

FIFTY YEARS ON

The movement for gay rights predates the Stonewall riots of 1969, but it was in the early hours of June 28 that year that the movement took off. The police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay hangout, on Christopher Street, in New York, led to six days of rioting, the coining of the term “Gay Pride,” and the gradual globalization of the insistence on gay rights.

FROM OPPRESSION

In any protest there is some truth. We don't have to agree with the gay lifestyle to acknowledge that the treatment of those claiming homosexual, lesbian, and transgender identity had its deplorable and counterproductive elements. Stonewall suggests as much.

While legal penalties against the gay community were upheld for the sake of public morality—recall, laws were also stricter re heterosexual adultery and divorce—they were not always just or helpful. The ban in New York on selling alcohol to known homosexuals seems needless. The law gave opportunity for other forms of license. Crime syndicates such as the Genovese family found a market niche servicing the gay bars of Greenwich village, bribing the police to ignore the Stonewall Inn so as to continue making money. Meanwhile, the mafia in general made a living by bribing high-profile socialites about their sexual orientation.

(Photo: www.biography.com/news/stonewall-riots-history-leaders. Information: www.history.com/topics/gay-rights/the-stonewall-riots).

Where great license in sin exists, there also develops as part of our fallen human condition, much self-righteousness, hatred, and the marginalization of fellow men and women. As the signpost reads: “Don't allow your third marriage to stand in the way of your opposition to same-sex marriage!” Thus, Pride has fed over the decades off the hypocrisies of society with its selective moral outrage. Off those of the professing church, too.

Nevertheless, Jesus, contrary to the distortion of his teaching, implicitly opposed homosexuality by upholding the Genesis account of the origin of marriage (Matthew 19:4-6). That said,

it was to the marginalized he went with his good news of salvation and the offer of inclusion in his church. While he did not affirm sinners where he found them, in authentic love he invited them to come to him for rest and for a new life. Those doing so found his word to be true. As Christians we apologize, then, for any and every instance in which we have not reflected Christ in engaging those of gay, lesbian, and trans persuasion.

TO OPPRESSION

That said, Gay Pride has not wanted the love Christ offers. It is not freedom from sin, but freedom in sin that Gay Pride seeks. The movement's success has been very great, so much so that America is now said to be post-gay. Equality of same-sex marriage under the law has been achieved, gays are welcomed into the military, and most live in states protected from discrimination. Moreover, Gay Pride gained the ideological support of powerful heterosexuals in national governments and international agencies.

So far has the pendulum swung, that there is a real danger now of the oppression of any holding to historical/religious views of morality. Gay rights are now said to trump any scruples of conscience. African governments under the Obama administration were basically bribed to support gay rights by promises of funding linked to their support. School curricula are being written to “educate” (aka indoctrinate) the young in gay and trans relationships. Bakers in the U.K. and the U.S. have been set up to endure arduous and costly legal processes for not falling into line with the new “ethic.” Sportsmen (Australian rugby player, Folau) and women (U.S. women's soccer, Jaelene Hinkle) are losing their careers for citing the Bible or for refusing to wear kits promoting LGBTQ.

In *The Way* we seek Christ's coupling of grace and truth, neither advocating hate for you if you are gay nor succumbing to the suppression of our voices. We thank, then, British gay activist Peter Tatchell for his defense of our freedom of speech, and use it in these pages to promote hope in Christ for all sinners, whether we be self-righteous or unrighteous.



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SUNDAY WORSHIP TIMES



Typifying the current impasse are two rainbows: the one seen in the sky following rain, known from the great flood of Noah's day to be God's covenant of mercy that he would not again flood the earth (Genesis 8:20–9:17); and the one created by San Francisco artist Gilbert Baker in 1978, adopted in New York in 1994 to celebrate a quarter-century of Pride and to represent the diversity of the gay community. Intentional or not, the second rainbow is Gay Pride's commitment to utilize God's patience with our race by uprooting theism, rejecting Holy Scripture, and forgoing the opportunity to be saved from sin.

