

David DeLauro
218 St. James Pl. #3B
Brooklyn, NY 11238

December 2, 2009

Dear Senator,

I am writing to you concerning the issue of same-sex marriage legislation. As this is the first time I am writing to you I think I should introduce myself. I am David DeLauro son of Scott and Patti DeLauro. I grew up in Griffith, Indiana, attended High School and moved on to be the first person to go to college in my family. I attended Saint Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Indiana, and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree for Computer Science. I actually started working for Saint Joseph's College as the Network Computer Systems Analyst before I graduated in December of 2000 and had worked there for 8 years—three of which were as a professor of humanities. Even in 2000 I felt a different calling for the direction my life was going and it was soon after my graduation that I applied for matriculation into McCormick Theological Seminary to earn my Masters of Divinity. I graduated in 2006 and I have already started to put what I have learned to good use. I have begun preaching at the First Presbyterian Church of Rensselaer as well as scheduled to give lectures to the entire sophomore class at Saint Joseph's College for the Core III and IV program, *The Roots of Western Civilization*. In 2008 I moved to Brooklyn so that I could continue my education and to volunteer at Bellevue Hospital as a chaplain in the CPE program. I'm planning on starting my Ph.D. in Hebrew at Union Theological Seminary on the Upper West Side.

Between working full-time, teaching computer science, going to school 3/4-time, translating Greek and Hebrew texts, lecturing and preaching, it has come to my attention that the Legislature has just recently failed to pass legislation concerning same-sex marriage. Being that I am now an official resident of New York State, I would like to know more about the debate and why it has failed to pass. In particular I would like to know what the reasons were for your support or dismissal of the legislation. It seems to me (which obviously means I could be wrong and ill-informed) that this resolution is a

“knee-jerk” reaction to other processes of law in other states or even pending elections. Learning your reasons, I believe, would help me better address the situation here in the community in which I live.

As a religious man and a seminarian, my personal view on the issue is that couples of the same-sex should be allowed to marry with all of the spiritual and legal benefits of such a union. The arguments that I have seen against the marrying of same-sex couples in this way usually have to deal with, in general, “degradation of society.” It is sort of a Sodom and Gomorrah type approach. “If we let homosexual-practice into our society, God will strike our society into oblivion.” Obviously, most politicians in the open do not use this wording but I see it as a theme that runs within the debate. I challenge this debate front head-on. To do so, I would like to take the mythos of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as a way of confronting the issue.

When we read the story of Sodom and Gomorrah we come to the story with a lot of worldly baggage. We come to the table with the notion that the Bible unequivocally defines same-sex intercourse as sin. Our English language even uses the term “sodomy” to describe copulation with someone of the same sex or with an animal. In the world we live in today we need only say the name of one of the cities that was destroyed to have some indication why God destroyed that city. Where did these pre-conceived notions come from? In truth the condemnation of homosexual practice began little over a millennium ago. Before that time the Western world was fairly nondiscriminatory when it came to the practice of same-sex relations. In fact many newly founded Christian universities had debates about the benefits and disadvantages of straight versus gay love. Moreover, there were no law codes outside of Visigoth Spain that contained prohibitions of same-sex acts. Things began to change though near the middle of the 1100s. A man by the name of Peter Cantor stepped onto the scene and work vigorously to ban same-sex love within the clergy. Peter Cantor is the man we can thank for restricting the term sodomy to refer to same-sex acts. Finally, the Lateran III council in 1179 became the first ecumenical church council to require punishment for homosexual acts. From this point forward order and uniformity were idolized and thus began the Christian persecution of Jews, Muslims, and the poor as a menace. Inquisitions were held and many heretics were sentenced to death. Through fear and turmoil the mindset of Europe

began to change and the general consensus on the issue of homosexuality became that of condemnation.¹

The etymology of the word ‘sodomy’ as describe in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is as follows: Middle English, from Old French *sodomie*, from Late Latin *Sodoma* Sodom; from the homosexual proclivities of the men of the city in Gen 19:1-11. I challenge this. The sin of the Sodomites was not sodomy. The sin of the Sodomites was inhospitality: the lack of concern for the poor, the hungry, the innocent, and ignoring the duty to be righteous and just.

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah really begins in chapter 18 of Genesis when Abraham meets God and two angels walking by his tent. As the story goes, Abraham meets three men in the heat of the day. These three individuals are God and two angels though Abraham himself does not know this until after a meal, which he insists upon the strangers. Reading from our time and space we might see nothing particularly interesting about this story. Aside from a few oddities² that a native reader would notice, we would be right. God has come to visit Abraham and remind him of the promise which was made.³ The story also gives us an inside look at the author’s view of the “justice” of God, the judge of the world.⁴ The story quickly moves from that of hospitality to that of bargaining with God. God declares to Abraham that near by there is are cities whose sin cries out because of great depravity and he is about to destroy them. At this point Abraham realizes the injustice that would befall any righteous individuals that live in this area and begins to bargain with God as to how many righteousness it will take to prevent this disaster.

After Abraham bargains with God, the story moves to the cities. In this part of the story the reader may feel as if the previous story is being started again but with Lot as the main character instead of Abraham. Again, Lot offers the visitors a resting place and a meal to eat.⁵ The importance of these two acts should not be overlooked. In the first

¹ Daniel A. Halminiak, Ph.D., *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality* (New Mexico: Alamo Square Press, 2000), 17-27.

² Norman Habel in describing the literary form of the J writer lays out how certain aspects of this story “suggests something unusual about the adventure.” Norman Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 44.

