

**Coming Out, Coming Home: A Place in the Church for Lesbians and Gays  
Held at the Center for Action and Contemplation, Abq., NM  
June 27-20, 1997 weekend retreat  
Led by Wendy Corry and Fr. Jack Robinson, OFM**

*Excerpts from...*

**Saturday Morning: “The Love That Dared Not Speak Its Name”  
(play on Oscar Wilde phrase) (Tape 1, Side 2)**

On Friday night (tape one, side one) Fr. Robinson said: “There are scripture passages which shed a positive light on relationships which might well be classified today as having at least some homoerotic content.”

He listed several, including St. Matthew’s & St. Luke’s account of Christ healing the Centurion’s servant. (MT 8:5-13, LK 7: 1-10)

In his Saturday morning talk, Fr. Robinson elaborated. He said: “Among the reasons for postulating that this centurion and his *pais* were engaged in what today would be called a homosexual relationship are linguistic, narrative and contextual.”

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1. Linguistic reasons: When the centurion refers to his sick *servant*, he uses the term *pais*. Fr. Robinson says: “I would also point out that *pais*, which can be translated as *servant* or *boy*, or any of a number of other things, was also used to refer to the younger partner in a male homosexual activity throughout Greek writing. Further, in Luke, the *pais* is called “intimos.” That’s the Greek word for *dear* or *valuable*, which is used by Luke to describe the centurion’s feeling for the *pais*.”
2. Narrative reasons: Fr. Robinson says, “We note the concern of the centurion; his self-effacing actions; and the role of the supporting characters in the story.”
3. Contextual reasons: Fr. Robinson says, “This includes the background information which would have been common knowledge at time of Jesus and the writing of the gospels but is not well known today, including the prohibition on marriage for centurions during their active service in the legions. They were not allowed to marry.”

“I would be first to admit these reasons for describing the relationship of this centurion and his *pais* as what we would call today a ‘gay relationship’ are not irrefutable, but neither are they mere phantoms. I would further speculate that no one made a more direct mention of this gay relationship in the gospel because there was not a much more direct way of stating the relationship in the first century given the lack of a term for homosexual orientation and as yet the generally unrecognized, or unacknowledged idea of such a thing as sexual orientation.

“What we have here is a single adult male in a responsible relationship – or a responsible position, excuse me – in an all-male environment, who refers to a particular servant, or a particular *pais* as “dear” or “valuable” and then humbling himself very considerably to beg for the life or the health of “my *pais*” from this itinerant Jewish preacher.

“After the time of the writing of Matthew and Luke, there may well have been enough tension concerning attitudes within the Christian communities and in society in general with regard to the acceptability of homosexuality that during the time when the linguistic and contextual reasons would have remained self-evident, few wanted to draw attention to it or perhaps even mention the sort of relationship which existed between the centurion and his *pais*. Then after a while, too, the linguistic and contextual reasons for recognizing this gay relationship eventually faded into obscurity. It was no longer in the original language.

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The Roman army was no longer stationed around you all the time. So for contextual and linguistic reasons, they just faded away.

“But the tension did not all have to come about *after* the text of Matthew and Luke reached their final forms. It is to be noted that Mark’s gospel makes no mention at all of this story of the centurion – which is not entirely unusual. The existence of material in both Matthew and Luke which is not in Mark is the basis for postulating the Q source.

“Although, to step from my written text...the type of story that this is, is unusual for being “Q” material. Most often, Q material is simply sayings; it’s simply groups of sayings. And that this is a narrative story is very unusual for it to be a Q source material. Most of Matthew and Luke’s narrative stories are also found in Mark.

“But going beyond that unusualness, this story is also in John, in a very altered form... But it’s there in John’s gospel. So we have this same story appearing in three of the gospels, though in John’s gospel it’s much altered. And yet it wasn’t in Mark and it’s not ordinary for something to both be in John’s material and in Luke and Matthew without being, as well, in Mark. So there may have been some tension, some filtering out of the story when Mark was putting together the gospel as presented by him.

“To return to the story itself, something must be said of the words and the actions of Jesus. First of all, in Luke’s account, Jesus receives the deputation of the centurion without question and does not hesitate to start out to fulfill request at the home of centurion. That in itself was something radical for Jesus to do. He was going to enter into the home of a gentile which is something that a Jewish rabbi was not supposed to do on any kind of an ordinary basis; that was not a proper thing for him to do. But Jesus was going to do that.

