In most societies in the world, sex between men is regarded simply as a fact of life and in some, male bonding and sexual commitment is elevated to a high ideal. However, once we look to pre-Modern Europe, we see a much darker and dangerous morality characterized by an intense homophobia blessed by Church and State.

“Homophobia”¹ is a term coined in 1969² by the prominent American researcher and writer on matters homosexual, George Weinberg. Since then, the word has gone into the language meaning an aversion to gay or homosexual people or their lifestyle or culture³ and is a useful shorthand term for the kind of extreme prejudices which underlie anything from poofa-bashing to Hitler's holocaust.⁴

**The origins of homophobia in Europe**

The Ancient Hebrews, from whose histories and traditions the Old Testament was derived, were always surrounded by enemies ready and eager to take over their lands and sell them into slavery so it is understandable that they resented any procreative act which did not result in more sons who would grow up and defend them. Hence, for example, Onan has suffered a bad press down the centuries for doing what he probably thought was right in a tight corner. Semen was believed so

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² The first major discussion of the term was in Weinberg’s 1972 book, *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*
⁴ As one example (but one which we won’t have time to elaborate) see: “The Persecutions of Sodomites in Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam: Changing Perceptions of Sodomy”, by Drs Theo van der Meer, in *The Persuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, Gerard, k. and Hekma, G., (Eds.), Harrington Park Press, 1988,p263-307
sacred, so powerful, that a man had to undergo purification if any so much as touched him or his clothes ....

As in all three Abrahamic religions, one of the main sources of anti-homosexual teaching lies in the Biblical story of Lot and the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. This story was interpreted to strike fear into the hearts of our ancestors, a fear that if anyone in their community had homosexual sex, this would so anger God that He would send a terrible punishment visited not only upon the culprits but upon the whole community. In the centuries following the introduction of Bubonic Plague to Europe, perhaps the “punishment” the people feared most would have been the Black Death, the actual cause of which they did not understand?

Another Biblical authority usually quoted as showing God’s condemnation of homosexuality is to be found in Leviticus 18:22 which states (New English Bible) “You shall not lie with a man as with a woman: that is an abomination” And Leviticus 20:13 which says: “If a man has intercourse with a man, as with a woman, they both commit an abomination: they shall be put to death; their blood shall be on their own heads.” These are part of what is known as “The Holiness Code” and appear to date from the time of the Hebrew’s slavery, from the 7th to 5th Centuries BC and were aimed at minimizing any foreign influence upon their own cultural purity.5 One of the institutions of the Canaanites the Hebrews particularly disliked was the temples where men and boys, surrounded by phallic shaped pillars, offered themselves as sacred prostitutes — kadesh — with whom, it was believed, intercourse ritually enhanced individual fertility and tribal power6.

There are a few, rather cryptic verses in the New Testament — for example, Matthew 5:21-22 in the King James Version — but these are rarely quoted and usually forgotten. Generally speaking, European homophobia was justified by the Old Testament.

Strangely, one of the most influential weapons put into the hands of the early Christian Fathers in their holy war against Pagan beliefs and especially against homosexuality was given them by Plato when he suggested homosexuality was “against nature” and praised the chastity of

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5 “You shall not do as they do in Egypt where you once dwelt, not shall you do as they do in the land of Canaan to which I am bringing you; you shall not conform to their institutions. You must keep my laws and conform to my instructions without fail. I am the Lord thy God.” NEB, Leviticus 18:1-2.
6 The judge Samuel might have been a kadesh in younger days.
the birds and beasts. Although scholars such as Boswell⁷ argue that Plato might have meant simply that such intercourse was not procreative, the early Christians adopted it in the sense of “unnatural” and their descendants have used it down the centuries and still use it even today.

Perhaps the most influential of all the early Christian writers, however, was St Paul⁸ who appears to have been concerned that too many members of the early Christian communities took the commandment to "love one another" too literally, particularly the many men who, in his words, leave "the natural use of the woman" to "burn in lust one toward another."⁹ Such men, he assured his followers, had been given up by God and are to be excluded from the Christian community.¹⁰

Western intolerance of homosexuality and the Church’s persecution of it was carried forward on the great tide of aestheticism which flooded the early Christian church. The so-called “Patriist” writers, the “Fathers of the Church”, fulminated against all forms of homosexuality but especially pederasty. Indeed, they fulminated against all forms of pleasure, sexual or otherwise and many set about making life as uncomfortable for themselves and others as they could. This was the time when many of the "saints" of the Church sat on poles, others lived in caves in the desert, and some even castrated themselves using a method much like the *elastrator* employed with young rams.