³ Genesis 12:1-7; Genesis 18:9-15

⁴ Genesis 18:22-33

⁵ Genesis 19:2-3

story we may read the hospitality of Abraham as the ordinary event that was proper. There are nuances that are missed if we do so. Norman Habel in a discussion of this story's events explains how the entire event follows a style of humor. "Each action is reported with extreme brevity and each statement is an ironic understatement. Abraham depicts himself as the supremely unworthy host."⁶ These small details would have caught the attention of the author's audience and the fact that the actions occur twice shows a great emphasis on the part of the author. These two events surround the story of Abraham feeling out how great God's justice is,⁷ creating a "literary sandwich" with righteousness as the bread and justice as meat of the issue.

Was it hospitable for Lot to offer his daughters over to the mob to be raped? We know that Lot was a righteous man and he did what was right...right? The land in which Lot is believed to have lived would have been a harsh country. If one were to stay exposed to the harsh conditions of the land death was a very real possibility. So, for Lot and anyone who lived and knew of such conditions, the expectation was to invite anyone who would be exposed to the elements a shelter lest they become the cause of someone's death.⁸ Helminiak goes further to describe that this expectation was "a traditional part of Semitic and Arabic cultures. This rule was so strict that no one might harm even an enemy who had been offered shelter for the night."⁹ It seems that if Lot would have denied or fallen short of his duty to give shelter/protection to the two strangers he himself would have been guilty of at least one of the sins of the Sodom. In seeing the importance of the hospitality offered by Lot, one might come to the conclusion that the "issue" of sex is no more the point of the narrative than "pounding on someone's door."¹⁰ Now, if we accept the interpretation that sex has nothing significant to do with the story other than to re-emphasize the wickedness of Sodom, we can see how Lot's offer of his daughters was understood. In the culture in which Lot lived he was the master of the household and everything in it was his property. This property included his wife and daughters. Obviously the story takes the concept of hospitality over property (family) to an extreme,

⁶ Norman Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 45.

⁷ Genesis 18:22-33

⁸ Daniel A. Halminiak, Ph.D., *Ibid.* 46.

Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 257.

⁹ Daniel A. Halminiak, Ph.D., *Ibid.* 46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 47.

but in doing so it paints a wonderful contrast between the magnitude of Lot's righteousness and the cities wickedness.

There are more problems with the interpretation that the sin of Sodom was homosexuality and not hospitality. One problem that I see with the homosexual interpretation is the fact that when Abraham bargains with God, Abraham convinces God not to destroy the city if there are at least 10 people that are "righteous." Now, if the sin of Sodom was homosexuality wouldn't that mean that there were not at least 10 heterosexual people in the city? In fact, within the story we have no evidence of homosexual activity. No sex of any kind occurs in the confines of the story. Moreover, if the people (both men and women) of Sodom would have gotten their way and "known" the two strangers, the sex would have been between the divine and the mortal. Is angelic human sex homosexuality?

Besides the logical contradictions for the interpretation of Sodom's sin being homosexuality, the bible itself interprets Sodom's sin for us and it has nothing to do with homosexuality. In Ezekiel 16:48-49 we read: "As I live – declares the Lord God – your sister Sodom and her daughters did not do what you and your daughters did. Only this was the sin of your sister Sodom: arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility; yet she did not support the poor and the needy." Clearly, the writer of Ezekiel does not mention homosexuality as the sin of Sodom. Another example within the Pentateuch itself is from Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy 32 we are told of the sins of Israel as compared to Sodom. "They scarified to demons, no gods, Gods they had never known, New ones, who came but lately, Who stirred not your fathers' fears" (Deut. 32:17). The author here condemns Israel for turning into a bunch of idol worshippers and for becoming just like Sodom. "Ah! The vine for them is from Sodom, From the vineyards of Gomorrah; the grapes for them are poison, a bitter growth their clusters" (Deut. 32:32). There are other references¹¹ to the sin of Sodom and in general Sodom is depicted as what the worst sinfulness is like and what can happen for such rejections of God's law. In all of these references the sin of Sodom is never simply sexual acts let alone homogenital acts.

¹¹ Wisdom 19:13; Isaiah 1:10-17, 3:9; Jeremiah 23:14; Zephaniah 2:8-11.

This story or at least the unconscious application of Peter Cantor's interpretation of the story (which I do see in the current debate over same-sex marriage) has skewed our own view of justice for the marginalized and the role of homosexuals in our society. As you can see, this is a misinterpretation that has been used for the past 900 years that has no basis in fact. The writer of this story could never have imagined just how important his little recount of hospitality and justice would become. Scholarly research in this area only convinces me more that the interpretation of "homosexual condemnation only" in this story of hospitality is not present within the confines of the text. The concern that I see in the story is how God is blessing creation not condemning it. The emphasis of this story is **צְדָקָה** and **מִשְׁפָּט** (righteousness and justice), feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, caring for the marginalized and helping the sick.

I just hope individuals realize we are creating marginalized people just like the Pharisees and Sadducees did to the "unclean" people in Jesus' day. So I urge you to defend our society against this marginalization and bring about new legislation that would remove anything in our laws that would define marriage as being between a man and a woman *only*. As of right now the debate is turned upside down. By allowing such laws to exist we would be just like the fabled city of Sodom by ignoring the cry of the poor, the sick, the marginalized. Our society would break down from its own internal injustice and unrighteousness when creating classes of people with privilege and those without.

I thank you for your service to this great state of New York and look forward to your responses. And, of course, if you find yourself in Clinton Hill in Brooklyn you would be more than welcome into my home for dinner and good discussion.

Peace, Tranquility and Serenity be with you.
Sincerely,

David DeLauro