

## Questions and Answers for Susan E. Gilmore

### *The Peace Seeker: One Woman's Battle in the Church's War on Homosexuality*

Over the years, the curious, the sincere, and the doubters have approached me about my beliefs regarding the conflicts between Christianity and homosexuality. No matter what the reason for their questioning, I began to notice five similar subjects that kept bubbling to the surface.

#### **But the Parts Don't Fit**

*1. God created man and woman with parts that are compatible. How can you think homosexuality is okay with Him if the parts don't fit?*

You are absolutely right, there is no denying that man and woman are suited for each other to procreate, to “multiply and fill the earth.” This process was necessary for mankind to flourish. But agreeing on this subject does not mean that there is no room for those of us who are attracted to the same sex. While the parts that fit for reproduction function gloriously, most would agree that there are plenty of other expressions of pleasure used by heterosexuals that do not include intercourse. Finding the similarities between the two groups could be the key to realizing that the “parts” although distinguishing, are not an end unto themselves.

In both types of relationships, sex is not the only thing that draws a couple into intimacy. It is the love that counts – and love is love. When the question becomes “how are the two groups alike?” – then we will find plenty of space on the planet for both to co-exist and find mutual respect.

#### **Born This Way**

*2. Is homosexuality a choice?*

Absolutely not! Who would choose to be gay? To choose to be gay is to choose to be outside the social norm. To choose to be gay is to choose fear of rejection by your family, employer, peers, and from your place of worship. Who would choose the terror of loneliness, loss of income, depression and ostracism? And let's not forget about the thousands who have chosen suicide as a viable alternative to the desperation they feel.

Although the social climate is changing, how can one ask this question without remembering the countless who have been tortured or who have lost their lives because they were suspected of being gay? Yes, we love our partners and would not think of turning our backs on them. We love the lives we've made, but would we have chosen this path that lead us outside and exposed? Absolutely not!

## **Rampant Sexuality**

*3. Why are gays so often sexually promiscuous and vulgar in their speech? Doesn't that prove that homosexuality is far from God?*

For years I wrestled with these same thoughts. The “sex” in homosexuality seemed to stand out in so much of the gay media and literature. To me it was shouting “raw, depraved, and vulgar.” I watched the Pride parades and the flagrant acts of sexuality played out in the gay community and found myself agreeing with these fellow observers. It was nothing less than shocking. The nudity and endless displays of conspicuous sexual consumption had a huge serving of “in your face” defiance. From my perspective, it appears to be a reaction from years of rejection. I can understand the wounds but cannot condone the promiscuity. A show of solidarity can be healthy, but the show does not need to include such base expressions.

And then there are the darker sides: the bathhouses, those openly gay places where men have been known to participate in unprotected sex acts with complete strangers; and the gay bars, or public parks that have certain sections set aside for those who are attracted to the dark and degraded.

I do not want to be associated with this part of gay America. But it is important for all to remember that the studded naked parade participants and bathhouse visitors do not represent the entire gay community. The sexuality of the gay community is an easy target for media manipulation, but there are many more who choose to live quiet monogamous lives. Through all of this, it is important to remember that homosexuals who might choose to live their lives as if sex were something to be given freely to anyone are no worse than heterosexuals who do the same. Heterosexuals have their share of lewd behavior – pornography, adultery and child sexual abuse are just as heinous – but somehow these acts have become so commonplace that they do not attract as many accusatory fingers. Yes, “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” The only difference is that gays must beware; the world is watching and the world will find greater fault.

## **Militants Among Us**

*4. There seems to be a real push for gay rights. Why are gays always marching and being so militant for the cause?*

All great movements begin with the radical. What would the Women’s Movement have been without Susan B. Anthony and Gloria Steinem, and a multitude of others? What would the Civil Rights Movement have accomplished without Martin Luther King or Malcolm X? Many gays believe they are in the midst of the last great civil rights movement of our time. In every vast awakening, the bar must be raised to a radical point. Only then will the public take notice; only then will the everyday American citizen be moved to speak up. Just as women and African Americans before us, homosexuals have lived with prejudice. The militant may be brash, they may be obnoxiously outspoken, but the militant serves a greater good. They lead the way for those who do not march to gain from their

achievements. We may not share all of their radical beliefs, but I know I must applaud them.

## **Sex Outside of Marriage**

*5. The Bible speaks of sex as something that is only for those who are married, how can you justify having sex outside of marriage?*

The Bible does speak of sex in the context of marriage and speaks of marriage as a sacred joining between man and woman. It also speaks about honoring the marriage bed as the two become one flesh. All of these concepts are pure and true, and those that follow them are following God's plan for marriage.

When you speak of marriage, what is your definition? Do you rely on a piece of paper? Do you depend on the ring worn on your left hand? Do you focus on the inward qualities of commitment, honesty, and faithfulness? This is the true essence of marriage and what is shared by all who are committed to one partner.

Until the day when marriage for same sex couples is legal and binding, the gay community will need to honor the "marriage bed." Honor will be displayed for all to see in the form of long-term loving relationships. The gay community will need to hold fast to love, and thereby set an example of commitment and integrity. Only then will our devotion to one another be recognized and our commitment honored.

