

A Statement to the Council of Bishops

By Bishop Melvin Wheatley

A part of the inescapable loneliness of life is that I cannot and do not know your story very well and you cannot and do not know mine. I therefore reluctantly share a most intimate part of my story with you at this time, not primarily as an argument in debate to affect the way you vote, but rather as a sincere effort toward helping you understand the way I am going to vote.

Because my story is what it is, I cannot approach any statement on homosexuality as basically a position on an academic though highly emotionalized subject to be identified as an IT.

I approach any statement on homosexuality as basically an intentional stance toward intimately personal relations involving THOU'S!

Whenever I am asked to permit my name to be attached to any public pronouncement on homosexual persons, for that is what any such statement is, always a pronouncement on real and particular person not a pronouncement on a subject without a face—I do not hear the meanings of that pronouncement transmitted through the editorialized columns of any of our publications.

I hear the meanings of that pronouncement transmitted through the eyes and ears of my great medical doctor, Bill, who twenty-three years ago literally saved my life and who before that and after that was one of Lucile's and my most cherished friends.

I hear the meanings of that pronouncement transmitted through the eyes and ears of that superb pipe organist and highly respected accompanist for John Charles Thomas on many of his concert tours, Roy, who is another of Lucile's and my most cherished friends.

I hear the meanings of that pronouncement transmitted through the eyes and ears of that mid-west United Methodist parsonage preacher's kid, Rhea, who in personal charm, intellectual perception and spiritual endowment is another Georgia Harkness, and who is one of Lucile's and my most cherished friends.

I hear the meanings of that pronouncement transmitted through the eyes and ears of Lucile's and my beloved son John, who from the earliest months of his life to these moments has convinced us that we were providentially guided in giving him the name associated with the beloved disciple.

Why do I hear the meanings of any public pronouncement on homosexual persons through the eyes and ears of these persons?

For one reason: because all four have in common same-sex rather than other-sex orientation. That same-sex orientation is perceived by all of them, not as something they have learned and practiced like piano playing, but as something they are, something they recognize and affirm like thumb prints and skin coloring.

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But for a second reason that is substantive for me. I hear the proposal (to support the negative portion of the 1976 Discipline wording on homosexuality) through their eyes and ears. Because all four of them and many of the millions they symbolize would read from our statement one clearly intended meaning: that in the judgment of the Council of Bishops, they as homosexual persons are automatically eliminated from eligibility as authentic Christians.

But for a third reason I see and hear through their eyes and ears. Because in my judgment (and in Lucile's)—not necessarily in their own—if the total life of each one of the four is set against the criteria of the gifts and graces and fruits of the Spirit delineated in our New Testament, indeed, against the criterion of a life motivated and pervaded by agape love (as commended in the morning meditation) each one of them appears to me and to Lucile to be as close to authentic Christian living as we dare perceive ourselves to be.

This part of my story experientially received and recorded radically affects the way I hear the proposal before us, (to reaffirm the 1976 Discipline wording on homosexuality). Its words sound brave and strong and all but believable when addressed to a highly emotional and crassly exploited subject. Yet the same words strike me as naive, harsh and categorically false when addressed to the Bill, Roy, Rhea, and John Wheatleys of my daily experience.

Therefore: not only is it impossible for me to consent to add my name to any such public pronouncement as here proposed, but also it is imperative for me, out of my own sense of integrity, to insist that any such public pronouncement with which I could be connected carry the unmistakable message that the vote that launched it was not unanimous.