



VIEWPOINT

Where are the preachers who called Ellen 'degenerate'?

by CANDACE CHELLEW

"You see them come out in force when they think a lesbian is going to come out on television, the preachers come out then. Y'know, something like this happens, where are they?"
—Ellen DeGeneres, at a Capitol Hill vigil for Matthew Shepard, Oct. 14.

At a vigil for Matthew Shepard last week in Washington, Ellen DeGeneres made a good point. Where are the preachers?

When she was about to come out on her television show, the preachers were lined up to talk about it. Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and all the other right-wing Bible thumpers were racking up face time on talk show after talk show, decrying her bravery as "promoting homosexuality" and calling her names like "degenerate."

Now when a young man, 21 years old, loses his life to the brutality that these men create with their talk of a war against the "homosexual agenda," where are they? They are strangely silent.

Just a romp through their web-sites shows they are not concerned over the life of one homosexual. Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network site is littered with stories about the Y2K problem, and the Christian perspective on Halloween. The Family Research Council and the American

Family Association talk about homosexuality all right, but their party line is "healing for homosexuals who want to change their orientation."

That sends a not so subtle message that Shepard got what he deserved. He didn't have to be gay, they tell us and the rest of America, he could have been a heterosexual if he'd just had enough faith. It's lies and hypocrisy.

These people will prattle on all day about being pro-life, until the life of a homosexual is taken. Then they pontificate about how it could have been avoided, if the person had just not been homosexual.

I agree with them that it could have been avoided. They could have been the ones to prevent the death of Matthew Shepard. His senseless torture and murder could have been avoided if these people had been spreading a truly Christian message: We are all God's children, and God weeps when evil is done to any of God's children—be they gay, straight, bisexual or transgendered.

God weeps for Matthew, and God weeps for the continued evil these so-called Christians perpetrate on our com-



munity with their hateful words and their lies about change.

But DeGeneres' plea hits home in the gay community, too. At the vigil on the Capitol steps, I saw not one preacher from the gay community. It's my turn to ask: Where are the preachers? Where are our defenders from the pulpit?

I see two answers to this question. First, there is an understand-

able aversion to religion and religious types among gays and lesbians. The religious right has so co-opted Christianity that most gays and lesbians have given up their faith all together.

Those of us who cling to our faith, despite the odds, are often objects of ridicule within our own community. It's a hard row to hoe being rejected both in and out of the gay community.

This disregard of Christianity within the gay community often leads to gay or pro-gay preachers being overlooked for vigils or protests.

I plead with the gay and lesbian community, don't leave us out! We are a valuable asset to the community. We speak in

a language the religious right understands, we know the words that will speak to the hearts and minds of the religiously minded in America and around the world. We are a valuable asset to you in the fight for civil rights.

Remember us when you organize rallies and vigils! Use the gay and lesbian preachers among you, let us be a valuable tool in the arsenal against hatred and oppression!

The second answer to the question goes hand in hand with the first. Since we are so often overlooked by the gay community at-large, we in the gay and lesbian religious world become complacent. We don't speak up and ask to be included. We are often too afraid ourselves of being rejected or passed over, or not taken seriously when we ask to play a role.

I ask the gay and lesbian civil rights leaders to remember us when you need speakers, and I ask gay and lesbian pastors and religious folk to speak up when the time comes. We must let our voices be heard, too.

Working together, we'll never hear another person ask from the podium: "Where are the preachers?" We're here, and we're ready to be heard.

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