

Paul Rebillot

Homosexual people as a source of healing for themselves and for our culture

During one of our last encounters, Paul told me what this conference paper is about. And he did it in such a way that I had tears in my eyes unexpectedly.

Paul gave this lecture in French at the conference "Sexuality and Mental Health" in Strasbourg, France, November 15-17, 2003. The title of the paper was chosen by the editors.

Manfred Weule

With the following preface, the contribution was published in the congress brochure under the title "Homosexuality - Problem Source or Balance Factor?"¹

Preface

"Homophobia - it functions in the same way as guilt and low self-esteem, but is increased by social pressure - is the main source of mental suffering for homosexuals: the self-destructive behaviour is based on social rebellion. As long as the homosexual is not aware of his/her own homophobia, he/she cannot find and fill his/her place in society.

Homosexuals have been part of society since the mists of time and in numerous cultures, they held roles of shamans, healers, spiritual masters and guides. Those cultures have recognised the homosexual as a being with two souls, uniting and balancing in him(her) the feminine and masculine principles.

How, nowadays, can this special quality of a homosexual person be a source of healing for him(her)self and for the society in which we are living?"

I am not an expert in homosexuality. I have not taken any courses at the university on that topic, and it is not my vocational training. I am a homosexual. And for a man of my age...telling you that...right in front of you...a large audience, in such a way.....pfff. That is quite a big thing to do! I am someone who, as we say, has made a "coming out", that is to say has gone out of secret life. In that period, there were, for example policemen who used to go to bars frequented by homosexuals. They charmed them, then they followed them to their homes, then, at the very moment they were doing something with them...they showed them their cards. The homosexual, refusing to be a prisoner, would sometimes rather commit suicide, jump out of the window and die because in those times it was too hard to reveal being a homosexual. Actually it was not a crime but it was considered as a crime to be homosexual.

For that reason, I say that for me, telling it in front of everyone, just like that, with this microphone, it sounds so big. That's why I feel so nervous.

But I must add that I am not a professional homosexual either! (*Laughs in the audience*). It is not my job, not at all. I work with everyone; so I work with homosexuals too. Not only with homosexuals. It seems important for me to make that clear.

¹ We thank Geneviève Liétaert-Dumoulein for her help in finding this contribution (originally in French) and a translator. We thank Paul J.Mellick for his review of the English version.

But what is homosexuality? A simple, very simple answer is: it's someone who is allured by a person of the same sex. It's just that. It is not a disease. For me it is not something major, it has existed since the beginnings of humanity. In a lot of civilisations, societies, homosexuals were an inner part of society. It is not an event which occurred suddenly in our period, with industrialisation. So that means homosexuals represent something important in the world of men and women.

Homosexuality is not a source of troubles: it's homophobia

The subject I have to talk about - I do not know if I chose it myself - is: "Homosexuality, a source of troubles or a factor of balance?" I want to begin with homosexuality as a source of troubles. I believe homosexuality is not at the origin of troubles: it is homophobia. Not only the inner homophobia but the one which is brought by the people from outside. The last one is the most difficult to live with for homosexuals: how do I live with it, especially then when I just had my "coming out"? How can I live and remain exposed?

Yet I cannot live differently because I am a homosexual. I cannot change the colour of my eyes, look, they are blue. I can wear contact lenses to change the colour but my eyes will remain blue.

Homosexuality is the same thing for me. One day, someone asked me: "How can people become homosexuals?" I said, "but with heterosexuality you don't ask that, do you?" We never ask :"How to become a heterosexual?" You do not say such things! It is life itself that creates it. It is life which creates such a variety of people! It's life, simply life. It's not a spell cast on you, it's not something that we could explain by saying: "Oh, that's it, that is where it comes from" and then we could delete it and in the same time delete the source of the troubles. If so, it would not be right.

Homophobia comes from the fear of women

I believe that homophobia comes from the fear of women. Maybe from the fear of the mother: just that. But I think it's mostly from the fear of women and from the fear of being a woman in a man-woman relationship.

As an example. I was once a soldier, during a period of my life. The worst insult for us was when the sergeant used to call us "Miladies". It was unbearable, intolerable. Why? I think it's due to the fact that a man who is a woman can introduce himself to another man: he can say "Here I am". This is not possible if men are in a dominant position. If machismo is linked to the idea of domination, to welcome another man being a homosexual is not imaginable.

