

## **Secular LGBT groups should embrace spiritual gays, leader says**

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by Kevin Davis

**Secular LGBT groups should embrace gay religious folks, said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, at a panel entitled "Whose Morals" that took place at the Commonwealth Club Thursday, September 28.**

**"We're either in this for all of us, or we're not," said Foreman. "We can't say 'We're in it for leather folk, but you religious folks, no.'"**

**For centuries opponents have used religion as a tool to oppress and psychologically wound LGBT people by quoting the Bible for bigotry, said Foreman.**

**"They know exactly what they're doing, causing our people such unbelievable pain," he added, relaying the sentiment of homosexuality's "moral evil," that was expressed at the Family Research Council's "Washington Briefing" two weeks ago in Washington, D.C.**

**That oppression is escalating to new levels.**

**Progressive movement members are "sticking their heads in the sand" and "sorely mistaken" to think the community can triumph over religion or that this aggressive demonizing will subside naturally, he noted.**

Gay people have a "prophetic call" to reclaim spirituality, said panelist Bishop Dr. Yvette Flunder of City of Refuge UCC Church.

"If we surrender or retreat from our spirituality, then our enemies have won the battle for our souls," she said.

Gay people raised in churches that teach that an angry, punitive God hates them, need to first apologize to themselves for sacrificing their gayness within childhood religions and reconcile with God internally, then go out to affirm others.

"Go get your God back," said Flunder. "Then we can move in the direction to create spiritual communities."

"We are the only liberation movement that is not spiritually inspired," said the panel's moderator, Christian De La Huerta, an authority on queer spirituality.

In the African American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s the message of equality came in the context of religion, said Flunder, "That is where our confidence came from, the belief that God is on our side."

**Although the word "morality" has been hijacked by the radical right as synonymous with a narrow biblical interpretation, it simply means making decisions with integrity, said Foreman, that you do not cause harm.**

**Despite the religious right's objection to anyone acting on their sexual orientation, conversely, it is immoral not to act on it, said Foreman. Living openly as an LGBT person is morally good, he said, a morality that secular LGBTs can embrace, a morally right principle that no one argues about.**

**It is good for people to feel safe, to give and receive love and care, to act as they are, to live a life of integrity. But, those who are closeted do none of those things, he said.**

Flunder said people should talk about what they agree on instead of engaging in biblical and theological discourse.

Southern Baptists at a church picnic singing "Amazing Grace" while lynching a black man for allegedly whistling at a white woman and believing they were doing the work of God can only happen because African Americans were demonized in the way that LGBT people are vilified today, she said.

Religious ideas should play a part in the gay civil rights movement, said Foreman.

The grassroots organizing and intense struggles occurring in mainline denominations to become welcoming and affirming are an important front in the movement, and they "are our allies, in ways that secular allies aren't," he said.

LGBT people of faith have a moral imperative to tap into congregations politically, as the right has, and make noise, impact them with e-mail lists, mobilize constituencies pro-actively, and get them to the polls, said Flunder.

"You are not in tune with your spiritual self unless you see to the rights of others," said Flunder, calling personal piety essential, but that it should move one to create justice.

**NGLTF is building a clergy coalition to take advantage of the defeat of the federal constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. Six hundred congregations are opposed to the amendment. The ecumenical National Religious Round Table, founded in 1998, is lobbying legislators.**

Gay people should "articulate the importance of our own moral and ethical stances, especially responding to people on the radical right, when they think they have captured the truth," said audience member Lynne Juarez, who spent six years in a convent, and does not currently attend church, but considers herself "rooted in spirituality."

"The truth is so much more embracing," said Juarez.