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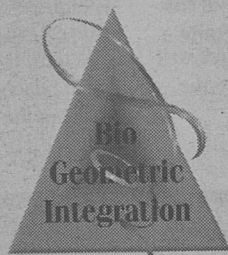
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Just in Time for Summer

By WALTER ZEICHNER

Sex Camp

by Brian McKnight
Author House 2005
Paperback 446 pp.

BOOK

Sex Camp is the latest book by Brian McNaught, the author of *On Being Gay* among other books, and a speaker and trainer in sexuality diversity. There are many perspectives from which one can approach this work.

It is, initially, a fictionalized account of a week of experiences of staff and participants at the Annual Workshop on Sexuality, held for 30 years at Thornfield in upstate New York, a retreat center owned by the Episcopal Church. By 'fictionalized' I mean that the participants are all made-up by the author, likely based on parts of real participants, parts of the author's own psyche, and characters that would work in this context. The staff, however, are based on the real staff of the Workshop on Sexuality, including the use of their real names.

Sex Camp takes us through the week of the workshop, from registration to staff debriefing at the end. We get to experience the week through the eyes of nearly all of the characters at one point or another, their joys and their sorrows, as well as their interpersonal experiences with each other. In this way it reads somewhat like a screenplay. As fiction the book is entertaining and engaging. I laughed, I cried, I read it in two sittings.

The author, however, is not just out to entertain us. He has an agenda! This book is propaganda at its finest. It happens to be propaganda for things like freedom, truth, compassion, liberation, and many other qualities admired by peaceful progressive people, so I'm for it!

The story of the characters is essentially a ruse by which McNaught takes us through the material taught at the workshop. We get to vicari-

ously react through the characters as they are amused, offended, appalled, challenged, cared for, allowed to grow and process, and ultimately to discover that the spectrum of human sexuality is diverse and beautiful. They are even challenged to love themselves as they experience their own epiphanies.

I'm sure anyone reading this book will find material to identify with when characters are telling their personal stories, or coming up against a fear or a repressed feeling. Those of us not fortunate enough to attend the Thornfield workshop get to do it internally. There's lots of good information in the book, as well as valuable references for anyone interested in learning more.

There is a strong Christian theme throughout the book. McNaught is a Catholic, the workshop is held at an Episcopal retreat center, and many of the characters are clergy or religious in some capacity, as well as being a diverse group racially, by age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, level of ability ... gee did I miss anything? I hope not.

The only things missing were a Witch and a Faerie, but with the clearly Christian bent to the setting that may be an omission the author chose deliberately. Something he definitely did deliberately is to use the characters' religious backgrounds to challenge the Judeo-Christian doctrine-based condemnation of gays and lesbians. As he does in his live presentations and in his other books, McNaught takes great pains to address the specific scriptural interpretations used by the religious right to oppress queer people. It's well done too.

The odds are that people who really need to read this book won't, but it can provide any of us with good material to use when confronted by homophobia, racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc. As someone who teaches Human Sexuality in the context of college-level psychol-

ogy, I'd love to use this book as one of my texts. There is an emphasis on homosexuality and transgender issues, but I have found that in order to really open up to accept the spectrum of sexual orientations it is critical to address the "pink elephants," i.e., queerness in its many forms. *Sex Camp* does that well.

Lest you think this will be a chewy read, take my word for it, it reads more like a soap opera than a textbook. There are a few areas that are slightly tedious and preachy, but out of 446 pages maybe 20 of them are like that.

Anyone who knows me will be wondering by now, "Where's the biting criticism?" I don't have any. I do have a few pet peeves with the book. He keeps referring to *Sex in the City* when the show is actually called *Sex and the City*. There is some conflict-avoidance by the author, particularly when one lesbian is expressing some of her anger at men but makes it clear that of course she isn't angry at any of the men present ... why not? She started out pissed at one guy but then kind of talked herself out of it. The thing I found most annoying in the book is Brian's relationship with workshop fellow-facilitator Carol. They snipe at each other "affectionately" throughout the book. Halfway through I wanted to tell them to just fuck and get it over with already. If I'd been on staff with them I would probably ask them what was under all that "good-natured" sarcasm. Other than those relatively minor criticisms, I really enjoyed "Sex Camp." I think you will too! ▼

Walter I. Zeichner is a witch, permaculturist, and activist currently traveling across Canada. You can read his blog at <http://www.walterzeichner.com/blog/index.html>