Very often, a man is lured by the idea of watching women making love together, but watching men making love together, no, that is different. Because it would mean for them to become a woman and this is still the insult I told you before. I think it's linked to this fear of being a woman, to be considered as a woman. To go into the role of a woman, brings closer the experience of really being a woman. And yet, why not? Being a woman isn't too serious, is it? (*Laughs in the audience*).

This can even be found in the Greek myths, you know, among the gods. Zeus, for example, wished to have this experience to be a woman: he took Dionysus and planted him in his thigh to be able to give birth to a child. It was Pallas Athena, who was born out of his head. Zeus was a man who wished to

give birth to someone else, to give life to someone else.

Homophobia, it's also the question of dependency, of subjugation to another one, and the question of sensitivity, subtlety. I have got to be strong, and a macho, and do what goes with it. On the other hand being squeamish is a bit dangerous.

An anecdote comes to my mind, because I love to use storytelling to say what I believe. During a period of my life, I drew tarot cards. One day, I was somewhere and I was drawing cards for some people. Facing me, there was a man who was a member of a gang: a true macho from a Californian gang. He drew a card which meant that he was perhaps a sensitive person, like a homosexual. I didn't dare say: "Oh maybe you feel like getting into a relationship with another man". Because if I had said so, he would have killed me right away, it was too dangerous, really! So, instead, I said :" Maybe you've got something which is sensitive in yourself." He then started to talk, then he cried and said things which sounded much deeper. By using the word 'sensibility', the possibility to experiment with that sensibility he had in himself was liberated, instead of rejecting the possibility of being like a woman in front of another man. Because, that was what he thought: that he was changing into a woman by showing his sensibility. This is not the case, but that's what he thought.

The social roles: “masculine” and “feminine”

Homophobia among men, it's also because they are afraid of losing their masculine social role. In society, if I am a homosexual, maybe, I am going to miss certain roles. I'm going to tell you this short story about Stanford, who has been my partner for ten years. We were together, we worked together, we lived together. At first I felt honoured to be with him. He was much younger than me; he was 18 years younger than me. He was someone who had done his "coming out" in the period when gays had already been emancipated. So he was much freer in his appearance. In contrast I was still a bit locked and tense because it was still a bit difficult for me. He often asked me to put my arm on his shoulder when we were walking in the street. And I didn't dare to do so because I used to feel too ashamed in those times.

We started to work together. He used to come over with me to Europe every year. But he wasn't used to Gestalt then. He was a priest in a protestant church but without experience in Gestalt yet. Instead of doing a research in Gestalt as he did soon after, we might say he rather worked like my wife, He did the washing, prepared the meals, everything that women often do. And he began to ask for money, normal wasn't it? Because he worked. But I was a macho, with another way of thinking. So we went to see a woman, who was a Gestalt therapist and feminist. It was very nice for us because she said: "You have got the same problems as women because women's work must be paid. Not only with money to buy food etc., but paid like a real job, a real professional job" We thought it over and wondered "Why not?" I said "yes, you are right". From then on we changed our relationship. We didn't stay in that fixed role of man/woman any more: I paid him for the work he did and the more he was getting involved in the reflexion of Gestalt, the more I increased the sum I used to give him. At the end - I say "end" because he died of AIDS - he got the same sum as I did. He trained himself in Gestalt, he worked in Gestalt with me. We created a school and he was one of its members, we had become equal then.

Then we started to reflect the differences between man/woman roles, and we explored several ways of living it. In our work for instance: We always used to work together and we had seven days sessions. Once the session was over, we worked in Gestalt to “clean” what might have happened in the group. After every week of work, he had one day for himself. That is to say he was the only one to decide what we were going to do that day. I followed him and I served him on that day. The next day we used to do exactly the opposite. In such a way, none of us was stuck in a role. We could breathe in these roles; and find valuable every side of each role. It was an advantage not to freeze in the man/woman roles.

Once I remember working with a man/woman couple, in Esalen, California. Both were in conflict concerning their own roles. But the man didn't want to leave his position as a man. He didn't want to do something that he thought wasn't in a man's possibility. I said to him: "If you can't change your mind, you can't live with this woman any more," because she wishes to change her role, her way of living with you."