“Interesting to note that for the statements over the centuries pronouncing Christian condemnation of homosexual relationships, homosexual activity, and even lesbian women and gay men, no one has ever quoted Christ himself offering any of those condemnations. And here probably we have instead the most direct encounter of Jesus Christ with someone who would today be pronounced “gay.” Christ’s reaction is acceptance of the person and even eagerness to be of assistance to restore the *pais* to health and by implication, to fully restore the relationship of the two, making possible the renewal of any sexual activity which they would have enjoyed together prior to the illness.

“Here I wish to interject a question for those who speak Greek: that’s some of you, right? The term *pais* is half of the Greek root words for “pedophilia,” so I have been accused by one critic of maintaining that Jesus condoned pedophilia. I’m firmly convinced that there is ample evidence that “*pais*” is not limited to referring to a child – as a matter of fact, I think it’s much, much more along lines of the term “boy” as it might have been used in South of the United States in the first half of the twentieth century – a reference to a social inferior as well as possibly a reference to a younger person. The question for those who would maintain that it has to refer to youth is whether they believe Jesus would condone pedophilia. I do not. I do not.”

“In both Matthew and Luke– [whispered] of course I do not – in both Matthew and Luke the story of the centurion follows closely a major teaching section of the gospel, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke. Jesus in both Matthew and Luke appears to see in centurion someone who living out what he had taught in those discourses. In that regard, I mean nothing that I have said to be construed so as to exempt gay relationships from the rest of what Jesus has taught in regard to moral action, in other words, the “love ethic” that Jesus taught, but rather to open the possibility of bringing gay relationships into the sunshine of Christ’s teaching, to be judged by that teaching rather than to leave these relationships in the shadows, uninformed by what Christ teaches us on how human beings are to treat one another.

“When Jesus say the Centurion in Matthew, he saw someone who put the one he loved ahead of himself, to the point of seeking the well-being of the *pais* at considerable cost to the Roman centurion himself – after, all, this Roman centurion, a proud representative of the Military mind of Rome, has humbled himself out of

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love to beg – and that’s the literal meaning of the word which is translated as ‘ask’ – he begged this favor from an itinerant Jewish preacher.

“In Luke, Jesus heard of a centurion who also put the *pais* ahead of himself and who practiced justice and charity in his more general relations to the Jewish community. These are both signs of all of the attributes which Jesus had just presented in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Plain. It is also to be noted in this regard that Jesus asks nothing more of centurion than what the centurion was already doing. There’s no “let the dead bury the dead...” “or there’s still one thing lacking...” etc. Or even, “See that you say nothing to anyone...” things that Jesus told others for whom he had performed miracles. None of that here. This centurion is evidently a man of whom Jesus asks no more than what the centurion was already doing. What specifically we are told he was doing in Luke was loving the Jewish nation and building the synagogue. In Matthew, we are told only that he was doing no more than begging for the restoration of the health of his suffering but evidently not dying *pais*.

“Luke seems to have a concern that some of his readers would miss at least some of the implications of the story of the centurion in the gospel so he makes a number of connections between the gospel centurion and Cornelius, in the Acts of the Apostles. Cornelius is the centurion in Acts 10, who is presented as the great gentile convert to Christianity. First they are obviously connected by rank. Then, they are also connected by the use of messengers, by the presence of slaves, by the descriptions of the virtues of the centurion by Jewish leaders, by an extraordinary openness to the working of the Holy Spirit, and finally by acts of healing love towards those closest to them ....

“The record of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts, chapter 10, is not actually the first record of the conversion of a gentile as Phillip is present for the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts, chapter 8. But the conversion of Cornelius marked such a turning point in the history of the early church that Luke devotes chapter 10 to the conversion itself and much of chapter 11 to the explanation of its meaning to the church in Jerusalem.

“The point could hardly be missed – both Christ and the Holy Spirit have opened the doors of the Church to those outside the community of Israel and, I would contend, to a gay man and his lover, as gay men. When Church retreats from that position, as in statement such as the following from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1992: “Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less a strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil and thus the inclination itself may be seen as an objective disorder. Therefore special concern and pastoral attention should be directed toward those who have this condition lest they be led to believe that the living out of this orientation of homosexual activity is morally acceptable option. It is not.”

“When Church says things like that, I contend that the Church is retreating from the love and liberty proclaimed by Jesus to embrace just the sort of worldly doubts and worldly wisdom which were expressed by Peter and caused Jesus to say, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

“Homosexuality has not been condemned by the Church because Christ condemned it, but because the Church inherited a condemnation of homosexuality from a world view expressed in many but not all cultures which does not understand homosexuality and fears that which was different from the ‘normal’ majority, that I spoke of last night.

“Perhaps, then, it is not without reason that the Church has found itself embroiled in so much controversy involving sexuality as the Church has given itself over to a received wisdom of the world with regard to condemnation of lesbian women and gay men...”

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