

Book Review by Daniel C. Maguire  
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(Most recent book: The Moral Core of Judaism and Christianity,  
Fortress, 1993.)

**JESUS ACTED UP: A GAY AND LESBIAN MANIFESTO** by Robert Goss,  
Harper, San Francisco, 1993.

The bible offers few clues regarding the sexuality of Jesus, but that has not stopped scholars and other Christians from studying those clues and reaching their own conclusions. Professor William Phipps in his book Was Jesus Married? concludes that he probably was. Professor Tom Driver says that the human tenderness of Jesus showed no signs of a frigid personality and certainly was fueled to some degree by the springs of passion. The Anglican priest Hugh Montefiore argues that Jesus might well have been gay. Much of art repudiated the idea of an asexual Jesus and even portrayed him with an erection or fondling his genitals as an infant.

Early Christian theology would have none of this, and systematically stripped Jesus of all sexuality and passion and made him the quintessential celibate.

The fact is that no one knows. Those who portray Jesus as celibate have no better grounds than those who judge him to have been heterosexually or homosexually coupled. We must live with the fact that he may have been any of the above.

Robert Goss, the author of Jesus Acted Up, a former Jesuit with a Harvard doctorate in theology, does not pretend to know Jesus' sexual orientation. He does however, speak of him as "the queer Christ" and he quotes with favor Pastor Sharon Robinson's conclusion: "Jesus was just as queer in his time as we are in ours. What a gift." A gay himself, and a member of Act-Up and Queer Nation, Goss speaks of "the queer Christ" in the sense that we do know that Jesus identified himself with the outcast and the despised, and thus was the Christ of the poor, of the orphans, of the Samaritans, the lepers...and of queers. He says: "Jesus the Christ is queer by his solidarity with queers." (In a protest against heterosexist oppression, Goss uses the term "queer" regularly for himself and other gays and lesbians. His point, however, is that homosexuality is a normal variant and no queerer than heterosexuality.)

In many ways this is a conservative book, based on solid scriptural research. Goss is a committed Christian, still actively involved in ministry. His is a powerful call for a spirituality that bonds poor and rich, male and female, gay and heterosexual in the kind of solidarity envisioned by the prophets of Israel and by the early Jesus movement. He speaks of the need for eucharist, "group prayer and reflection on God's word." What could be more conservative!

But it is also a radical book, bristling with outrage at the lethal prejudice the Christian world has inflicted on its "queers." The book is a profound assault on all forms of prejudice and its important point is that prejudice is always tendentially murderous. (Our prejudice against African-Americans kills them. The death rate of African-American infants is double that of white infants, and the cause is social injustice, not genetics.) And our prejudice against gays kills them. The Reagan administration refused to spend monies for AIDS research allocated by Congress until it became clear that the disease also affected heterosexuals. Conservative Christians lobbied against spending these monies on "the gay plague." The logic of those lobbies was death. Over a quarter of a million gays and lesbians died in the Nazi Holocaust, he points out, and no protest was heard from the churches. Christian hatred of gays ratified Nazi brutality. It is the point of this book that the blood of gays in on all of our hands.

It follows for Goss that the tactics of gays should be tough. He supports the "Stop the Church" moves that interrupted Cardinal O'Connor's liturgy and punctuated Cardinal Law's ordination ceremony with shouts of "Two, four, six, eight: how do you know your priests are straight?" He compares the "Stop the Church" protests to Jesus' "Stop the Temple" acting up. Both invaded sacred space to protest injustice.

Outrage calls for outrage. Outrageous prejudice calls for outrageous protest. Interrupt church services, he says, by releasing helium-filled condoms, staging kiss-ins, blowing whistles, chaining one's body to altar or pews--all to remind Christians that "they are guilty of crucifying queers."

He calls for a "national coming-out day for religious, clergy, bishops, and cardinals; administrators of universities and seminaries; pastors, theologians, biblical scholars, church elders, religious educators, choir directors, and musicians." Gays are in all those offices, he says. He criticizes church people who stay in the homophobic closet.

Goss knows that Christianity was not always hostile to gays. The great Catholic orders always had a disproportionately large gay presence as do seminaries today. Goss argues strongly that gays

are a blessing, not a blight. Along with prophetic toughness, these pages pulse with compassion for all people and for all life on this generous host of an earth. His chapters on the relevance of biblical religion for gays and for others is gay theology come of age. This book deserves a reading.