

A Glimpse at the Dark Side

Book Review: *Gay Soul: Finding the Heart of Gay Spirit and Nature, with Sixteen Writers, Healers, Teachers and Visionaries.* by Mark Thompson (Harper San Francisco, 1994).

This popular book, written by a gay journalist, provides a most interesting window into modern gay life and philosophy. Author Mark Thompson interviews prominent community leaders to show the reader the essence of "gay soul and spirit."

The world this author reveals to us, however, is deeply disturbing.

Some of the most common, recurring themes presented by the book's interview subjects:

- 1) Gay sex is labeled "sacred." The word "sacred" appeared over and over again in this book to describe the gay sex act, gay culture and gay consciousness. Similar terms like "holy" and "mystical" also appeared frequently. Eroticism is seen as the ultimate life force.
- 2) Gay men are described as a superior, third sex who are "two-spirited" because they are not limited to one gender: they have internalized femininity as well as masculinity.
- 3) Gay men are special--gifted with a mystical sensitivity and creativity that allows them to better understand life and serve as visionaries to the larger culture. They are a blessed people, graced by God.
- 4) Straight men ("breeders") are described as inhibited morally, sensually, and socially. They lead dull, emotionally restrictive, uncreative lives.
- 5) Primitive societies, as well as the gods and goddesses of pagan cultures, are presented as superior and more highly evolved.
- 6) The interview subjects express delight with ideas that defame traditional standards. They relate stories of "having sex with God," describe Jesus as a gay man, delight in sex enjoyed in seminaries between students and priests, take pleasure in describing the flouting of the priestly vow of celibacy, and go so far as to describe sadomasochism as a "sacred" sexual experience--along with what one Jungian scholar (and *psychotherapist*) labelled the "sacred" experience of incest between fathers and brothers.
- 7) The interview subjects repeatedly assert that gays are born that way. However, most of them describe distant, rejecting relationships with fathers. Another frequently described scenario is that of the classic over-intimate and smothering (even overtly erotic) mother. Some mention painful memories of boyhood alienation from male peers, and the experience of having been called sissies.
- 8) There is a recurring theme of gay superiority and narcissistic self-love, with the theme of evangelizing the world

into a celebration of homoerotic sexuality. This is contradicted by an inner struggle against self-hatred, which in turn is blamed on society.

9) The distinctions between the sexes are seen as arbitrary and socially constructed. There is no reference to moral boundaries.

10) There are repeated themes of fantasy, impersonation, grandiosity, and a sense of unreality.

Some sample quotes from Gay Soul:

From James Broughton, filmmaker:

"Sex is an avenue to bliss in the soul, and that bliss I have followed all my life...bisexuality is natural; nature is pansexual. The soul is androgynous in everyone...Watch out for conformity. Middle-class morality is ever ready to kidnap you. Support erotic workshops...gaiety makes us gods..."

From Paul Monette, author of the bestselling book *Becoming a Man: Half a Life Story*, for which Monette received the 1992 National Book Award for Fiction:

"Aphrodite and Apollo are my gods, not Jesus...my anger against the injustice and hypocrisy of religion goes...to the Vatican and the pope. Those people for whom God is only politics and not anything of the spirit--those people are evil...Carnality is not as easy as it used to be. I find it more precious."

Andrew Harvey, author:

"I was an eerie little boy, fantastically precocious and full of imitations. I've seen films of myself in which I look quite camp--like a tiny drag queen. It must have been rather difficult for my father, who was a policeman, and I never felt loved by him. Now I see that longing for my father's love was something that defined my homosexuality, just as my obsession with my mother must have..."

"Gay men and women...[are] essential to the health of society, as people who are freed from the responsibilities of procreation to cultivate the artistic, the spiritual, the values of living itself, as people who point to an inner fusion of male and female, a holy androgyny, that all beings could aspire to."

