

“Scholar-activist Miguel A. De La Torre is a highly trustworthy guide when it comes to critiquing social injustices and envisioning alternative possibilities. In this book he beautifully weaves together the threads of sexuality, spirituality, and social justice. Along the way, he offers indispensable insights about how every oppression defames the body—the personal body and the corporate body—as well as defames the human spirit. Don’t just read this book. Savor it; share it with your friends, allies, and even your critics; and, above all, embody its call for a comprehensive justice that leaves no one down or out.”

— Marvin Ellison, Professor Emeritus at Bangor Theological Seminary and Director of Alumni/ae Relations at Union Theological Seminary; Author of *Making Love Just: Sexual Ethics for Perplexing Times*

“This refreshing collection of essays will make readers stop and think about all the distortions of sexuality running through scripture and culture, including how sexist labeling of the Other as ‘effeminate’ functions as the primary dynamic behind other forms of oppression. While Miguel A. De La Torre doesn’t assume readers will agree with everything he says, he hopes to provoke a serious consideration of destructive gender and racial injustices that prevent the flourishing of sexual desire within safe, mutual, and committed relationships.”

— Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Vanderbilt University Divinity School, and Coauthor of *Christian Practical Wisdom: What It Is, and Why It Matters*

“Wise, provocative, uncensored. This wide-ranging collection of essays indicts the most entrenched structural sins of our time—classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism—in order to overcome distortions of healthy sexuality and the goodness of our created, embodied selves. Naked and unashamed, De La Torre liberates sex from oppressive traditions of biblical interpretation and cultural imperialism. An inviting introduction to the scholarship of one of the leading Christian social ethicists of our time.”

— Darryl W. Stephens, Lancaster Theological Seminary

“Dr. Miguel De La Torre addresses systemic issues of justice-making while confronting biblical texts that have long been misinterpreted. By addressing the interlocking and systemic nature of sexism, heterosexism, racism, and ethnic discrimination, Dr. De La Torre rightfully challenges readers to embody a stance that will more faithfully serve the needs of the world and of our churches. This is an integrative work that is desperately needed in today’s culture of hate and violence.”

— Joretta Marshall, Brite Divinity School, Author of *Practicing Care in Rural Congregations and Communities*

“Miguel De La Torre’s *Liberating Sexuality* is grounded in biblical scholarship and takes on such topics as masturbation, God beyond gender, and ethical S & M. Without providing easy answers, De La Torre presents biblical texts and characters that both confirm and subvert patriarchy, sexism, machismo, heterosexism, and racism. This book forces the reader to engage the Bible and sex deeply and thoughtfully in the movement for justice.”

— Marie Alford-Harkey, President and CEO, Religious Institute

LIBERATING SEXUALITY

JUSTICE BETWEEN THE SHEETS

MIGUEL A. DE LA TORRE



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When the Bible Is Used for Hate¹

Are you ready kids? Whoooo lives in a pineapple under the sea? SpongeBob SquarePants! Absorbent and yellow and porous is he. SpongeBob SquarePants! But wait, this silly frolicking sponge is really a sexual pervert teaching our innocent children to be pro-homosexual—at least according to Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family. I always knew there was something fishy about a sponge who openly held hands with a pink starfish. God only knows what illicit acts are taking place at SpongeBob’s neighborhood appropriately named Bikini BOTTOM.

Thanks to the vigilant eyes of James Dobson, who credits himself for bringing about [the George W. Bush] reelection, we can now shield our children from SpongeBob the sex fiend. Yes folks, Dr. Dobson outed SpongeBob during an inaugural feast held for members of Congress. It appears that SpongeBob joined other so-called “gay lovers” like Winnie the Pooh, Kermit the Frog, and Barney the Dinosaur on a new video asking children to take a “tolerance pledge”—a pledge to show dignity and respect for those who are different, whether it be different gender, race, ethnicity, faith, and yes, orientation.

Heaven forbid we teach our children to demonstrate agape (unconditional) love toward those who are different, when fear and ignorance are more useful tools for winning elections. Furthermore, our fear of gays requires we smoke them out and persecute them, even if it endangers the security of our nation. After the first terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 1993, our intelligence agency revealed an alarming shortage of Arabic-speaking translators. The mountains of data collected concerning possible terrorist attacks remains practically useless because of the backlog of vital information that remains untranslated. Last year’s backlog alone encompasses 120,000 hours of potentially vital information concerning possible threats to our security. Of the 279 Arabic translators at the State Department, only five are fluent enough to handle the regional dialects and language subtleties. Yet, since 1998, twenty Arabic-speaking government translators were

discharged from the military for being gay. We had trained and skilled people who could do their job well and help save American lives, but because they are gay we would rather not take advantage of their skills and instead choose to endanger lives? Does sexual orientation really affect someone's ability to do their job well?

