

The Vomit of God by Mark Hollenstein

“It is a good thing you did not come in here last week because I would have thrown you out that window. Lucky for you, just a few days ago I was delivered from a demonic spirit of hatred towards homosexuals!”

These were the exact words that were spewed at me with venomous disgust by the Dean of Admissions at the Bible College for which I was applying, back in 1982.

Looking at the window the Dean had pointed at, and realizing we were on the third floor of a very old office building, I seriously considered darting right out of that “godly man’s” office, but stayed put thinking, “Perhaps that would be best, me dead. Maybe I should pray he does push me out that window right now! Better yet, why don’t I just jump out the window on my own accord?” If it was not for my wife and two babies at home, I have no doubt that I would have flung myself out that third story window and ended my life. Lord knows I had contemplated killing myself many times before and this brief encounter convinced me again that I did not deserve to be alive.

I had scheduled the appointment with the Dean of Admission because I believed I was doing the “right

thing.” I thought I was being honest. I hoped my honesty would earn me some support and understanding before I started taking classes to become an ordained minister.

I began our conversation by saying I wanted to introduce myself and let him know my circumstances. I was 22 years old. I had been married for 3 years and I had a beautiful wife and two wonderful children. I had converted from Catholicism to “Born Again” Christianity when I was 19. I loved Jesus and felt “called” to share the gospel with as many people as I could. I had decided that being a pastor was the best way for me to do that. However, I was challenged. I was attracted to men, and our denomination taught us that homosexuals were an “abomination of God.” (They explained the definition of abomination as “The vomit of God” which always confused me because, if God barfed us out, how did we get inside of him in the first place? Did he eat us?

But I digress.)

I had come to this appointment secretly wanting the Dean to assure me, that as the “vomit of God,” I could still preach the gospel. I wanted this “man of God” to tell me at least one success story of other men in my position that came to him with their honest truth and tell me of their glorious transformation. “Please tell me how they over came their ‘affliction’ - how they were “delivered” and how they never had to fight or argue with their inner tormented self again.” How I longed to hear how these other desperate sincere men woke up

one morning attracted to their wife wanting to have lots and lots of sex with them. I wanted him to assure me he knew I did not “choose” to be homosexual.

That was not the conversation we had that day. It turned out to be mostly about him and his hatred of homosexuals and how hard it was for him to get delivered from the demon that tormented him with his hatred. He told me how he witnessed many men who came to Bible College or his church who were caught in “sinful” situations and how the church dealt with them publicly from the pulpit. He told me of the many homosexuals who struggled and failed at being in ministry. “BUT! With enough prayer, exorcism, bible study and discipline,” he pontificated, I could possibly be “delivered” like he was of his hatred of homosexuals and I could have a joy-filled, Christian marriage, ministry and life. He then quickly explained the different programs I could enroll in and instructed me to rapidly pick one. Discouraged, confused and petrified that I would fail, I reluctantly signed some documents and began Bible College the next month.

I walked into his office a confident and determined young adult, ready to dedicate my life to the service of Jesus and to sharing the gospel as a full-time minister. I walked out enrolled in the college, but emotionally beat up, humiliated and drowning in even more of the shame I was hoping to unload. I remember clearly how my eyes swelled, my head hung low and my chest burned with what felt like white-hot coals,

one of which lodged itself in my throat. It was such a familiar, painful sensation, as if my heart was being seared with the stamp of a fiery red, cattle-branding iron. As the pain in my chest intensified, humiliated, I imagined the letters VHS (for Vile Hopeless Sinner) scaring my loving heart, the place in my being where I so desperately wanted love to flow freely and where I believed Jesus lived. The shame and the heat were almost too much to endure.

Suffice it to say, college did not go well. Long story short, after 10 years in ministry and 15 years of a loving yet tumultuous marriage, I got divorced, left the ministry and came out of the closet as a gay man and stepped into the long journey of healing and emerging my authentic self.

That was 20 years ago. What I have discovered since then is that, like myself sitting in the Dean's office, most people in the church give ministers far too much authority and power over their lives. I have learned for certain that there are far more scholarly views of scripture than what I was taught in Bible College. I have come to fully understand that instilling fear and shaming and hurting men and women is abusive and severely mentally and psychologically damaging. Quite frankly, it is unacceptable emotional abuse. Solid clinical research now reveals that these methods used by the church are not only inappropriate and ineffective, but result in many beautiful souls suffering irreversible damage.

As a result of my own mending process, I have come to a much more peaceful place in my own heart and mind. I am a genuinely happy, healthy, creative gay man who is designing my life free of the limiting, long held beliefs I once-upon-a-time accepted as truth, simply because some one in church leadership told me it was “The Truth.”

I encourage Christians, who ask me about my traumatic evolution, to be open-minded. I invite them to recognize that contemporary clichés get tossed around as Biblical teaching and they are not even recorded in the Bible.

“Hate the sin and love the sinner” for example.

A little know fact in most church circles is the phrase is a concept lifted out of context from Gandhi’s autobiography that actually reads:

“ ‘Hate the sin and not the sinner.’ A precept which though easy enough to understand is rarely practiced, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world.”

Why is it hard to practice? Because our emasculated human minds have an unreasonable time making a distinction between a sin and the person who commits it. Even with the best and noblest of intentions, we end up hating the person right along with the sin, and for this reason, evil, prejudice, and bigotry continue to spread. There are plenty of examples of this through history – groups whose blind hatred has contributed to extreme evil being committed on our planet.

And pretty soon, it is easy to blame our own hatred of homosexuals on the demon from which we may or may not have recently been delivered.

As I have come to love myself fully as the gay man I was created to be, I allow for the possibility that scripture is not as black and white as we have been led to believe.

I now understand that my shaming others and instilling fear with the hopes of scaring them out of what I may believe is sinful or that I simply do not understand, only creates more suffering in the world. So I stopped doing that.

I have liberated myself from the need to change people and simply love and support them the way Jesus taught us too. What if, together we all lived in the kingdom of heaven that is with in each of us? That is the experiment I am conducting with myself. Regularly I ask the question “What will be the blessings of this day when I experience God’s kingdom of love that now dwells in my formerly VHS branded heart?”

Anyone care to join me?

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