Andrew Ramer, teacher and writer:

"I think the future of the world, the hope of the world, depends on us, that men who love men are the only people who can save this planet. That's our job, our purpose. We carry this other kind of energy that no one else carries, and it's entirely in our hands to save the world...By virtue of our creativity, our passion, our humor, our exuberance for

life...we have the ability to model what it's like to be a human being on the planet for all of humanity. The world is looking to us even though it doesn't know it.

..."If there's theatre, we're doing it. If there's art, we're doing it. If there's music, we're doing it. If there's writing, we're doing it. If all of us decided to stay home for a week, the entire cultural life of the planet would grind to a complete halt.

"Because we live between genders, we also live between matter and spirit, between this world and the next...Nothing has stopped us [from having sex with each other]. Not damnation, not imprisonment, not all kinds of psychological labels, because this energy in us is so strong. It allows us...to feed our souls and feed the culture...we're going to be able to use that energy to change life on the planet."

From Harry Hay, the founding father of the gay-rights movement and the Mattachine Society:

"...gay men are constantly trying to put their dreams into words, music and motion--into new ways of talking to one another...That's why it's tremendously important right now for gay men to be in sensual and sexual contact as much as possible--it enhances that articulation."

Will Roscoe, anthropologist and author:

"I brought a jump rope to school, only to discover it was a 'girl thing.' I didn't choose jumping rope because it was a gendered activity. I chose it because it was personally right for me...I think my experience characterizes the gay attitude toward gender, which more than anything is actually indifference toward gender.

"I see gay men today who have a lot of hostility toward the mother and even more hostility, deeply buried, towards the father..."

"Dad was an introvert...he always had pets, but he couldn't relate to people. He was married five times...there was a love relationship [between my father and me] that was then broken...by the time I was in first grade..."

"He could not deal with emotions and people's love."

James Saslow, art historian:

"Somewhere, deep down inside, human beings know that all their social constructions are arbitrary.

"...in the physical and emotional rapture that comes with them [gay sexual relationships] we have some glimpse of the cosmic forces of the universe...gay people insist on ecstasy."

[Explaining why he sometimes wears a dress] "Being involved in cross-dressing is a way of laying claim to all the possible archetypes of the universe. It's all about symbols, right?...In the divide between men and women, I like being right on the fence, to be able to sense the experience of both sides and to implicitly point out that the divisions are artificial...Who says gay men can't wear this particular item of clothing?...Or makeup? Why not? The trouble is

that people insist on an either/or, binary system of perception...[but] we're not going to be just any old female. Aim high! This is part of turning yourself into an archetype...a lot of people...pick Bette Davis...I pick Elizabeth I. They have similar characteristics; larger-than-life, imperious, and somewhat gender-ambiguous."

Ram Dass, clinical psychologist and Harvard professor:

"I'm sure I've had thousands of sexual partners. It was often two a night. Then I returned east as a professor at Harvard and continued to have this incredible sexual activity...I had all these relationships with young men whom I really wanted to turn on [with LSD] with.

"My mother...had taken my power. She was such a deep love for me...I kept trying to stay a child to stay in intimate relationship with her. It was clear that if I became a man, she'd reject me. And so I got fatter and fatter, eating everything she gave me as my form of intimacy with her. At one point, in prep school, where I was horny all the time, I hugged her and got an erection...[My father] was a very successful and upwardly mobile person, so he didn't have too much time for the family. He was a somewhat remote figure...I never felt he heard me."

"[S]o I ended up having a hard time in my relations with women, in getting my pleasures...I got to the point where I would take huge amounts of acid and look at these slide pictures of women to try to see where my fear was because I saw that there was a block, where I just turned off women...If I want to venture a psychogenic description of my gayness, I would say it's about the absence of my relation to my father and the love affair I had with my mother, which I was never willing to give up...I didn't want to let go of the nurturance and intimacy I had with her."

[Asked what doubts and fears he struggles with] "There are some bizarre ones, like trying to be at peace with the emptiness of it all."

