

*People ask me how I deal with my faith and my sexual orientation. Personally, it has never been a conflict for me.'*

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I chose to study theology, because I felt the commitment and calling to be a pastor. When I finished my studies, I went through the process to become ordained, but in the end it didn't work out. I was never really told why I wasn't going to become ordained, just that it wasn't going to happen. I couldn't understand what was happening. There is no document, there was no decision, there isn't anything that says why I was denied ordination. I wasn't openly gay at the time, but everybody kind of knew; my first book on Gay Theology was about to be published. It was a long and painful period that went on for months, because the institution worked on the idea that, if they kept ignoring me, at some point I would go away.

I was very lonely and had to find another job, because I had been ready to go to a parish and suddenly I wasn't going anymore. My whole future changed. Emotionally, I couldn't understand why I was being punished, and for what. It was just very, very painful. I even considered committing suicide.

I got a job, took some time off, and then decided to take a master's degree. I wrote a thesis on the ordination of gay people, which became my second book. It was my way of dealing with the experience and explaining the problem to myself, to the Church and to other people.

As a Latin American liberation theologian, I explore ways of reading the Bible in context. The question for me is not just what the Bible says about homosexuality, but how do we find meaning about our LGBT experiences when reading the Bible. If I compare those texts that supposedly condemn homosexuality against my own experience, I question not just the text but the way it is read and has been interpreted along history. It doesn't refer to our experience as LGBT people nowadays; it refers to a completely different context.

Just to take one example – people like to think that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of homosexuality, but I don't see the experience of gay men as getting together in gangs and going around abusing or violating other men, which is what happens in the narrative if you want to understand it from the perspective of men having sex with other men. That's not what we do; it's not what we understand as homosexuality. So, we deal with those texts and we also try to find meaning in other texts, for example how the narrative

of David and Jonathan, the story of two men who loved each other, can help us as LGBT people live our lives and our faith in the best way we can. The real question is how we can read the Bible seriously, honestly and in relation to our life experiences; our needs, desires and hopes. Not just for ourselves, but for all humanity.

People ask me how I deal with my faith and my sexual orientation. Personally, it has never been a conflict for me. The problem was not my faith and sexuality and how they relate to each other; the problem came when I was confronted with institutions, particularly the Church, because then the way I understood my sexuality and faith was put in question. Sometimes it's been a lonely journey to try and survive in those institutions. Debates on faith, sexual orientation and gender identity often assume there's something that needs to be reconciled, that these parts of our lives are separate. I feel we don't need to reconcile our faith and our sexuality, but rather, as LGBT Christians, we need to heal, because people have hurt us.

I think religion could play a really important part in overcoming homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and the human rights violations of LGBT people – it could transform the situation for LGBT people in different parts of the world. We need to shift the way we talk about sexual and gender diversity in relation to faith. I see no theological argument to state that a sexual relationship between two men or between two women, or between a trans person and another person, is in itself sinful, as long as those practices do not dehumanise or diminish the people involved. Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, on the other hand, do dehumanise people and it is against the will of God to make other people suffer because of the way they understand themselves as human beings.

Recently in Brazil, some gay people were assassinated. It's important that people speak out and condemn acts like this. There are lots of allies that understand discrimination towards us is not an issue just for LGBT people, but an issue for all humanity. It's all about how we relate to one another and how we are going to live together. The role of allies is fundamental, because they broaden the movement for equality and acceptance, and broaden our partners for dialogue.

What I hope for, and what I work for, is a time where we respect, love and care for each other. There is still a long way to go and I hope right now that this movement in civil society, in government, and in academic studies grows stronger and deeper, so that we can get through the struggles we have before us.

*'But I know God listens to me wherever I am and wherever He is. If He didn't love me or didn't like my sexuality, I wouldn't have been created.'*

*'When folk hate or reject LGBT people, it affects the person who is doing the hating.'*

*'A simple positive statement from religious leaders could make a huge difference to someone like me, who may believe God hates them because of what a few preachers said.'*

*'I was 17 when I came out to myself. It happened during a moment of prayer and, in a way, it was actually God who outed me.'*

*'It is un-biblical and un-Christian for people to close the door of fellowship against anyone on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity.'*

## **CHRISTIAN ROLE MODELS FOR LGBT EQUALITY**

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