Inner homophobia

The hardest aspect of homophobia is the **internal** one. Of course, there is external homophobia, but it exists within ourselves too. For the ones who lack confidence in themselves - and we are many in this group - this homophobia is reinforced by the external world. For that reason homosexuals believe very easily that what happens to them comes from outside. If I lose my job, if I am not invited to a conference, if something negative happens to me, I think at once: "Yes indeed, if it happens to you, that's because you are a homosexual." But this is wrong! Maybe it was right at a certain time. But it is no longer right today, because I am not only a homosexual, I am much more than that.

I think this homophobia doesn't have a natural source. In the musical "*South Pacific*" one song says: "*You have to be carefully taught*".² This comedy is about racism. It's about the fact that prejudice is not something that comes naturally, it had to be learned willy-nilly, and that's the case with racism. Racism is not innate.³ The same for homophobia "you have to be carefully taught". Very often, the parents themselves are afraid of it. The Church talks about it like a mortal sin. It's the patriarchal society which is afraid of that element of women, etc. All this feeds our inner homophobia, from which comes the fear that homosexuals feel and also their suffering. We always hear that inner voice which says: "As you are, you are no good." I believe that a lot of behaviours comes from this inner homophobia. For example, the outrageous comportment of some gays who walk in the streets, practically naked. Like drag queens, their female costumes and looks are so excessive that they sometimes turn into a mockery of women. Behind all this I think, there is a lot of anger. The person really says "That's the way I am", "accept me like this", but he/she says it with an angry voice. I think this anger springs from that inner homophobia.

We can even imagine a life when people have a lot of lovers, a lot of sexual adventures, that this life is actually ruled by that same anger. Among animals, for example, the males make love to the partner that is ready. They make love quite a lot of times, without necessarily having chosen the partner. Ho-

2 The complete text of the song can be found in Appendix 1.

3 In French, prejudices are called *idées reçues*, adopted ideas - in other words, you adopt them from outside. (MW)

mosexuals can make love without any responsibility. They don't have to bring up a child if they make love. I think it's the origin of the word "gay". It means they can enter life and be cheerful and not feel responsible for a child. In such a way, homosexuals are perhaps linked to the goddess Aphrodite, because that is her blessing to humanity. She is the one who loves, who makes love without having a child, only for pleasure. It's Aphrodite's intent, power and blessing.

Here, let me make a short digression about the concept of virginity in ancient Greece. A woman who is not a virgin in the Greek culture is someone who belongs to a man, to her husband. She is considered as his possession. But to become a virgin again, she used to go away in the village, in Aphrodite's Temple and during a whole night she used to make love to a stranger. Thus she could become a virgin again, because she no longer belonged to one man. She wasn't his possession any more. Then, with the Catholic church, things changed but at first it was like that. I tell you this because homosexuality among the gods was not a bad, nasty thing. It was a blessing.

Liberation of women, liberation of black people, liberation of gays

I would like to tell you about changes which happened a while ago, in the late sixties. These years were border years. First of all, feminism began at that time. This was extremely important, because with this idea and the right to vote, women began to stand up as equals. Formally, they were already equal, but they began to express their equality with men. Following that liberation of women, the liberation of black people started in the U.S. Then, after the liberation of black people came the liberation of gays. Every event occurred one after the other, in the same period.

During this liberation, something very important happened. In the beginning there was a shell, an egg-shell, to protect our insides. This shell was formed by the groups of activists who said "Don't touch!" They protected the special capacities of women. Inside (in the middle) were the most vulnerable, who nourished themselves to be able to leave this shell when they were ready.

For the Blacks, it was the same kind of thing. There were activists, for example the "Black Panthers" to protect the heart. And for homosexuals it was the same. That's a good thing, because the vulnerable side which stays inside can be protected. Me, for example, I live in San Francisco, which is a sort of Mecca for gays. There are plenty of gays there. In fact there is a sort of ghetto for gays there. On one hand it's something valuable for gays but I don't completely agree. Circling a group in a ghetto makes it lose its relation to the rest of humanity. It's a true loss for everyone. Not only for homosexuals.