**St Peter Damien was the soul of the “Riforma gregoriana”, which marked the passage from the first to the second millennium and whose heart and driving force was St Gregory VII.**¹¹

The Church’s war against homosexuality was also fuelled by the threat of many cults and “heresies” which flourished at the time, including Gnosticism and Manichaeanism which not only interpreted God and Jesus in different ways but also permitted homosexual relations. And, although they were schools of philosophy rather than religions, both Neoplatonism and Stoicism added substance to the fight.

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⁸ Prof. Raymond-Jean Frontain writing at http://www.glbltq.com/literature/bible.html
⁹ See 1 Cor. 6:9-10; see also 1 Tim. 1:9-10
¹⁰ See Rom. 1:26-27
An interesting, albeit fire-and-brimstone homophobic web site called “What the saints say about the sin of homosexuality” quotes several of the Church Fathers on the subject. By far the worst — and possibly the most influential — was Saint Peter Damian who goes on and on for page after page in the most terrible purple prose in his Book of Gomorrrha which, in 1051 AD, he addressed to Pope Leo IX.... This is just a taste:

This vice strives to destroy the walls of one’s heavenly motherland and rebuild those of devastated Sodom. Indeed, it violates temperance, kills purity, stifles chastity and annihilates virginity ... with the sword of a most infamous union. It infects, stains and pollutes everything...

Of course the Christian case against Paganism was vastly strengthened when in 313 the Emperor Constantine converted to the new religion and made it the official religion of the Empire in 325 AD. However, it was not until May 14, 390 AD, that the Emperor Theodosius decreed the first anti-homosexual law in the West when he posted his decree — perhaps significantly — in the Hall of Minerva, then a popular gathering place for actors, writers and other artists. Later, in 533 AD Justinian, also intent on rooting out all vestiges of Paganism in the Empire, revised the Lex Julia, which originally only punished adulterers with death, by adding “those who dare to commit acts of vile lust with [other] men”.

In the late 4th Century, a collection of ecclesiastical law called The Constitution of the Apostles appeared which rather surprisingly revised the 6th Commandment, Thou shalt not commit adultery by adding to it a clause Do not abuse boys: for this vice is against nature (Deut. 27:15).

In this latter-day version of the Mosaic commandment, a new word was used: paidophthoros (paidophthoria) which is a compound of the Greek pais (boy) and phthora (abuse, corruption). The word was coined by Hellenized Jews but it was adopted by Christians in about the 2nd Century AD. Eugene Rice, who is an Emeritus Professor of History at Columbia University puts this into perspective when he reminds us that:

13 This is an edited selection. See the site for the complete text, including references.
14 The “What the Saints say...” site says this is considered the principal work against homosexuality.
15 Liber Gomorrhianus, in PL 145, col. 159-178.
16 He also ordered the destruction of any remaining books after the great Library at Alexandria burnt down in 391 AD, and in 393, he banned the thousand-year-old Olympic Games.
17 Quoted in Fone, B. op cit, p.115.
18 Quoted by Eugene Rice, Shepherd Professor of History Emeritus at Columbia University at the site: http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/patristic_writers.html
... pagan moralists and legalists had strong views of their own about honor and shame, consent and coercion, and they had words like hubris and stuprum, each capable of registering a wide range of disapproval, with which to reprobate sexual behaviors they considered abusive... [but] The innovation of the early fathers of the church was to make the crucial move of labeling pederasty itself an abuse. So Greek Christians learned to say "boy-abuse" (paidophthoria) instead of "boy-love" (paiderastia) and "abuser of boys" (paidophthoros) instead of "lover of boys" (paederastés, paidophilos).

Such terms — unnatural, contrary to or Sin against Nature, abuse, self-abuse, child abuse (when referring to post-pubertal males), depravity, abominable crime, unspeakable vice, and a host more — have followed homosexuals down the centuries ever since. Even so, one suspects that ordinary men just kept on doing what they had always done and had sex with each other when the opportunity and the desire presented themselves. Much of this caterwauling by powerful men within the Church was not heard outside in the fields and in the towns except when, on odd occasions, something went wrong and a homosexual liaison was brought to the notice of the authorities or, most horribly of all, official persecutions were launched, as they were episodically, in the attempt to eradicate heresies and Pagan cults. First, the authorities set about wiping out the Arians, then the Manicheans, and later in the Middle Ages, the Jews, the Cathari mystics and Waldenses, and later still, the Hussites, Lutherans, Calvinists, other Protestants and Rosicrucians, while not forgetting the witch hunts which, among others, were directed towards practitioners of remnants of the “Old Religion”, the indigenous European practices and beliefs.