Yet, for all her triumphs, Gay Pride remains insecure. The prior oppression and ongoing incidents of it explain some of this, but we should not ignore the deeper spiritual issues explaining gay (and straight) insecurity.

THE INDELIBLE LAW OF GOD

We can mock God's law, ban it, despise those upholding it, and suppress its voice within, but there it stands, etched indelibly and unalterably on our constitutions. No amount of public affirming of gay life can make up for the niggling loss of peace and security felt by those living life contrary to God's will. We can ignore our consciences, suppress them, go far to sear them, but we cannot eradicate them.

THE HOLY WRATH OF GOD

Our consciences not only know right from wrong, they understand that the breakage of God's law warrants his just response. Yet, every Pride march bounces along in revolt against what is known of God, his law, and his coming judgment on sin. "See," proclaim Pride marches in effect, "where is the sulfur which rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah?" Such denial has been emboldened by the antiretroviral drugs which have stayed the AIDS' death sentence.

The Bible, however, does not teach that AIDS is the judgment of God. After all, AIDS was unknown to the biblical writers. Scripture teaches, rather, that gross immorality is God's judgment. Once our lives have shouted out to God that we shall not be happy unless we have complete license to sin, he eventually leaves us to our sins. God, repeats Paul, gives us up to our lusts, dishonorable passions, and our debased minds. Divine judgment is, then, already in play among those who practice "all manner of unrighteousness" and who give approval to those doing so (Romans 1:18-32).

THE LOVING MERCY OF GOD

Far from affirming claimed rights to sin, God calls us in love to come to him for a new life and for true freedom. His call takes the form of a command to repent of our sins and an invitation to rest in Christ as our personal Savior and Lord. Only in him do we receive a relationship with God and a fresh start in life.

God underlines his call. First, he implicitly denies that gay and trans people are born that way. As if the physiological incompatibility of same-sex relationships does not make that

clear enough, Genesis 1:27-28 and 2:24 teach us that God created us male and female, and that his institution of marriage was exclusively heterosexual. Yet, before deriding this, note that *The New Atlantis*, a John Hopkins University Journal of Technology & Society, published in 2016 a special report titled *Sexuality and Gender* by Drs. Lawrence Mayer and Paul McHugh. It concludes that, "Some of the most widely held views about sexual orientation, such as the 'born that way' hypothesis, simply are not supported by science." Since, then, we become gay, we can, by God's grace and power, unbecome it also.

Second, God encourages us to revoke our adopted identities. Gay parades may encourage jolly dress codes, yet God utilizes misery to call gay people to himself. Consider, for instance, the higher rates of suicide among "gay kids" (*The Atlantic*, June 28, 2019), and the significantly higher rate of divorce in lesbian than heterosexual marriages. Causes include conflict over who goes out to work and infidelity.

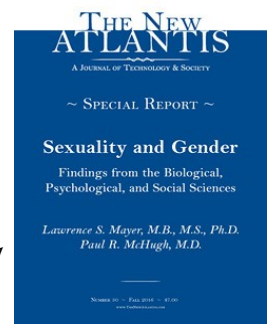
In a fallen world, heterosexuals are, admittedly, not left unscathed by sinful choices in life. God, in his mercy, uses our malfunctioning to call us to our senses and to Christ. Listen, again, to psychiatrists Mayer and McHugh:

... subpopulations [such as sexual minorities] show higher rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicide compared to the general population. One hypothesis, the social stress model— which posits that stigma, prejudice, and discrimination are the primary causes of higher rates of poor mental health outcomes for these subpopulations—is frequently cited as a way to explain this disparity. While non-heterosexual and transgender individuals are often subject to social stressors and discrimination, science has not shown that these factors alone account for the entirety, or even a majority, of the health disparity between non-heterosexual and transgender subpopulations and the general population. (www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/conclusion-sexuality-and-gender; photo: www.pinterest.com/pin/485614772297916078/.)

