

"Jesus the Christ is Queer"

by Malcolm Boyd

Jesus Acted Up

A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto

by Robert Goss

HarperSanFrancisco

ISBN 0060633182

hardback \$19.00, 256 pp.

Daring to Speak Love's Name

A Gay and Lesbian Prayer Book

by Elizabeth Stuart

Hamish Hamilton

ISBN 0241133351

paperback \$10.00, 162 pp.

Two new books deal with the revolution taking place within religion from a gay and lesbian perspective. The two are as different as night from day, reflecting the utter diversity found in lesbian and gay spirituality and theology.

Jesus Acted Up is required reading for non-gay religious leaders, including opponents of gay rights, if they are ever to understand where contemporary lesbians and gays are coming from. This manifesto offers a highly active declaration of rights. It should also be read by lesbians and gays who are active in spiritual pursuits as well as by those who are strongly anti-religious.

In a sense, this book moves existing gay religious controversy to a new level. Claiming queer identity, it accepts queer as "a part of political dissidence and sexual difference." It stresses that "Christo-fascism has contributed to and blessed homophobic violence." Tracing historical, cultural, and religious roots of oppression, the book states: "Stonewall ended our desire to be accepted as normal...Homosexual silence died...the gay and lesbian movement became publicly visible with a transgressive self-identity." Identifying with Queer Nation and ACT UP, transgressive activists are critical of reformists for endangering the movement because of assimilationist tendencies. So cultural separateness is flaunted and gender politics challenged.

All this involves conflict. "Queer non-violence renounces violence as a means of social change," the author says. Yet there can be a fine line between involvement in conflict and a definition of violence. I recall that Martin Luther King, Jr., said on one occasion that violence enters into the way one picks up a telephone and answers it. There may be conflict ahead for ideas expressed in this book. One is that "queer criticism...constructs

a contextual Christological discourse that is born from gay/lesbian social experience." Another is that such criticism "utilizes biblical criticism to discover the dangerous memory of Jesus lost beneath nearly two millennia of patriarchal and ecclesial formulations."

Goss utilizes an intense, pounding style of writing that rivets like a sledgehammer. As a result, there is inescapably a lack of reflection, pacing and balance. Even Martin Luther might concur that this is a *very long* manifesto.

An imbalance in the book is the author's overemphasis on Roman Catholic practice and experience. He seems unaware of exceptions to the focus of his criticism. For example, as a gay Episcopal priest, I have served for more than a decade in a church that fully accepts me as a completely "out" person living openly with my life-partner Mark Thompson. The parish has a woman priest on staff, uses inclusive language, publicly affirms persons with HIV and AIDS, practices the full inclusion of women, and supports African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pro-choice and the homeless. While out of the ordinary, the parish is not unique.

My major criticism of the book lies in its flaw of seeking perfectionism, which does not exist in a world of moral ambiguities, and its strong projection of utopianism. While he rejects dogma, the author has produced a strongly dogmatic document.

Yet there is an underlying truth in what he says in his relentlessly sweeping way. Unarguably, Goss castigates "the maleness of the asexual Christ." He continues: "To say Jesus the Christ is queer means that God identifies with us and our experience of injustice."

Goss seeks the creation of "queer Christian base communities," taking a leaf from liberation theology. A key element in the book is his call to queer and feminist theologians "to re-envision human sexuality, its love making capabilities, its erotic potentialities, its pleasure and its connectedness to the world. 'I couldn't agree more positively. The book is a powerful manifesto to set free the erotic power of "love-making and justice-doing" and it demands to be read."

From England comes **Daring to Speak Love's Name**, by Dr. Elizabeth Stuart. Its main claim to fame is that a church-related publishing house tried to censor it by keeping it under wraps. That's a silly thing to do! Now the book has twice the attention it might have enjoyed otherwise.

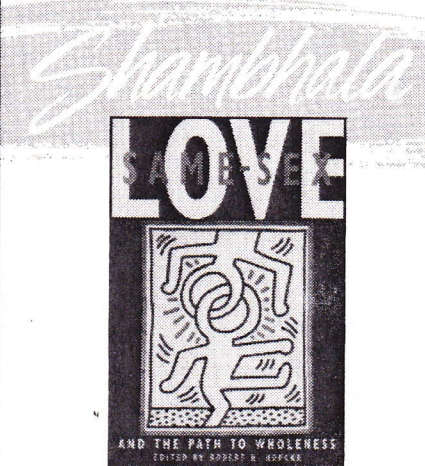
Stuart espouses the theology of friend-

ship. She says two groups of people have sought to revive this: Christian feminists and gay men and lesbians. She quotes poet Adrienne Rich's description of her experience in a lesbian relationship to make the point that it's wrong to deprive people of language with which to make sense of their experience. This book attempts to provide such needed language. It does so under headings such as "Celebrating Lesbian and Gay Relationships," "A Celebration of Coming Out," and "Healing Liturgies for People Living with HIV and AIDS."

Much of the work is poignant and sensitive. It is helpful to lesbian and gay men who wish to construct liturgies for personal or communal use at moments of great need. I suppose that an equivalent book growing out of our American experience might somehow come closer to home in delineating our feelings in a more telling way. This book might have been richer and more rewarding if it included a wider variety of religious and spiritual experience. A bit narrow in its vision and focus, yet is provocative, touching and challenging.



Malcolm Boyd, author/activist/priest, is Chaplain of the AIDS ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles. He is the author of 25 books including **Take Off the Masks**, and the upcoming **Rich with Years**.



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