

ISN'T IT TIME TO STOP PUSHING THE "HATE" BUTTON?

By Michael L. Brown

A standard American dictionary defines the verb "hate" as: "to feel hostility or animosity toward; to detest." In contrast with this, the lexicon of contemporary political correctness appears to define "hate" as: "to hold to Christian principles and values; to stand for biblical morality," and, quite specifically, "to take issue with the homosexual lifestyle."

Pushing the "hate" button has proven quite effective, since the moment it is pushed, all rational discussion ceases and one's ideological opponent is quickly reduced to a small-minded, mean-spirited bigot. Immediately, the playing field becomes unequal, and the opponent becomes a monster whose ideas are unworthy of serious consideration. And should that opponent happen to be an evangelical Christian, then pushing the hate button becomes all the more useful. The Bible-believing Christian is caricatured as a modern day crusader and witch-hunter rolled into one, a self-righteous, insensitive hypocrite who gleefully consigns all but a few likeminded fanatics to eternity in hell.

Does this sound extreme? Then consider some of the descriptive quotations in Richard Rubin's article in the May 8 edition of the *Observer* entitled, "Protesters eager to share beliefs at gay pride festival."

Mr. Rubin writes that, "Christian protesters in red shirts mingled with gays attending the Charlotte Pride festival Saturday, singing to them, preaching to them and pulling them aside for conversation and argument," a fair summary of the activity, although there was certainly a studious attempt by the "protesters" to avoid getting into arguments with the gays attending the event. Nowhere in the article, however, are these red-shirted, Christian protesters allowed to explain the actual content of their message, with only a passing reference from one of them to "the cause of Jesus." What exactly does that mean?

The reader is quickly educated: "Do something constructive with your time instead of telling us we're going to hell," said one, presumably lesbian, attendee. In keeping with this was the statement of Mette Andersen, executive director of Time Out Youth, described as an advocacy and support group for gay teens and young adults: "I'm very concerned about the message of hate," she said. "Our youth are very vulnerable, they're insecure and to be hit over the head with the Bible like this is unsettling."

So there you have it: These red-shirted Christian protesters, representing the "cause of Jesus," were hitting people over the head with their Bibles – notice that some of their prime targets were "very vulnerable" young people – telling them that they were going to hell, proclaiming a "message of hate." How terrible! But what else could be expected from Bible-toting Christians?

Sadly, once the hate button is pushed, many readers instantly see red – and I don't mean the color of the shirts – failing to ask if, perhaps, a fair picture is being painted. Is it possible that there was disagreement without hatred? Is it possible that the protesters

were actually motivated by love? Is it possible that their main theme was not hellfire and brimstone? Is it possible that using the rhetoric of “hate” and “hell” is actually a ploy to avoid discussion of the real issues?

The vast majority of the protesters were young people themselves, their red shirts emblazoned with the words “Liberated!” and “Transformed by the blood of Jesus.” How is this a message of hate? And if it is acceptable for gays and lesbians to celebrate their “liberation,” why is it hateful for followers of Jesus to do the same?

The theme of “liberation” did not begin with the homosexual movement in the 1960s (or, for that matter, with the women’s lib movement of that same era). It was a major theme of Jesus, who taught that everyone who sinned was a slave to sin – this applies equally to heterosexuals and homosexuals – but that whoever he, the Son of God, set free, would be free indeed. The red shirts proclaimed a simple message: Ultimate freedom is only found in Jesus, through his shed blood. Is this a message of hate?

Some of these red-shirted Christians lived overtly sinful lives in the past, having been enslaved by pornography, alcohol, or drugs. Others had been “decent” church-going people who came to realize that they too needed to find mercy through the cross. Others still were former lesbians or homosexuals. All of them wanted to share the message of God’s transforming love with as many people as they could, offering them the same mercy and kindness they too had received from the Lord. Yet this is branded a message of hate. Based on what criteria?

As for the subject of hell, this was almost always brought up *to* the protesters rather than *by* the protesters, who surely were *not* preaching, “Because you are gay you are going to hell!” Rather, since these Christians understand that all of us are members of a fallen race, they believe that all of our lifestyles bring us under God’s judgment and therefore *all of us* need to receive forgiveness from God. That’s why he sent his Son to save *all of us* from hell and judgment, and that’s why the word “gospel” literally means “good news.” Yet it is this good news that is obscured whenever the hate button is pushed.

If some still choose to push this emotionally charged button, the rest of us can make it ineffective by determining instead to seek out and hear the truth, recognizing that whoever uses the rhetoric of “hate” is most likely deflecting discussion from the real issues at hand. It is only through genuine dialog and interaction that we can render the hate button obsolete. Isn’t it time?

It was Jesus who also said that the truth would set us free, but we will never find the truth as long as we ourselves to be manipulated by cheap rhetorical tricks.

Moreover, if homosexuals had the right to assemble in Marshall Park and publicly declare the rightness of their lifestyle, didn't Christians have the right to be there to offer them another way?

Must the opponents of biblical morals resort to the rhetoric of "hate"?

And since when did pointing to the power of Jesus' blood constitute hate?

If you say, "Well, keep your beliefs to yourself," we reply, "Then why don't you keep your beliefs to yourself? Why do you choose to celebrate them openly in a public park? If you want to promote proudly your sexual agenda, you can expect to meet with loving opposition from those who differ with your agenda."