PEDRO BERRUGUETE: St. Dominic presides over an auto da fe, 1475

**The Age of Inquisitions**

When we say “the Inquisition” we usually mean the Spanish Inquisition, but in fact there were four Inquisitions. The first Inquisition was the Medieval or “Episcopal” (established in 1184); followed by the Spanish (1478); the Portuguese (1536); and lastly, the Roman (1542). Despite their different locations
and intentions, the Inquisitions followed a set pattern:

Initially a tribunal would open at a location and an edict of grace would be published calling upon those who are conscious of heresy to confess; after a period of grace, the tribunal officers could make accusations. Those accused of heresy were sentenced at an auto-da-fe, Act of Faith. Clergyman would sit at the proceedings and would deliver the punishments. Punishments included confinement to dungeons, physical abuse and torture. Those who reconciled with the church were still punished and many had their property confiscated, as well as were banished from public life. Those who never confessed were burned at the stake without strangulation; those who did confess were strangled first. During the 16th and 17th centuries, attendance at auto da-fe’ reached as high as the attendance at bullfights.19

The Medieval or “Episcopal” Inquisition was established in 1184 by a papal bull called Ad abolendam and was set up to deal with the growing Catharist heresy in the south of France. This Inquisition was not very effective and so another, called the “Papal Inquisition” was established in the 1230s. This was staffed mostly by Dominican clergy who had been trained specifically for the job of hunting down heretics. Punishment for those found guilty of heresy was to be burnt at the stake but, as was to be the custom thereafter (from at least the 1220s), the sentence was always carried out by the civil authorities.

Ferdinand and Isabella, Their Most Catholic Majesties, responsible for expelling the Jews and the Moors from Spain and for establishing the Spanish Inquisition20.

19 See http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/Inquisition.html
The Spanish Inquisition was founded in 1478 by Their Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella, to find out and destroy, if not a heresy, then a suspected apostasy. Jews had been forced either to convert to Christianity or leave the country. Many of these “Conversos” were suspected of continuing in their Jewish faith while maintaining outwardly Christian appearances. Ferdinand and Isabella petitioned the Pope for permission to start an Inquisition and in 1483 Tomas de Torquemada was appointed inquisitor-general assisted by two Dominican monks, Miguel de Morillo and Juan de San Martin. Finally, in 1492, the year Columbus “discovered” America and the last Moors were defeated at Granada, the Jews were expelled from Spain. During the three and a half centuries the Spanish Inquisition operated, it is estimated that 31,912 “heretics” were burned at the stake, 17,659 were burned in effigy (the accused had fled before they could be arrested) while 291,450 made reconciliations with the Church authorities.

When the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, more than 150,000 fled to Portugal which traditionally had been more tolerant than Spain. At the time, D. João II allowed them to enter, at a price, because he wanted to benefit from their wealth and skills. João II died in 1494 and was succeeded by D. Manuel I who initially took a more lenient view of the Jewish community. However, his marriage to Princess Isabel of Spain in 1496 forced him to expel the Jews within the year. In 1536, during the reign of D. João III, Pope Leo X established the Inquisition in Portugal and tribunals were set up in Lisbon, Évora and Coimbra. In Portugal, the Inquisition was under the authority of the King who appointed the Grand Inquisitor, always from within the Royal Family. As it happened, the first Grand Inquisitor was Cardinal Henry who himself later became king and was responsible, on his death, for the passing of the Portuguese crown to Spain for 80 years.

As in Spain, the Portuguese Inquisition was responsible for rooting out Conversos, but it also took on responsibility for book censorship, as well as prosecuting witchcraft, divination, bigamy and of course, sodomy which, over the centuries, had become so closely associated in Christian minds with heresy that often the same word was used interchangeably for both. For example, in Old French, herite means both heretic and sodomite while we get our word “bugger” and “buggery” and the Italians, “buggerone” from the French word, bougre for “a Bulgarian” because they believed the Bulgars were responsible for importing the Catharist heresy into France.

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21 Isabella of Castile appears to have been the religious zealot; Ferdinand of Aragon, a Catalan, was more tolerant.
All in all, by the time of its abolition in 1821, approximately 40,000 cases had been tried in Portugal, although only 1800 were actually burned.