Joseph Kramer, former Jesuit seminarian, founder of the Body Electric School Workshops:

"High school years were the blossoming...I went to an all-boys Jesuit school, and that's where I recognized the importance of homosexual sensibility. Certainly the vast majority of Jesuits are homosexual. I loved my high school years so much, I didn't want to end them. So I decided to be a Jesuit...I was with 15 other men...12 of the 15 were homosexual...So here were gay boys coming together to be educated by older homosexuals...this was the best I could have found, unless the Radical Faeries had snatched me away...At least half of the students there had sexual encounters with one another. We were so close in so many ways, that it seemed right for our bodies to touch and to sear. We were the body of Christ.

"The hierarchical-political level of the Catholic Church--what I call the Imperial Church--is very oppressive of gay people. But the community-based levels of the church--where real men and women live, work and pray--can be incredibly nurturing of gay people."

"The image I like to use of myself is that of a body-based sex magician...My core tribe are those men and women, gay and straight, who honor eroticism as the life force.

"Maybe God is this astonishing vibration, the greatest possible orgasm of all, vibrating all the time. As I vibrate higher, I resonate with that orgasm...The very quality of our lives demands that we transform the sex-negativity of our culture...there are gay men whose life vocation is sex work."

Malcolm Boyd, Episcopal priest for over 40 years, and author:

"...I met more gay people in seminary than I ever met in Hollywood. There are more gay people in the church than probably anywhere else, and you could say intuitively I was motivated by this. Because here I found my tribe...The closet in seminary was huge...

"It's important for gay people to realize that we're unique. We're special."

Guy Baldwin, psychotherapist who works with gay men, and author of a book on the leather world:

"I would like to believe that there's something special about leather sexuality that leads people to a spiritual path...for me, the S & M experience is a kind of crucible in which I place myself, where I hope that my own impurities and illusions are somehow burned away...for me the S & M experience can function as a lens through which existence becomes focused, clarified, refined and revealed... Absolutely, it's a spiritual experience.

"[During S & M sex] I am left with an ecstatic contact with Self. There are no words passing through my mind; there are no cerebral events taking place. I suppose some in Eastern spiritual traditions might call that Nirvana... the ecstatic, transformational event can occur for me on either end of the top-bottom, master-slave, sadist-masochist dynamic.

At some level, deep in our primal consciousness, the top and bottom walk along the razor's edge of good and evil and are able to glance indifferently from one side to the other...

"In order for the S & M experience to deliver players to this place that we are now speaking of, certain elements must be present. One is that the bottom must have a real experience of his vulnerability. Some people need more than simple bondage in order to have that vulnerability revealed to them in crystalline terms. They may need a hand at their throat. They may need to feel themselves broken under the assault of heavy mental or physical stimulation--a whip comes to mind, or they must feel deep submission. And the top must experience as real the fact that his bottom's life is in his hands and feel his own urges to push the bottom's vulnerability...

"I think that at some level we all share the same inner beast...everyone needs some kind of lens through which to get a clearer focus on the self...in the moments of ecstatic fusion that occur in S & M scenes, there is no place to hide

from anyone or anything...If you beat the shit out of a man, he will learn all about you.'

[Responding to the interviewer's observation that gay men have developed S & M to a "high art," Baldwin agrees]-- "[M]ost world-class sadomasochists are to be found among gay men."

Robert Hopcke, Jungian scholar and author. (Alarming--Hopcke works as a psychotherapist. He finds mythical value in the gay stories "Father Blows Best," "The Coach Taught Me," and "Brothers Do It" -- "raw erotic tales of brothers as lovers, father-son couplings" which "exemplify the union of the same at its most potent: a relationship *no less satisfying, or sacred*, than any other," according to the book's interviewer.)

Hopcke says:

"The outsiders, the tricksters, the androgynes, the people who break the boundaries--in other words, gay people in our culture--serve a very vital function...in the breaking down and dissolution [of the general culture]...That's why lesbians and gay men are in the forefront of creative pursuits, since we are the people who break down and let something new come in. That's the function we serve; that's why we're here. That's also why it's very easy to identify us with death and decay.

