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Gay Straight Alliances

In Alberta, Canada Bill 10, a bill mandating that public and Catholic schools provide GSAs when students request them, was passed. Requiring Catholic schools to provide a GSA when students want one was opposed by two Alberta archbishops. Because of opposition from the Catholic Church to GSAs and because the queer community insisted that students who want GSAs have access to them, the Government engaged in more public consultation.

The Rocky Mountain Civil Liberties Association engaged in public consultation regarding GSAs. About 3,000 people participated in the Rocky Mountain Civil Liberties Association consultation process.⁽¹⁾ In their report, the Rocky Mountain Civil Liberties Association noted that access to GSAs in schools increased religious freedom for those who wished to be part of a GSA and had "no significant deleterious" impact on the religious freedom of those who did not want to be part of a GSA.⁽²⁾

While some Catholics believe GSAs in Catholic schools weaken the Catholicity of Catholic schools, I believe GSAs strengthen the Catholicity of Catholic schools. Respecting diversity is a Catholic value. The presence of GSAs respects and honors the diversity members of sexual minority groups bring to schools. The targeting of gay people for violence and abuse opposes deeply held Catholic values. Gay-Straight Alliances help reduce bullying targeting LGBT students. GSAs also help to reduce overall bullying in schools. Christian schools that have GSAs have another tool they can use to help treat each student as a God carrier and nothing is much more Christian and is much more Catholic than treating all students as if they are God carriers.

From Hate Crime to Saint

by Gary Simpson

Ken Vincent, in *The Golden Thread*, describes Paul's persecution of Stephen, which made Stephen the first Christian martyr, as a hate crime.¹ I found Ken Vincent's description of Paul gripping. For some reason, I just could not get the term hate crime out of my mind. This reflection uses Ken Vincent's point as a starting place for thinking about the apostle Paul and for thinking about God's radical, inclusive and compelling love.

Paul is an apostle with a spotty track record. The apostle Paul may have been guilty of taking part in one of the first hate crimes targeting those who follow Jesus Christ. We read a little about Paul's role in the murder of Stephen in **Acts 7:58-59** (KJV). **And cast him (Stephen) out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**

When it comes to hate crimes, there is a tendency for intolerant bigots to appoint themselves as judge, jury and executioners. I think one can make the case that is just what happened in the murder of Stephen. Commentator William Barclay describes Stephen's stoning as a lynching, because the Sanhedran did not have the legal authority to put people to death.² What is moving and powerful about Stephen's murder is not the powerful sermon he gave, but how he forgave those who executed him. In the 16th century, Scottish reformer George Wishart was going to be executed. The executioner is reported to have hesitated. Wishart approached his executioner, kissed his executioner and said, 'here is a token that I forgive thee.'³

While Paul's involvement in the stoning of Stephen might not meet some people's criteria for a hate crime, the way Paul went out of his way to persecute those who followed Jesus sounds like a religious hate crime to me. Continuing the story in Acts chapter 8. **Acts 8:1-3** (KJV) **And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and**

¹ Ken R. Vincent. *The Golden Thread: God's Promise of Universal Salvation*. (New York: iUniverse, 2005), 6.

² William Barclay. *The New Daily Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), ebook.

³ Barclay, ebook.

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Gay Straight Alliances continued . . .

Notes

(1) "The RMCLA Public Consultations on Gay-Straight Alliances." *Rocky Mountain Civil Liberties Association*. <www.rmcla/publicconsultation.html>.

(2) "Report and Recommendations on Gay-Straight Alliances in Alberta Schools." *Rocky Mountain Civil Liberties Association*. (Calgary: Rocky Mountain Civil Liberties Association, 2015), 2.

<www.rmcla.ca/GayStraightFinalReportRCMLA.pdf>.

Movie Review: *Boys*

- 78 minutes
- Available from Amazon

According to the DVD box cover, *Boys* won four prizes.

The movie is in Dutch, with English subtitles. Reading subtitles does not take away from enjoying the movie.

Some movies communicate mainly with dialogue. *Boys* uses a combination of dialogue and film shots to communicate.

Boys is an enjoyable and romantic coming of age movie, about two gay teens, who fall in love, as they struggle to accept their sexuality

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Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Acts chapter 9 gives more insight into Paul's hatred for the early Messianic movement, the early Christian movement. **Acts 9:1-2** (KJV) *And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*

Paul's hate-filled persecution of the church appears to have had a significant impact. The Jerusalem church ended up being scattered through Judaea and Samaria.⁴ Paul's persecution of the church is described as reeking havoc on the church. The Greek contains shades of meaning that are vivid. In Greek, there is a sense of "brutal cruelty". The word translated as havoc has been used to describe a "wild animal savaging a body."⁵

Paul had an encounter with God, when Paul was traveling to Damascus to persecute Jesus' followers. Acts chapter 9 relates the story about how God calls on a member of the church in Damascus to heal Paul. Picking up the story with **Acts 9:10-15** *And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.*

There are certain ironies in this story for the queer community. Can you imagine the conversation that might have taken place if Ananias was a gay Christian and if Paul was a notorious homophobe. I can almost hear the response.

⁴ Acts 8:1-4.

⁵ Barclay, ebook.

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Religious Freedom Bills: Bitter Backlash

Indiana and a number of other American states have either passed religious freedom bills or are considering religious freedom bills. The religious freedom bills are widely considered to be bills that allow for Christians to discriminate against LGBT people - with Christian operated businesses being able to decline to serve gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans customers.