**Love Letters from the Sacristan of Silves**

In the archives of the Portuguese Inquisition, the Arquiva da Torre do Tombo, in Lisbon are five love letters written by one man to another in Lent, 1664 and are among the oldest homosexual love letters in the whole of Western civilization\(^2^2\). Sadly, they came to be in these archives because their author had been denounced as a sodomite.

*A traditional Portuguese guitarra*

They were written by a man who was the sacristan in the Cathedral of Silves, a small mining town in the south of Portugal, in the region known then as now as Algarve. The sacristan was Francisco Correa Netto and the man to whom he wrote his letters was Manuel Viegas, a professional musician who both played and made guitars (Spanish guitars, *viola*, not the traditional Portuguese *guitarra*) for a living.

*Modern Silves (the Sé or cathedral is much altered since Netto’s day)*

On 29 March, 1664, Viegas passed his lover’s letters to the Vicar of Silves, Manuel Luis Coelho who in turn sent them to the Inquisition in Évora, with a covering letter, denouncing his sacristan, Correa Netto

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for sodomy.

Generally speaking, the Portuguese Inquisition dealt fairly compassionately with cases known as *nefandum peccatum*. Of the 4,419 names of persons listed alphabetically in the *Repetitios do Nefando* (the Catalogues of Sodomites) who had been denounced or who had confessed to having committed this crime between the years 1587 and 1794, only 408 (10%) appear to have been put on trial and of these, about 30 (0.7% of the total denounced or 6% of those actually accused) were ever executed. The Inquisition was most concerned with backsliding Conversos and heretics, who made up about 80% of cases brought before the Tribunals, most of the rest being suspected witches or cases of bigamy. At the time these letters were written, Portugal appears to have been fairly tolerant of homosexuality: the king, D. Afonso VI (1656-1683), was himself well-known to be homosexual. Also well-known was the *dança dos fanchonos* held in Rossio, the ancient common and still the civic heart of the city of Lisbon, where boys dressed as women and danced the night away. Nearby, pretty much next door to the Palace of the Inquisition, effeminate homosexuals, *fanchonos*, met for sex in a famous rooming house. And, as popular then as *fado* is today, was a kind of lyric poetry set to music known as *cancioneiro medieval*, among which were the famous *Canções de Amigo* (“Songs for a friend”) in which sodomy is mentioned several times as a positive, natural thing to do.

Even so, to write so openly about his love for the guitarist and to admit in letters what they had done together, was a dangerous thing to do and speaks of the passion, desperation and ultimately anger the sacristan must have had.

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23 Op. cit., p.100
experienced. Note in these letters that the expression Your Grace (Vossa Merce) was a common expression used among equals, even lovers in 17th Century Portugal. It has all but disappeared now from common usage.

Letter Number One

Senhor Manoel Viegas:
If men sleep with me, it is not to find a pussy. They place the cock between my legs, and there they have their way. I do not achieve it. If Your Grace (Vossa Merce) would wish the same, dispose of me, I am at your service, to whom I swear unto death, to offer what is needed, and the losses are mine.

Francisco Correa Netto

Personally, I suspect that the authors of the article in which these letters were first published, Luiz Mott and Aroldo Assungdo, both of the University of Bahia, in Brazil, might have some difficulty with English because there are a few strange renditions....

Commentary

- The Canon Law definition of the capital offence of sodimia completa required evidence of penetration and emission, so by limiting their activities to intercourse “between the legs”, that is, “frottage” or, in Portuguese, coxeta many homosexuals hoped to avoid punishment by the Inquisition. Both masturbation (punheta) and coxeta were deemed mere “sins of pleasure”.
- Correa’s remark that “I do not achieve it' is a strange translation of the original, “Eu, nao me vem nada”: “vem” is 1st person singular of the verb “vir”, to come: this verb is commonly used in modern Portuguese meaning “to ejaculate”. If you discount the double negative (used in Portuguese for emphasis) with a little elegant variation to achieve the same effect, the phrase can be translated into modern English most accurately as “Personally, I don’t come at all”, where “come” is often spelled “cum” nowadays to make it clear it means “ejaculate”. Judging by the authors’ comments, this practice of foregoing ejaculation and even of concealing their genitals entirely by the passive partner was not uncommon and probably was intended to avoid reminding the active partner

25 Mott, L and Assungdo, A: Op. cit. All quoted translations are from this work.
that it was another man with whom he was taking his pleasure.