THE SURE PROMISE OF GOD



To the jaded, empty, and unclean, God's rainbow offers relief. It affords more security than the 70 percent of Americans opining that homosexuality should be accepted. This all-time high is fickle but God is not. His long suffering has provided us this season of grace. He does not accept homosexuality, but he does accept homosexuals who come to him through Christ. The only sin that God is constitutionally unable to forgive is the refusal to seek forgiveness through Christ. That, however, is as true for the self-righteous as it is for the gay.



TWO RAINBOWS

Transitioning from one rainbow to the other seems an impossible journey, even when desirable. It helps, though, to encounter others who have undertaken it. Dr Rosaria Champagne Butterfield is but one to have done so.

ALIVE BUT WITHOUT THE LAW

Although raised in a liberal Roman Catholic home, Rosaria was drawn into lesbianism in her late twenties by feminist philosophy and by LGBT advocacy. Gaining her Ph.D. from Ohio State University, she was employed in the English department and women's study program at Syracuse University from 1992. She was not only a specialist in queer theory, but advised the LGBT student group, wrote Syracuse University's policy for same-sex couples, and actively lobbied for LGBT aims alongside her lesbian partner.

Rosaria recalls that those were happy days. Understandably so, for the law of God had yet to be applied to her by God's Spirit. There was, however, one wrinkle in her happiness—her distaste for Christians who, she felt, would not leave consenting adults alone. Freshly tenured, she embarked on a research project to examine the religious right from a lesbian feminist point of view, wanting to prove the unreliability of the Bible.



Amid her studies she wrote a piece for her newspaper which elicited a kind and thoughtful response from local pastor, Rev. Ken Smith. Intrigued by evangelical Christians and needing input for her research, Rosaria took

up his invitation to call him. Thus, there began a conversation in Ken and Floy Smith's home lasting two years. (Photo: <https://chmce.org/speaker-bios/>.)

WORN DOWN BY GRACE

Coming at their meetings from polar opposite worldviews, Rosaria found that her defenses were gradually worn down by her unexpected commonalities with the Smiths. There was their kindness and hospitality, which were so important for her in her gay and lesbian community. Additionally, there was the Smith's willingness to listen to her and to treat her with dignity. Along the way, she learned that this readiness was attributable to their biblical conviction that every human is made in the image of God, no matter our history of sinning.

Such discoveries, coupled with her reading of large chunks of the Bible for her research, began to affect her thinking. One friend from her circle began to notice. To her, Rosaria raised the question she had feared articulating: "Jay, this is just a research question, but what if it's true? What if it's true that Jesus is a real and risen Lord? What if we are all in trouble?" To Rosaria's surprise, Jay had been a Presbyterian minister and had prayed for her own healing. This unsettled Rosaria, since she had always thought of lesbianism as good. If it was not good, as her Bible reading was telling her, then what she needed was not healing (as if she was sick), but repentance for her sins. Yet, Rosaria was not yet ready to advance beyond the intellectual stimulus to issues of her heart.

THE WORST SIN

During her weekly meetings with the Smiths, Rosaria found that there was a bigger elephant in the room than her lesbianism. Ken and Floy focused not on her sexual sin but on original sin. That is to say, the principal of sin found in each of us. Thus, she came to realize that her biggest sin was her unbelief in God and in the good news of Jesus Christ. More than that, she learned that personal sin requires personal repentance, and from Ken's prayers over mealtimes that he was a repentor of his own sin before he was an advocate of Rosaria's repentance.

Two years into their friendship, Rosaria felt comfortable enough to attend the Smith's church unannounced. There she was welcomed and found other colleagues from Syracuse University. Still beset by many questions, she heard from Ken's sermons that we must first submit our hearts to the will of God if we are to receive answers from him. She, therefore, began to read the Bible differently. No longer scrutinizing it in disbelief, she now, contrary to her reliance on human reasoning, began heeding it and praying for understanding.

