



Article of Faith: Why the pro-LGBT movement should welcome religion

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By the **Rev. Rebecca Voelkel**

Anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) ballot initiative efforts have caused a furor in the pro-LGBT movement, and much of it has to do with religion and its role in our community — both in our pro-LGBT efforts and in those efforts against our community.

As LGBT religious folks, we often find ourselves in the midst of a squeeze-play between our religious communities and our colleagues in the secular LGBT movement. But, I believe that we, as LGBT religious folks, have a unique and powerful role to play.

In particular, our movement, as it engages our opponents who are overwhelmingly religious, must claim the theological and moral authority of our pro-LGBT voice. Justice and equal protection under the law are more than legal questions, they are moral questions. And they spring from deeply rooted religious understandings of how God or the divine has created all and blesses all and calls upon all to respect, dignity and love. Thus, it is critical — both to winning campaigns and to building a stronger and more vibrant movement — to have religious voices, spiritual voices speaking with moral and theological authority as to the rightness and the justice of our efforts.

Secondly, as we look around the world and throughout history, we see that successful movements for justice have had a spiritual power that was more than the rightness of a legal argument.

In the book *Gandhi and Jesus: The Saving Power of Nonviolence*, Terrence J. Rynne lifts up the fact that there were four major movements in the 20th century that have radically transformed their societies through the use of Gandhian nonviolence. They are the civil rights movement in this country, the solidarity movement in Poland, the movement that deposed Marcos in the Philippines and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. In each of these, people of faith were at the core and the methodology of Jesus and other religious traditions were woven throughout the movements.

The key to this Gandhian/spiritual approach is that of recognizing the humanity of all involved in any given situation. Both the oppressor and the oppressed have their humanity devastated. To transform oppression is to liberate all involved. This recognition of the humanity of all means that that which is created beyond the dismantling of the oppression has the possibility of being life-giving, not just a change in who is oppressor and who is oppressed.

For the LGBT movement — particularly the religious LGBT community — this Gandhian wisdom can be a guiding light.

But I worry about our larger LGBT movement. We often seek to be transformative of our world without recognizing the spiritual transformation that is necessary within our ranks.

Particularly as we move toward and amongst a spiritual season within many religious traditions — approaching the pagan marking of Equinox, in the midst of the Christian practice of Lent, the Jewish preparations which lead to Passover, the upcoming celebration, for some Muslims, of Milad un Nabi, the approaching marking of Magha Puja Day for Buddhists and many others — can our larger LGBT movement join hands with its religious and spiritual colleagues to be about the spiritually transformative work that is ours?

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