The religious freedom bills can be viewed as a backlash against same-sex marriage rights. Religious freedom bills impress me as being like a boxer who is punch-drunk wildly punching, in a vain hope to inflict some damage, while on the way down. The religious right tries to depict Christians as a persecuted minority group, when people who identify as Christian compose the majority of American society. The aggressive and heavy-handed tactics of the religious right are causing people to lose respect for conservative Christian groups, who, for many years have been raging against one group or another.

For many years, the religious right tried to depict gay people as sex fiends, who had no ability to form relationships and who were quite unstable. As more LGBT individuals come out of the closet, it is becoming more difficult to depict sexual minority people as evil and horrible. Americans can look around at their queer colleagues, queer neighbors and queer friends and can easily tell that there are many people of quality who are part of the LGBT community.

For some Christians, same-sex marriage eliminates one of their big arguments against homosexuality. Many times I have been told, with a rather smug attitude, that I cannot have sex, because I cannot get married. The smug "I've got you," attitude disappeared and these wonderful Christian folk turned angry and nasty, when I pointed out that same-sex marriage is legal where I live.

"Ya, Lord. That's funny. Me go to Straight Street and heal Paul. Like that is going to happen. You know I don't do anything straight and I don't go near Straight Street. I'm too fab to go to Straight Street and healing that monster is out of the question. Get a straight disciple to do Straight Street ministry."

I am certain Ananias felt deeply conflicted by God's request to heal Paul, but Ananias not only went to help Paul, Ananias chose to treat Paul as a brother in Christ, not as a man guilty of committing hate crimes against the church. Commentator William Barclay describes Ananias as one of the "forgotten heroes" of the church.⁶ And such Ananias is.

In the Biblical story, Ananias healed Paul. Immediately, Paul could see. He got up and was baptized.⁷ Paul being healed of his blindness is not the most impressive miracle that took place that fateful day. The power and spirit of the risen Christ changed Paul. The result of Paul's encounter with God on the way to Damascus was amazing. Before the road to Damascus and the Straight street experiences, Paul was intensely legalistic. Paul became a man renowned for championing grace. Pauline theology is solidly based on a kind of inclusive grace and inclusive love that Paul never knew before he saw the light of God on the way to Damascus. The power of the risen Messiah transformed Paul from one of the fiercest persecutors of the church to one of the strongest pillars of the early church and turned Paul into one of the most effective evangelists of the early church.

Corrie Ten Boom was an amazing lady. She and her sister hid Jewish people and helped them escape from Nazi occupied Netherlands during World War II. Eventually, the German authorities discovered what she was doing and they put Corrie and her sister in a concentration camp. Her sister died in a concentration camp. After the war was over, Corrie Ten Boom did what I do not think I could have done. She went into Germany to share news of God's forgiveness. One time, after speaking about God's forgiveness, one of the guards at a concentration camp in which Corrie Ten Boon was incarcerated, approached Corrie Ten Boon. He said he knew God had forgiven him. He asked Corrie Ten Boon to forgive him. She was able to forgive the former guard of the concentration camp where

⁶ Barclay, ebook.

⁷ Acts 9:17-18.

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With the legalization of same-sex marriage, conservative Christians can no longer claim that they are treating gay people exactly the same way they treat unmarried straight people. The mask of "respectable" religious discrimination has come off and we now can clearly see how evil and petty the religious right is. Refusing to bake a wedding cake, refusing to serve pizza to a gay family, refusing to serve a gay man coffee is not going to reduce the frequency of gay sex and it is not going to reduce the frequency of same-sex marriages. Religious "freedom" bills are not about religious freedom; they are bills that essentially legalize religious discrimination. And they show the evil and petty nature of religious homophobia.

Homophobia and the hatred of gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people a sin. Jesus died for your homophobia.



Happy Easter!
Christ is risen!
Risen indeed!

her sister died.⁸

I am no Corrie Ten Boom. Forgiving people guilty of hate crimes is challenging for me. Every cell in my body fights forgiving people and accepting people who are guilty of hate crimes. Forgiveness seems easier to me when the person guilty of committing the crime has been convicted by the judicial system for his or her crimes.

I encourage members of minority groups to oppose bigotry and discrimination, not to be meek doormats for those who spread hate and engage in violence. We can struggle against hatred, while remaining open to the times when the Spirit asks us to extend a healing hand to those who the Spirit wants to transform into powerful agents of change.

"When the world hands you a lemon, make lemonade." That is the straight version. I am going to conclude with the gay version. You have heard it said, "When the world hands you a lemon, make lemonade." But I say, "When the world hands you lemons, make lemon danish." In today's Scripture, we see the early Christian church being handed a bitter lemon, and, through the power of the Spirit, turning that bitter lemon into a lemon danish. Today, the Spirit is giving you a lemon danish.



⁸ "Corrie Ten Boom Story on Forgiving." *Family Life Education Institute*. (excerpted from "I'm Still Learning to Forgive" by Corrie ten Boom. Reprinted by permission from Guideposts Magazine. Copyright © 1972 by Guideposts Associates, Inc., Carmel, New York 10512). n.d., 29 March 2015. < <http://www.familylifeeducation.org/gilliland/procgrow/CorrieTenBoom.htm>>.