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

God in his marvelous grace was granting Rosaria two blessings: conviction of her sin and desire for himself. Together, they occasioned the tumbling of her worldview. The God she denied, she was now conversing with in prayer. The Bible she cursed and led thousands of students in cursing, she now clung to as hers, and the Jesus she now understood to have persecuted her whole life, she embraced. She did so, not as simply some historical figure, but as her Prophet, Priest, and King, her Savior and her Friend.

In the grace given Rosaria to repent toward God and to trust in Christ for forgiveness, she lost everything this world has to offer, apart from her dog! "Conversion put me in a complicated and comprehensive chaos." She lost her partner, her reputation in the gay community and among her students in queer studies, and her colleagues. In the words, of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "When God calls a man, he bids him come and die."

Yet, God is debtor to no one. When, in kindness, he crashes an old life, from the ashes emerges a new life that is pleasing to God, suffused with his purpose, and of eternal duration. Now, twenty



years on from that heady turn of the millennium, Rosaria has the support of the Christian community, the love of a husband and four adopted children. She utilizes her training and research as an English professor to testify as to how God's grace is transforming her, and she challenges the church to extend more of the love of Christ to gay communities through hospitality (hence her book, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*).

(Photo: <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/rosaria-butterfield-a-former-lgbtq-professor-on-living-in-a-post-ssm-society>). This account of Rosaria's conversion to Christ is based chiefly on her interview with Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth of *Revive Our Hearts* (www.reviveourhearts.com/season/secret-thoughts-unlikely-convert-rosaria-butterfield/).

ONE JOURNEY

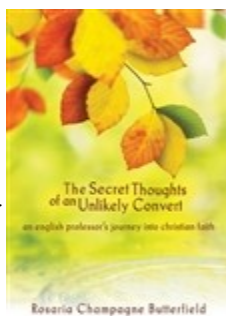
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WHERE TO FROM HERE ?

If Rosaria's story resonates with you and you find yourself stirred within, know that you are not alone. The Lord is also able to lead you to people like the Smiths. Moreover, there is plenty of literature available to speak into your life. These include resources by those who have walked in your shoes.

Why not read Rosaria's full account of her journey to Christ, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*? She has a follow-up book in which she discusses questions and answers many ask when she speaks. The title is *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ*. Rosaria also has a blog (rosariabutterfield.com/).



There are other ministries dedicated to serving from experience of the gay lifestyle. Hole in My Heart Ministries is one such ministry, and offers a helpful list of grace-laced resources (www.himhministries.com/resources.html). Harvest USA began as a ministry to those affected by the AIDS crisis in the city of Philadelphia and to those struggling with same-sex attraction. Although the ministry is now a larger entity, seeking to service local churches and to encourage biblical discipleship especially in the area of sexuality, the ministry offers opportunities for one-on-one support. For more information go to www.harvestusa.org/get-help-for-yourself/.

Just know that there is hope in the transforming grace of God in Christ. The moral chaos of our day is not new. In fact, it was in a day such as ours, preaching a gospel of God's compassionate grace in Christ, that the Christian church not only survived, but thrived and spread unto the ends of the earth. Listen to the implicit progress report Paul includes in his letter to the Christians of Corinth:

... do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy,

nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified [set apart from the world], you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Come, then, to Christ! No matter your history, whether a "respectable" sinner like the Pharisees or a self-destructive lawless type, God promises his mercy and pardon. A myriad have come to Christ before you. None have ever been rejected nor have they regretted coming. Why, then, would you?

(Photo: unsplash.com/@benwhitephotography.)



WHAT IS ON OFFER TO YOU ?

To customize *The Way* for your church's/ministry's use, we recommend a point person collect the relevant information to advertise what you have going on that is especially relevant to the unchurched. The point person will need some computer skills to present creatively the information in words and logos, etc.

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May *The Way* aid your ministry. We praise God for our partnership in the gospel. Do join us in prayer for God's blessing on the publication.

Next Issue Due Out: December 1