"That's why Jesse Helms targets us, since he perceives quite accurately that we are revolutionary.

"What heterosexuals don't cop to is how burdensome [procreation] is to them. I see that in my work with family men in particular. They're saddled with the provider role and feel all kinds of restrictions on their ability to be who they are. That's what that envy is all about: gay people are perceived as having more freedom. In fact, perhaps we do..."

(Asked about homophobia in his gay clients): "It's a huge problem. Even the most 'well-adjusted' gay man that I see struggles with it. I struggle with it myself. Having been identified from a very early age as gifted, I developed a certain kind of narcissism that helped protect me against self-hatred. But still, it's there."

(Here in this chapter, the author of the book offers some astute comments of his own. He describes rejection of the prehomosexual boy by the father, and observes that mothers wound their sons through seductiveness, using their "almost inseparably close bond" with their sons. The mother-son over-intimacy requires the boy to "labor under the weight of having to be the 'best little boy in the world.'" He says gay men are left narcissistically wounded, "ageless boys, afraid of growing up and finding our adult masculine power." Most reparative therapists would fully agree with these comments. The author describes exactly the "classic triangular relationship" that gay advocates typically insist is inaccurate.)

He says: "Gay men and lesbians know that there's a certain kind of salvation through the body...for us, the material world and the spiritual world are not dichotomous. They're one.

"I love the idea of male birth; it's a very archetypal symbol, a sacred symbol...our gayness is fertile...There's a union with the same that is the fount of self-love and therefore love of the universe. It brings the wholeness that occurs from uniting with someone who's the same as you...The homoerotic is an archetypal aspect of human sexuality...If our culture is able to integrate homoeroticism into everyone's sexuality, there won't be a need to identify anyone as [gay, straight or bisexual]..."

Mitch Walker, psychotherapist and author:

"One night in 1974, I had a revelation...Suddenly, I saw the truth. I realized that what I was experiencing in loving another guy was archetypal, not a mere accident or adaptation."

"I believe gayness is the immutable center of an inner truth that is harbored in the genes...We were born with sexual orientation...[Homosexual twinship] makes us two-in-one in a way that heterosexuals are not...The real things that move us are archetypal--those things that come from the lusty gonads, the surging blood, and the yearning heart..."

"Erotic body workshops, S & M and other rituals, tantric practices, and so on, can...be useful ways of encountering one's psyche...Passionate love is the doorway to a world of spiritual truth."

Ed Steinbrecher, widely-known author, teacher and lecturer, in a chapter called "Sex with God":

"[Gay men's] spiritual potential is incredible. They form one of the most important communities on the planet right now...They've been handed an incredible gift. The American Indian calls this group 'two-spirited.' Both the male and female aspects of spirit in-dwell...this gives metaxsexuals [gays] an incredible access to universal power. As a result of this potential, society instinctively reacts against gays as a threat to themselves and their established reality...While many people have to struggle for years to get the opposite-sex part of themselves back inside, the gay and lesbian is born with it automatically inside...Here you have this incredibly powerful group of human beings that have been given at birth what every spiritual person is speaking, but nobody has told them...They have the powers ascribed to sorcerers and witches...Gay men and the other metaxsexuals are designed for leadership."

[Describing a previous spiritual-sexual experience]:

"...Suddenly this energy awoke in me. All I can say is that it was like having sex with God. It was eight hours of constant physical orgasm. I know that that's impossible. But it was me as God's phallus, creating galaxies...continuous, unending creation. Once you've had sex with God, everything else sort of pales...There's nothing more awesome than sexual union with God."

If the above themes really are "the essence of gay soul and spirit"--as the author of the book claims--then they reveal a very dark night of the soul, indeed. ■

-----Reviewed by Linda Nicolosi