Among the traditional Native Americans, for example - today it is different, but I am talking about the more traditionally minded - homosexuals were called "people with 2 souls", the soul of a man and the soul of a woman. This view was helpful for homosexual men and women. This was true for both male and female homosexuals. They were granted both poles, male and female. Very often they had a special place, a special position and were considered important members of the village and the tribe. Very often they became shamans and were related to the spirituality of the tribe. They could become healers (medicine men or medicine women). A woman, who was deeply connected to her femininity was in contact with the earth, with medicinal plants and also with the healing power of her hands with the help of her feminine side.

I think most of the witches who were burnt in the Middle Ages were women who possessed that power. They held a power which exceeded that of “ordinary” people, you might meet every day. They used to be called “sorcerers or witches”. For the Catholic Church this meant that they could reach God without the Church and that was the reason they were killed. Some other questions, like the possession of land etc. has to be considered but I believe that in the root it was this question of female power.

This relationship between a teacher and a student would often occur in ancient Greece. Socrates and Plato for example were linked one to the other by homosexuality. Hera’s priests were often castrated. It was severe but after the castration, the priest used to throw away his testes in someone’s house, and that person should come and take care of him until he was cured. Very often afterwards, he turned into a gay - I don’t know why exactly but it happened. He was still a priest of the goddess Hera. He was then tied to the spiritual world. We find something similar in Native American shamans.

When I mentioned the factor of balance, I said that if homosexuals are in a ghetto, they do what they do, but only for themselves, and only in that group. So an aspect which could nourish society all around cannot get out in fact. To effect a small change, we should begin to work on this inner homophobia. I think it’s really important that we realize, as homosexuals, that all of us carry this homophobia in ourselves.

Working with one’s internal racist

I remember the period when I worked as a Gestalt therapist in a psychiatric hospital with male nurses, psychiatrists etc. There were quite a lot of black people in that team, and there were numerous black patients in the hospital too. I don’t remember how it happened but I talked to a black man. I thought I didn’t have any prejudices; I thought I had grown up , that I was not like my parents anymore, who were real, true racists. I thought I had escaped this trap. I was talking to this man and he said: ”You can’t really work on problems between Blacks and Whites until you get rid of your “internal racist.” “What does that mean?” I answered. “I am not a racist. I don’t think I am a racist. It’s horrific!” He said: “Look, for example when you talk to me or when you observe something, how many times do you have just a little thought which goes through your mind, a racist thought.” ”Okay, I’m going to try,” I promised.

Then I began to realize that when I met a Black man I heard in my head something a bit paternalistic which was saying ”Oh yes I get along well with him” something even worse than that, and it is racism! I started to think how much even now I have such thoughts. When I sometimes looked at criticisms on movies in a paper, and if I saw a film about Black people, I used to think:”I am not concerned...” But that’s not right because this real thought is a racist one! Now every time I note racist thoughts in my mind, I catch them by the ass and I hit them ! (*Laughs in the audience.*) Oh I meant taking them by the neck! (*Laughs.*) Yes, maybe by this side too! (*Laughs.*) So I grasp these thoughts by the neck and I face them, wondering: “Is it just me thinking that right now, or has it something to do with my inner racist?”

It’s the same way for homophobia. Every time that we homosexuals have this kind of thoughts, we should do the same thing. When I think :”What happens to me now, it’s because I am homosexual” I

must face this idea and wonder: "Am I right to say such things? Or is it a false idea, coming from the past, a stereotype?" It is necessary to find a means to change this inner homophobia, because it is what prevents us from doing something else with our lives, something else with another person and with the outside world.

This homophobia , the inner one I mean, prevents me from making love to a woman too. I am not in opposition to women, I do like women. Women are pretty too! And I made love to some women but it was very hard for me because I wasn't making love with Marie or Françoise, I was making love with a Woman, the Woman! Because it's homophobia which says "You must make love with a woman!" If I can drop this inner homophobia, perhaps I will be able to make love with the one (he or she) I have chosen, simply chosen. You don't make love with an idea, with a generalization but with a particular being, a living person made of flesh and bones. Do you understand what I mean? Because I believe it's an aspect of homophobia which doesn't let me make love to the person I would prefer.

