosexuals with partners don't stop cruising, they just cruise less. When they don't think straights are listening, gay writers say the same thing."

"So what if it's true? There's nothing wrong with gay love anyway."

I spoke quietly. "Tell me what's loving about sex acts that cause bleeding, choking, disease and pain," I suggested. "You might start by explaining the meaning of the medical term 'Gay Bowel Syndrome,' or how people get herpes lesions on their tonsils."

"You're — how can you even say that?" he demanded. "How dare you tell me who to love?"

"I don't think I am telling you who to love."

"Oh, no? Then what are you telling me?"

"That there is nothing loving about mutual self-destruction."

"You must think my relationship with my partner is just dirt!"

"No, I respect friendship wherever I find it — your friendship with your partner included. It's just that sex doesn't make every kind of friendship better."

"Why not? Are you anti-sex or something?"

"Not at all," I said, "but would you say that sex improves the friendship of a father with his daughter?"

Seeing from his face that he didn't, I continued. "You get my point. Nor does sex improve the friendship of two men."

"That's where you're wrong. Gay sex is just as natural for some people as straight sex is for other people."

"What's 'natural,'" I said, "is what unlocks our inbuilt potential instead of thwarting it. One of the purposes of marital sex is to get you outside your Self and its concerns, to achieve intimacy with someone who is Really Other."

Was he listening to any of this? "I'm sorry, Lawrence — I really am — but having sex with another man can't do that. It's too much like loving your reflection. That's what I meant before about refusing the challenge of the other sex."

I was about to go on, but abruptly he changed the subject: "It's attitudes like yours that killed Matthew Shepard."

"Surely you don't imagine that the thugs who killed Matthew Shepard were Christians, do you?" I smiled grimly at the absurdity of the thought, but seeing that he misunderstood my expression I made my mouth a straight line and tried again.

"Lawrence, I deplore the violence that killed Matthew Shepard, and I'm glad those men were caught. But shouldn't we also grieve the urge which caused Matthew Shepard to be sexually attracted to violent strangers?"

He said only, "You hate me."

I paused to study him. Did he really believe that, or was it a smokescreen?

"I don't hate you," I said. "I love you." I paused. "I'd like to be with you forever, in heaven."

Lawrence's face displayed shock, as though he had been hit in the stomach. Then he looked confused. The expression of confusion was instantaneously replaced by an expression of anger.

For one split-second, it had looked as if the shutters were open. "*God in heaven,*" I thought, "*I need help.*" How could they be pried back up?

"My love isn't really the issue for you, is it?" I asked.

"What do you mean?"

"It's God's. God's love is the issue for you." For a few seconds there was no reaction.

Then it came. "You're bleeping right God's love is the issue for me," he said. "*Your* God's love. The lying God who says He loves man, but who hates me for loving men."

"Do you think God hates you?"

"Doesn't He?"

"What makes you say that?"

"Doesn't your Bible say that? It calls people like me an abomination."

"It calls what you *do* abomination. There's a difference."

"There's no difference. I do what I am."

I considered his point. "Could it be," I said, "that you want God to love you *less*?"

"Less!" he spat.

"Yes. Don't you know what love is?"

"Acceptance."

"Acceptance of what kills you? Consider another view: Love is a commitment of the will to the true good of the other person."

"What?"

"I said love is a commitment of the will to the true good of the other person."

"I don't get what you're saying."

"Sure you do. The lover wants what's good for the beloved."

He hesitated. "I suppose."

"Good. Now think. If that's what love is, then a *perfect* Lover would want the *perfect* good of the Beloved. Do you see what that means? He would loath and detest whatever destroyed the beloved's good — no matter how much the beloved desired it."

I couldn't read the look on his face, so I plowed on. "That's what sin does — it destroys us. Yours destroys you, mine destroys me. And so the Lover doesn't 'accept' it; He hates it with an inexorable hatred. To cut the cancer out of us, He will do whatever it takes — like a surgeon. No, more than like a surgeon. If you let Him, He will even take the cancer of guilt upon Himself and die in your place."

Still inscrutable, he kept his eyes in front of him, just avoiding my own.

I asked "What happens, then, if you refuse to let go of what destroys you? What happens if you say this to the divine and perfect Lover who wants your complete and perfect good — if you say, 'I bind myself to my destruction! Accept me, and my destruction with me! I refuse to enter heaven except in the company of Death!'"

Neither of us spoke.

Lawrence rose from his chair and walked out the door.

Copyright 2000 J. Budziszewski. All rights reserved. International copyright secured.