

Leaves, Nigel. A Journey in Life. In *When Faith Meets Reason: Religion Scholars Reflect on Their Spiritual Journeys* (Ed., Robert W. Funk et. al.). Santa Rosa, California: Polebridge Press; 2008; p. 26.

Yet now I must admit to being deeply troubled by the conservative direction that my religious tradition and its leaders have taken. I find myself marginalized and increasingly alarmed by the claims of some of its adherents. When the titular head of my church (the Archbishop of Canterbury) proposes that homosexuals must change their sexuality if they are to be *welcomed* into the church, then I fear that the church has returned to the dark ages. How can an allegedly enlightened thinker and former university professor ignore the scientific evidence of the discovery of gene Xq28 (the so-called: "gay gene") and refuse to acknowledge that homosexuality is a *biological* fact? How can I still belong to an organization that excludes one tenth of the adult population of the world on the basis of six verses of an ancient text? It is especially difficult because the text (Rom 1:22-27) was written by a first-century man who—as retired Episcopalian Bishop John Shelby Spong intimates, taking up an earlier suggestion by the distinguished Harvard classicist and theologian Arthur Darby Nock—might have been a repressed, self-loathing gay man. ([Leaves 2008](#): 26)

Whether Nock and Spong are correct in their evaluation of Saint Paul's sexual orientation is open to much conjecture: there is only circumstantial evidence from the scriptural texts to back up the claim that homosexuality was Paul's "thorn in the flesh." However, the fact remains that hostility towards gay people by Christians has been based on a worldview that has now been surpassed by modern science. I align myself with fellow Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu in being deeply ashamed of my homophobic church. The secular world has embraced the full sexual rights of gays and lesbians: it is time for all the churches to do the same. ([Leaves 2008](#): 26-27)

So, what should I do? One option would be to take leave of my church and join a growing band of "freelance monotheists" led by people like the author and broadcaster Karen Armstrong, whose only test for the validity of a religious idea or doctrinal statement is that "it must lead directly to practical compassion." If God is love, to put their case simply, then only those fragments of each religious tradition that promote a more loving, compassionate world are from God. The rest is bad theology and a departure from what God prescribes. ([Leaves 2008](#): 27)