I told you about the Greek priests , and how the goddess Hera's priests often became homosexuals. My thoughts about that were not taken from any book. To prepare for this conference I had brought thousands of books to learn but I have thrown them away, because I believe it sounds better if I talk about my own experience, instead of saying: "Someone said this, and someone else said that, etc." I wonder if the Catholic Church didn't realize, at a certain deep level, that it is nice to separate men from women. And thus, men fall in love with men and women with women. Maybe it's promoted, spiritually speaking. Jean François, you talked about transformation and metamorphosis; I had the experience with close friends that after a certain level of contact, a psychological side between us became stronger.

I had a friend before Stanford was my partner. I lived with him for ten years too, and even if we don't live together any more, even if we are not sexually attracted to one another, we have an alliance still, an extraordinary relationship. He always knows when I am at home, and though he knows I often travel, he knows where I am and very often, when I am thinking about him I get an e-mail from him, and we often talk about something or other, but we have very profound conversations then. He is for me someone very important. And that comes, in my opinion, from the transformation which happened after our relationship. The same development happened with Stanford, who was my next partner.

Stanford, my friend

Let me talk a little about Stanford. In my eyes, he was someone extraordinary...because he was much more open minded than I was in that period. Once he made me laugh when he asked the boss of a hotel for a double bed. The man looked at us. And Stanford told him we were going to pay him and not him who was going to pay for us. In a very simple way he was an honest man in his way of life.

But Stanford caught AIDS. We had a relationship which was open, in a certain way. It was more difficult for me because I was more monogamous and he was much more polygamous. After a while we decided to face that situation but I warned him when the epidemic AIDS started; I was worried that he could catch it from someone external. I told him not to go with a sick person, to be aware of it and to be protected. He answered, with a point of pride I think, that he perfectly knew who was in good

health and who was sick. But then he really caught AIDS; I felt furious with him. In our own relationship when we were in bed, in hot moments, it was a safe place for us. Suddenly that monster AIDS stood between us; I was ready to ask him to leave because I had already told him not to do so. I was ready to separate from him even if it was hard.

In those days I used to spend 6 to 8 months in Europe every year. We lived in California and he couldn't come along with me because his condition was getting worse and worse every day. That year I came without him. I was thinking: "What am I going to do with him now?" He brought this sickness into our relationship, how can I face it? I started to read a book about people who take care of AIDS patients. I got to the last chapter where it was written: "Don't read this chapter if you take care of someone with AIDS, because it talks about death". Still, when I am told not to do something, for me of course, ...it's the forbidden fruit! (*Laughs*) So I read that chapter and when reading it I realised how much I really loved that man, Stanford. Even if he did things I couldn't stand or disagreed with, my love for him was far beyond all of that.

I called Stanford then and I asked him on the phone to marry me. Then when I came back to California, I asked a priest to come home to celebrate our wedding. I wondered: "It's so easy to be together when everything is all right, when you feel happy, when, there are nice evenings and nice mornings, but the moments when the marriage seems the most important is when things go wrong. It's the moment when we need to commit, the both of us, to say: "I stay with you until the end of your life." I did that and it has been a wonderful process for me because I noticed how Stanford got through difficult moments of his life, and even in his death.

At the end, I wrote a short text: "He died as a cured man."

Indeed, for me he cured himself, in spite of his death. He found a way to clear all the things which were wrong in his life, he cleaned all his relationships. In fact he attended the session I had organised about death and resurrection. We had decided to attend the session even if it was difficult for me. I think he was cured in the end and I was really glad.

Lots of people called after Stanford's death and said "You know, I didn't call while Stanford was near death because I wished to keep a memory of him when he was handsome." And I answered: "But you were completely wrong". At the end of his life, Stanford worked on every aspect of it. We were in Gestalt therapy together. Even the last week, we have worked eight hours, deeply, in Gestalt to allow him to complete all topics of his life. Four entire relationship had been dedicated to find out what, in ourselves, had been rejected; rejected what was divine in ourselves. We did not work to prevent pain, but to allow it, to cleanse it and to integrate it again in order to heal it. So we experienced these last hours of Gestalt work as a gift to both of us. In the end Stanford shone like a sun.