## **Miscellaneous**

*6. With gay rights and marital equality making such headway in America, why do you think your book is so necessary?*

It is correct that the subject is all over the media and the general public believes that gays are making headway by leaps and bounds, but what many have not considered is that the Christian church has not changed their views. From Roman Catholicism to the Evangelical Protestant church, their doctrine remains the same as it has for centuries. They have not begun to embrace the idea that a loving relationship between same sex couples is acceptable. Their view is that homosexuality is unacceptable and sinful, and that a homosexual lifestyle is completely opposed to God; that homosexuality is actually opposition to God's ways.

Depending on where you live in the states, Christians are either silent about the topic or are very vocal about the changes in government law. But no matter where you live, if you were to ask someone who is involved in their faith what they believe, they will tell you that homosexuality is a sin. Many discount the power of the Church, but that power is real and if you look at the numbers, churchgoers are in the millions. There is an army of people who have been taught from their pulpits that gays are not living a pure life and that they should not be accepted in the Church. The power behind the pulpit has left the gays outside the Church when many of them want to be in the fold.

My life is an example of this battle that has raged for years and I am one of many who has experienced the prejudice. I have been excluded. It is important that the public understand what is going on behind the doors of their church. The world needs to know about the treatment of homosexuals and the Church needs to take a second look at what they are doing to the gay community.

*7. Your story is a tale of perseverance, why do you keep trying? Why do you want to be included in the Church that has repeatedly called you a sinner and has repeatedly thrown you from congregations and told you that you were not wanted and could not participate?*

That is the heart of my story. It was of utmost importance for me to let the Christian community know that *I am one of them*; that all gays who have accepted Jesus into their lives are also *one of them*. We are part of the family just as much as any straight person who embraces Christ. We love God at the very core of our being. Many of us believe that there is nothing wrong with how we were created. We believe that God made us gay just as much as He made people with brown eyes or long legs. It is part of us and it has been proven over and over again that it is not something we can change. I persevere because I cannot change my gayness; nor can I change my status as a Christian. I believe that speaking out can lead to positive change. I believe that Christians will one day see that their beliefs surrounding homosexuality is misguided. I have to believe that Christians can find compassion towards all beings, especially homosexuals, and that the next generation will not have to experience the injustices that I, and many others, have experienced.

*8. Your book is a memoir, why did you choose that platform?*

I chose the memoir platform because I wanted everyone who reads my book to understand my background, to know that I was someone from a middle class American home. I wanted them to witness my journey, and possibly relate to the *everydayness* of my life as I was growing up; to not only see that I was a Christian, but that I was also just a normal kid trying to find my way.

I feel like many people have the wrong idea of what being gay means. They have this idea that being gay is an all-encompassing feature of one's life; but it is not. I have told my story with the highlights of what made me *me*. I have shared what gave me joy and what brought me heartache. I also believe that my story is one that should be told. It is raw and embarrassing, with elements of tragic intrigue. I know that I am not alone, I have heard from hundreds of others who have experienced the same type of ostracism that I have endured. Just like every other social activist writer, I have told my story to alert the public of the prejudice that exists, and to help others in their journey.

*9. As you have shared, there are some deeply personal details to your story. Was that difficult for you to write? What was it like for you to try to remember the details of these very painful moments?*

It was not difficult for me to share my personal story. It is my life from around the age of five to the present. I am fifty-five now, and have arrived at a place of peace within myself. The peace seeker has finally found her peace. If I had written the book when I was younger, I could not have objectively looked at the pain and heartache, or the injustice of it all. But now I see how everything worked together for the good – how each experience molded me and made me stronger, and more able to fight the battle and eventually find peace.

*10. Why did you call it The Peace Seeker?*

The title fits on so many levels. For more than twenty years, I was seeking peace from my own inner turmoil. The Church told me that on the most basic level of who I was as a gay individual *was wrong*. Yet, at the same time, my conscience was clear. I did not know what to believe. With the Bible and the Church as my authority, I was taught that I should believe that I was not what God intended me to be, but my soul could never wholeheartedly believe what I was being told. After a life of twists and turns, I decided to find peace once and for all, and it came from the strangest of sources – the Bible itself.

With my background in theology, I took a fresh look at the scriptures using the very tools that I had been taught in bible college. I did my best to be truthful and honest, knowing that how I was to live the rest of my life would depend on what I discovered. With the scriptures still as my authority, the outcome would lead me to celibacy or give me permission to find a partner. It was the actual Bible that offered me the peace I had sought for so long.

*The Peace Seeker* also speaks to the war that is ongoing between the gay community and the Church. To say they are at odds is an understatement — at times it is an all out war. I am fairly certain the Church cast the first stone. The Church believes gays are sinners and the gays do not want to have anything to do with the Church because of that belief. Who can blame the gays? Who wants to go where they are not wanted, where you are called reprobate? *The Peace Seeker* is just one more plea for the Church to reconsider their misguided beliefs, and to acknowledge how very unchristian they have been; to repent (to change their minds) and to learn to co-exist with the homosexual population.

11. What are some of the bible passages you rely on to come to your conclusion that a gay lifestyle is not a sin?

12. What other words of encouragement, wisdom, and hope can you offer to the disenfranchised gay youth worldwide who live in fear of embracing their true nature as a homosexual?

13. It seems like a daunting task to turn the Church on its axis after hundreds and hundreds of years of preaching that homosexuality is a sin ... what do you believe the first steps should be?

14. How did you find it in your heart to forgive those who treated you so cruelly?