

# Belfast Pride 2008

Shelley Leggett



**T**HE GAY PRIDE MARCH 2008 in Belfast on 2nd August was the biggest one yet, and the high spirits of everyone involved weren't dampened by the brief downpour of rain that left us all physically soaked. As 10,000 or so people took to the road to walk this year's route around the city centre the noise was at times so deafening I had to plug my ears. I couldn't, however, hear a word from the Christian protestors dotted along the way, because happily there were more of us than there were of them, and it was poignant that the voice of bigotry and fundamentalism was completely drowned out.

Once again I found myself wondering what their problem is. I know they claim the Bible is clear that homosexuality is a sin, or 'an abomination' as MLA Iris Robinson put it, but, as Christians, shouldn't they be Christ based rather than 'Bible based'? What did Jesus say about homosexuality?

A tract on this subject would be blank. None of the texts in the Bible that condemn homosexuality contain anything that was attributed to Jesus. In fact, the Hebrew Testament forbade homosexuality for purity reasons, along with requiring people to wash at certain times, to not eat certain foods, and to be circumcised, all of which made a person a Jew. But Jesus was not interested in these laws. According to Paul: "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcised nor uncircumcised counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love*" (Galatians 5:6).

Jesus was actually questioning the very law that had forbidden homosexuality, although not specifically. So Christians should actually be taking part in the Gay Pride parade, as indeed some of them were, along with one brave enlightened cleric, who wore his clerical collar in order to make sure his point was understood. Rev Chris Hudson, of All Saints Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church, speaking on the radio the next day said that he was moved to see ordinary working class people wearing

the red ribbons that signify opposition to the stigma faced by those with HIV and the clapping and cheering he received from the gathered spectators. He also said that a Christian protestor at the City Hall jumped in front of him, waved a Bible in his face, pointed to his collar and shouted 'Shame on you' into his face, until some of the spectators pushed him back behind the crowd. I too was thrilled to see people walking with small children, some of whom were in prams. One man read our banner and his face broke into a wide grin. He put his hands out in front of him and clapped widely while nodding his head enthusiastically. There were many gestures of support. That, and the welcoming reaction of the vast majority of onlookers, gave me hope for the future.

But why are some Christians so disturbed by homosexuals and the 'homosexual act'? If it's sodomy they're concerned with how, can they possibly know who's engaging in it and who isn't. Heterosexual members of church congregations could be at it for all we know. And who cares? What consenting adults get up to in private is their business. There are so many more important issues that need our attention.

But since Christ didn't condemn homosexuality where does this revulsion for sodomy come from (I'm using the Christian term only because I thought buggery might cause offence)? In the ancient world victors often used homosexual rape to humiliate their victims, because to do so was treating them like women, who were seen as inferior. Logically, then, in a modern world where women are not seen as inferior (well in theory anyway), homosexual sex is equivalent to heterosexual sex and should be accepted in the same way. Could it be that ancient prejudices were incorporated into the developing Christianity, as has happened before – just think of the pagan origins of Christmas itself? That might explain the unhealthy obsession with what gay people do behind closed doors.

Last year there was an unholy row over a banner carried at the Pride march stating that 'Jesus was a Fag', and this year Pride organisers agreed to make sure it wouldn't appear again. Why? The march is a celebration of pride at being gay – or to put it another way – of being a fag. So can anyone explain why that is an insult?

Surprisingly some Humanists objected to those of us who marched under a Humanist banner, arguing that we have no right to speak for all Humanists, and people might think we're gay. Well what if they do? We have a right to march under a Humanist banner because 'Gay Rights are Human Rights' as proclaimed by other banners at the Parade. And if a Humanist group can't support human rights, then I'm obviously in the wrong organisation. After all, this year especially, we were in good company with representatives of all the political parties taking part except for the DUP. Also represented were the Gay Police Association, Amnesty International, a straight Presbyterian minister along with other clerics and gay Christian groups.

Scientific research has shown differences in the part of the brain that controls sexual orientation between homosexual and heterosexual men, but the debate still rages whether they are innate or whether the sexual activity itself causes the changes. I'm no scientist, but I believe sexual orientation is established in the womb, and I base my beliefs on observations I made of young boys I watched grow into gay men. The signs were there all along, from wanting to play with girls and the toys they preferred, although that alone is not an indication as one of my own sons liked to carry a baby doll with a pink ribbon in her hair under his arm for a while and he's very male now, but the overall picture in the boys I refer to was different.

Not that proving a genetic cause for homosexuality would end discrimination and bigotry. Just look at the treatment of black people. My own belief is that in between male and female every other variation exists, which was the view of Kinsey in the 1940s and 1950s. His Scale of Homosexuality measures the percentage of maleness or femaleness in an individual. Perhaps one banner at the parade summed it up best: SOME PEOPLE ARE GAY. GET OVER IT. □