Homosexuals, father and mother in the spiritual world

The next morning I went to him and he said "You know, I worked on the relationship with my father, my mother, my students, you and me, all of that, but I never really faced my fear. I didn't know what to do at that moment because, as I told you before, he was 18 years younger than me, and I had

already lived lots of things in my life. So I answered: “ If I could take your place, I would but I can’t. I can’t help being here, along with you. I can’t do more. That’s all I can do and I will do it as much as I can.” And for half an hour, he remained faced with his own fear. I had worked in Gestalt with people who shouted, who hit against walls, but that fear which was there was very silent but totally true. I stayed with him for half an hour and at the end there was no fear any more: it was over. He lived for another week but he never felt scared again. I felt more scared then, but I hadn’t walked across that line. He had done it. I stayed with him till the end of his life and even if it was hard, despite all the difficulties, I believe I worked well with him.

I remember a TV broadcast concerning a lady who had a child sick of AIDS. It was a period when AIDS was scaring everyone. People didn’t know what to do. They were really frightened. That woman said ”My husband left me because I wanted to stay with my child; I didn’t want to abandon my child though he was ill. My parents left me too. They refused to be with me, with my child, because they were frightened. All my friends left me. The only persons who came along with me were homosexuals.” I found it touching, but I had an idea – I was working with Stanford in those days: even if AIDS is the worst thing, something horrible, it brings homosexuals back closer to work done by them in other societies. I know a lot of homosexuals who have turned into acupuncturists, who have learnt Chinese medicine, or Rudolf Steiner philosophy, who have become masters in meditation. People who had lots of different jobs before but who, with the rise of AIDS, got much more involved in healing activities.

You know that very often homosexuals are artists, actors, writers, musicians, etc. I heard a master from Bali say that artists create a picture of the future which is possible to follow and to accomplish for human beings. If it is right, and if many homosexuals are linked to the world of art, maybe, if they can cure this homophobia, it might become a wave that sweeps the rest of the world. It has to start here (he points to his heart), nowhere else, if homosexuals are to begin healing themselves.⁴

If we look at the link between homosexuals and the other human beings, their task, among many other things they have to do as well of course, is quite clear: they become the source of the further development of humanity. Source of the children who will continue life. If they are connected to the whole world and don't just live isolated in a ghetto, perhaps they can also become fathers and mothers. Maybe not physically, but spiritually. That's what I wanted to share with you on the subject of “homosexuality as a balance factor”.

Appendix 1

You've Got to Be Carefully Taught
1949 Music Richard Rodgers, voice Oscar Hammerstein

You've got to be carefully taught and fear,
You've got to be taught from year to year.
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear.

⁴ In May 2004, seven months after this conference, an openly homosexual priest in the Episcopal Church (the American equivalent of the Anglican Church in England) was appointed bishop by the official hierarchy. Even if the conservative members of this church do not agree with this and do not recognise it, this is a big step forward.

You've got to be carefully taught!

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made
Or people whose skin is a different shade
You've got to be carefully taught!

You've got to be taught before it's too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight
To hate all the people your relatives hate.
You've got to be carefully taught!
You've got to be carefully taught!
To hear this song, you can have a look at the following site:
<http://www.turnofftheviolence.org/Carefullytaught.htm>

Appendix 2

Epilogue

In February 2004, President Bush tried, in his most important official speech of the year, to launch a referendum to amend the Constitution in order that marriage be exclusively reserved for mixed couples (men/women). Following that speech, the mayor of San Francisco - who is Catholic and the father of a family - opened the doors of the town hall to allow all homosexuals who wanted to be married to do so. For several weeks, there were immense queues of homosexual couples waiting to get married. People came from all over the United States. I sent bunches of flowers, like many other persons, to offer the couples who would wish to accept them. In that town hall, it was wonderful, the weddings were celebrated on a balcony inside, covered in red, to which you could get by two symmetrical and stately stairs.

In English they say: *You cannot unring a bell once it has been rung.* This means there are points of no return. Nothing will stand as it was after these marriages.

- In May 2004, seven months after this seminar, a priest openly homosexual from the episcopal church (the equivalent of the Anglican church in the United States) was named bishop by the official hierarchy. Even if the conservative members of this church don't agree with it and don't recognise it, it's a huge step forward.

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