But why should we be surprised. Those today who use the Bible to advocate hate, disgust, and fear toward homosexuals are the spiritual descendants of those in this nation who have used the Bible to persecute those who are different and have refused to conform to powers and principalities of the privileged social order. Following God's biblical call to missionize the heathens and fulfill our Manifest Destiny, we committed genocide upon the indigenous nations of this land. Based on the Word of God, we [hung] independent-thinking women...in Salem on the charges of being witches. Following God's ordained order for the universe as laid out in the Bible we kidnapped, raped, enslaved, and murdered Africans. Maintaining God's scriptural command that men are to rule over women, we denied them the right to vote, and even today, pay them 75 cents on the dollar for the same work they do as men. And when the Reverend King voiced the call for freedom and liberation to flow like living water, most of our white churches stood against what was seen at the time as a communist wolf in sheep's clothing, because the desegregation he advocated contradicted how we've been taught to read the Bible. Sadly today the Bible is being used to oppress, dishonor, and persecute our queer brothers and sisters, who like the rest of us, are also created in the image of God. I am repulsed by politicians who have fanned the flames of hatred and fear toward gays in order to score votes with evangelical Christians. I am dismayed that the universal church of Jesus Christ has changed the message of salvation as an act of unconditional love to one where gays cannot be included among the saved. But does not Christ call us to love our (white, black, Latino/a, Native American, and yes gay) neighbor as ourselves?

Now, if you excuse me, my favorite TV show comes on in ten minutes—*SpongeBob SquarePants*.

An Apology to Homosexuals

(follow-up to article above)

To my gay bothers and sisters. May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. I've received numerous communiques demanding an apology for a previous column I penned. And I agree. But if any apology is due, it is one that should be made to the gay community. I am sorry if I inadvertently made you the Object of my discourse rather than the subject. I never intended to speak for you or about you, but rather to highlight what I continue to see as a moral travesty—the use of sacred text to justify cultural bigotry.

The purpose of said article was that gays and lesbians are fired because of their sexual orientation, and specifically how the firing of trained Arab translators places this nation's security at risk. This injustice is undergirded in the name of God, as have past oppressions. Use of the Bible to justify crusades, genocide, slavery, and sexism is historical fact. My fear is that we are repeating history.

Hurt feelings of public religious political figures, myself included, are not the issue. What is important, my gay bothers and sisters, is that God loves you, God cherishes you and God suffers in your sufferings. You should know that Christ dwells in you, and you should not reject the good news of the salvation and liberation because of how those claiming to be Christ's disciples interpret his words. You should know that you are created in the image of God, created for dignity because you have worth. And because all that God creates is good, you should never settle for being "tolerated." Like all humans, you should be accepted into the fabric of society.

It is one thing for some to disagree with your lifestyle; it is another for them to use their power and prestige to impose their views, and in doing so, deny you humanness. And we who are heterosexuals should know that your orientation, like ours, is but a part of who you are, not the total means of defining your identity. You are more than gay. You are parents, siblings, children, teachers, scientists, ministers, politicians, military personal protecting our freedoms, and world leaders.

At first glance it appears that Jesus makes no reference to homosexuality. But several of my gay brothers and sisters point to Matthew 19:12: "There are eunuchs who are born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who are made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the reign of Heaven." Those who are made eunuchs, like Nehemiah the cupbearer, refer to those who were castrated in order to be the king's servant. This insured their ability to serve the monarch without dishonoring the king's possessions, specifically his queen or harem. Eunuchs for the sake of God's reign, are those who chose celibacy as a religious calling.

But how do we interpret eunuch from birth? Some gay scholars believe that this verse refers to them as modern-day sexual outcasts or transgendered persons. The eunuchs from birth represent men who have not been with women because of their orientation from birth. Eunuchs were considered spiritual outcasts, unable to participate in the cultic practices of the faith community: "He shall not enter the assembly of Yahweh if his male member is wounded, crushed, or cut (Deut. 23:1)." By referring to himself as a eunuch, Jesus seeks solidarity with the sexually oppressed of his times, while fulfilling the promise stated in Isaiah 56:3-5: "Do not let the eunuch say, 'Behold, I am a dried up

tree,' for thus says Yahweh to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and chooses things with which I am pleased, and take hold of my covenant. I will even give them in my house and in my walls a name better than sons and daughters, I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off."

Jesus' inclusion of the sexual outcast served as a model of welcoming and affirming everyone into the early Christian church. Love for all people, including the outcasts, becomes the acceptable norm established by Jesus. Love is an action word, not an abstract concept based on unexpressed feelings. The real test of love is that it be unconditional, not for the devious purpose of changing them (which in effect transforms people into objects), but rather love for the sake of the person, as she or he is.

When the disciple Philip (Acts 8:26–40) encounters an Ethiopian eunuch on the road to Gaza, who is reading the prophet Isaiah, Philip is quick to share the affirming message of the gospel and to welcome the sexual outcast into the fellowship of believers. But what if I'm wrong? What if homosexuality is a sin? Then, when I stand before the throne of the Almighty, I can stand with confidence. For I rather have erred on the side of grace and mercy than on the side of judgment and condemnation.