• The Vicar of Silves in his accompanying letter to the Inquisition added: "This letter was written in front of the most holy Sacrament" which was probably another attempt to indict Correa Netto for sacrilege in addition to sodomy and possibly Judaism. There seems no doubt that he was generally despised by the Vicar who some time in the past, had blocked Correa Netto from becoming a priest because he considered him to be one-quarter Converso or “New Christian”.

If there was ever any doubt that Correa was a “fanchono” deeply enamoured with the guitar maker it is surely dispelled by the excessive terms of endearment which pepper Letter #2 after their initial meeting: for example, he refers to the guitar maker as *Tender gift to me and longing of my senses, My love and bounty, Mirror of my sight and joy*; and he signs off as *Goodbye, my darling, my happiness, my true love!*\(^{26}\)

**Southern Portugal — Algarve — showing Silves**

However, as true love, this affair was all down-hill from there. Manoel Viegas the guitar-maker had a fiancée, Maria Nunes who seems to have been the niece of the Vicar who denounced Netto to the Inquisition. Netto offered to share the guitar maker’s love with her and tried to buy his affections by showering him with expensive gifts. In Letter #3 we learn he even commissioned him to make him a guitar. He also asks Viegas to destroy his letters. Of course, Viegas did not do as he asked but instead passed them over to the Vicar. Netto kept his word and destroyed whatever Viegas had written to him.

\(^{26}\) Op. cit p. p. 95
In Letter #4, Netto writes of his humiliation, jealousy and anger. Gone are the flowery terms of endearment; instead he expresses his hurt that Viegas is giving his gifts to his fiancée and apparently telling her all about the man who is pursuing him. In her turn, Maria Nunes is doing her best to humiliate him and make him jealous.....

Finally, in Letter Number Five, the scorned Netto angrily turns on Viegas:

False and Flatterer:

If I could mock, scoffing at someone in love! But in the end, quem mais ama menos merece. For me there were only tears, tears caused by you and by so many skirts. Now she has what I desired.

Because we are trained to see effeminate men such as Francisco Correa Netto as “funny” and even “ridiculous”, we tend to read his letters with some embarrassment and perhaps even to sympathise with the guitar maker, Manual Viagas, rather than allow ourselves to feel properly sorry for this man whose emotions have been tramelled and whose person has been used, and worse still, whose “boss” will actually denounce him to the Inquisition.

One of the more stylish of American gay writers, John Preston, once said that effeminate homosexuals are the strongest men in the world. He said they gain their strength because they have nowhere to hide: they cannot pass for “straight”, they wear their sexuality for everyone to see and they have to learn to live with the consequences. So too it must have been for Francisco Correa Netto: hopefully, though wounded by his experience with the guitar maker, he recovered and lived to love another day.

And indeed, he did live: despite the Vicar’s best attempts at denunciation, hoping the Inquisition would get rid of his unwanted and embarrassing sacristan, and even though the mayor and another priest were prepared to swear that Correa Netto was in infamous sodomite, the Inquisition took no further notice. To qualify as a denunciation, the “abominable sin” of sodomy required two witnesses to both penetration and ejaculation, and on two separate occasions. If nothing else, the Inquisition was meticulous in following its own rules.

27 He who loves most deserves least.
28 in “Fanny: the Queen of Provincetown”.
Although no description has yet been found of the execution of a sodomite in Portugal, just what Correa Netto escaped was described by a British resident of Portugal on 15th January 1707 after he had witnessed the Auto da Fé on 12 September, 1706. After one man was reprieved, four people were burnt, two after being strangled first and the other two, burnt alive. Those burnt alive were a woman (Maria Pinheiro) and a man (Heytor Diaz da Paz), both convicted as “Judaisers”. The Englishman wrote:

*The execution was very cruel. The woman was alive in the flames half an hour, and the man above an hour. The present king and his brothers were seated at a window so near, as to be addressed to a considerable time, in very moving terms, by the man as he was burning. But though the favour he begged was only for a few more faggots, yet he was not able to obtain it. Those which are burnt alive here, are seated on a bench twelve feet high, fastened to a pole, and above six feet higher than the faggots. The wind being a little fresh, the man’s hinder parts were perfectly wasted; and as he turned himself, his ribs opened before he left speaking, the fire being recruited as it wasted to keep him just in the same degree of heat. But all his entreaties could not procure him a larger allowance of wood to shorten his misery and despatch him.*

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30 João V, 1706-50