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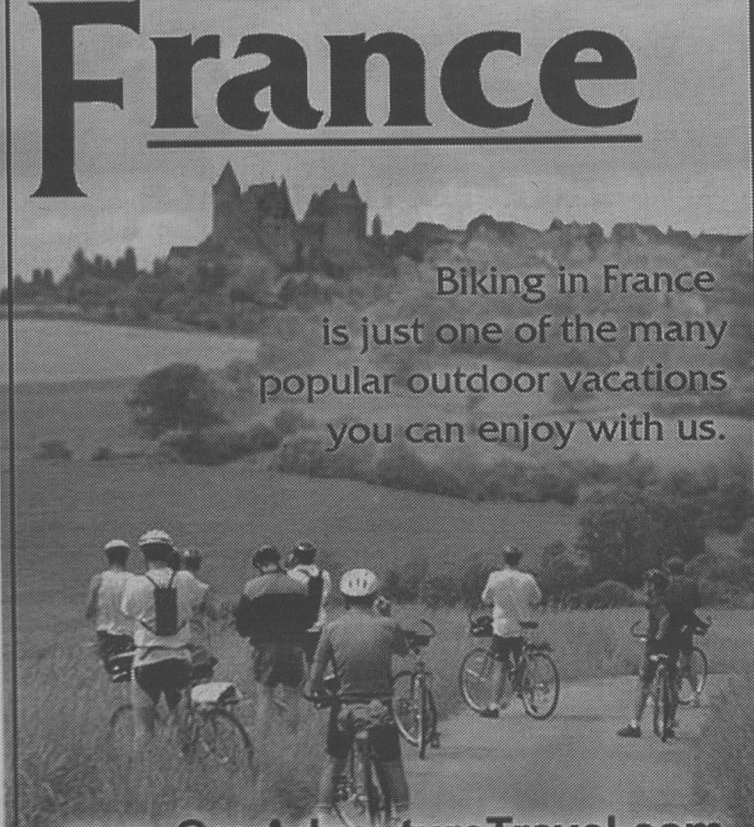
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## Views: Articles of Faith

The Pride celebrations of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community across the country during June must seem a strange ritual to outsiders. With a wild mix of go-go boys, drag queens and topless lesbians, all throbbing to tribal drumbeats, this seemingly self-indulgent display causes outrage for social conservatives, and chagrin for those in the gay community who would like to see us acting more conventionally. But perhaps there is another way to look at Pride besides as an exercise in hedonism: perhaps it represents the pressing back of cultural boundaries by a people uniquely qualified for spiritual exploration.

Throughout history, people we today label lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender have been honored for their roles of spiritual service and leadership. In many cultural contexts, gay people have been the healers, teachers, shamans, keepers of beauty, mediators and peacekeepers; those who "walked between the worlds." For queer spiritual practitioners, not only is their homosexuality or gender identity not a sin, sickness, or abomination, it is a gift, a blessing, and a privilege. It is the element of their personality that has pushed them outside the realm of comfort and conventionality and into the place of mystery inhabited by those who fulfill roles of sacred service. If there is any doubt about the pervasiveness of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in religious leadership roles, it would be a compelling exercise if, on some weekend, every single queer minister, rabbi, music director, teacher or other spiritual functionary stayed home from religious services.

The term "Gay Pride" barely begins to capture the sense of honor and respect this rich spiritual heritage deserves. According to the Dagara tribe in Africa, certain people Westerners would identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender are uniquely physically and energetically suited to be "gatekeepers," the guardians of the doorways into other worlds, realms and realities. The Dagara believe that much of the pain and woundedness of the world can be traced to a lack of respect for these spiritual gatekeepers. In fact, author and speaker Malidoma Some says that part of the reason the world is in the shape that it is in is because the gatekeepers "have been fired from their jobs."

### christian de la huerta

Similarly, among Native American peoples, the Two-Spirit were thought to have special powers and played key roles in tribal ceremonies. These people, who lived on the edges of tribal life, were associated with the gift of prophecy and the implementation of rituals, and were said to possess healing powers. Today Two-Spirits are regaining their place of honor among many Native American communities after being annihilated or forced to go underground during the European invasion.

Is it any wonder that

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mystics and saviors of many spiritual traditions can often be found with those on the margins of society? Perhaps, beyond "healing" the poor, the religiously unclean, and the sexually different, these prophets found in these people a spiritual kinship that sustained their ministries. If the historical figures of Elijah, Buddha, or Jesus were to come back today, I would not be surprised to find them in gay bars, with "welfare moms," or with AIDS orphans in sub-Saharan Africa. For it is people in the boundary places of the world who are often closest to the Divine.

All this does not mean that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are better than straight people. (After all, heterosexuals should not be blamed for not having a "choice" about their sexual orientation!) It does mean, however, that queer people should have a sense of responsibility to

continue bringing light, healing, and spirit to the world, even if the world does not yet realize or fully appreciate our value and contributions.

Furthermore, it is time for religious leaders to stop asking queer people to apologize for who we are and to recognize our innate spiritual offerings of service and leadership. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have gravitated to and fulfilled spiritual roles throughout history, in numbers that far exceed our proportion to the overall population. We have contributed tremendously to the evolution of humanity.

For those who snicker or cringe at the fabulous excess of Gay Pride festivals, realize this: these are the outsiders, the spiritual warriors, the scouts of consciousness who are integrating spirit and sexuality for much of the rest of society. We owe these modern-day shamans the latitude they need and the respect they deserve to do this crucial work.

And for the lesbian, gay,

bisexual and transgender community, the world is crying out for us to speak from a place of real power and pride. We must know, in the deepest recesses of our souls, in the very fabric of our tissues, in every one of our cells in every part of our bodies, that we are blessed in the ways we express our love and our passion. Our blessing is that we know love, and we must love deeply, passionately, and selflessly. It is our calling as a people. It is our calling as human beings.

This spiritual calling is what I celebrate during Gay Pride. I invite all of you who hear this call within you to do the same. ▼

*Christian de la Huerta is a member of the National Religious Leadership Roundtable of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the author of Coming Out Spiritually, and founder of Q Spirit and Revolutionary Wisdom.*