

Two Cheers for Amy Grant: Good News and Great News for LGBTQ+ People

Amanda Udis-Kessler, August 14, 2021

“Gay. Straight. It does not matter. It doesn’t matter how we behave. It doesn’t matter how we’re wired.”

So said Christian music megastar Amy Grant in a recent interview. (See <https://www.christianheadlines.com/contributors/milton-quintanilla/its-so-important-to-set-a-welcome-table-gay-straight-it-does-not-matter-amy-grant-asserts.html>).

What matters, said Grant, is setting a welcome table and loving people as we have been, and are, loved.

Grant’s comments are undeniably good news to LGBTQ+ people of faith and especially to LGBTQ+ Christians, whether they are already Amy Grant fans or will be eventually. (Okay, my biases are showing a bit.) Grant is taking a stand for love and for the kind of welcome that Jesus taught us to offer. She’s showing the willingness to risk getting blowback from her more conservative fans. She’s sending out a message that, because it’s coming from her, might just move the needle for some people who really don’t want to be homophobic but who need a role model to help them with that. And, of course, she’s warming the hearts of plenty of LGBTQ+ people of faith, music lovers, and those of us who are both. It’s easy to feel welcomed by her words. Grant’s comments are undoubtedly good news for the Whosoever community and many like us.

That said, because I cannot leave well enough alone, I would like to queer the situation a bit, so to speak. Specifically, I want to suggest that there’s more to the story and that in fact that we LGBTQ+ “stumblers who believe love rules” (a phrase from the Bruce Cockburn song “Mystery”) should think a bit about how delighted we are by Grant’s comments. Her comments do indeed represent good news worthy of celebration. But they also represent a temptation that we can and should seek to resist.

People often interpret the temptations of Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11) as a competition over who Jesus would serve and how, but it’s also possible to see these temptations as a distraction from the work of Beloved Community before Jesus, a diversion from a life lived in holy trust, even an interruption of his mandate to bring good news to the oppressed and suffering. In the same way, while there’s nothing wrong with wanting Christian celebrities to support and celebrate us, we cannot let such moments, however beautiful, distract us from the truth that is not merely the good news of Amy Grant but the truly great news of Jesus.

We are loved.

We, who the world has hated, slandered, discriminated against and murdered, are loved.

We, who have been taught to hate ourselves, are loved.

We, who may have been taught that God hates us, are loved.

At the heart of everything, in good times and hard times, in life and death, we are loved.

And we, by virtue of being loved, are called to love God (however we understand God) and to love ourselves and to love our neighbors as ourselves and even to love our enemies. We are invited to do so on the assumption that we are capable of loving: ourselves, each other, our society, our oppressors, the sacred spirit within and around and among us.

We are loved, lovable, and loving regardless of which Christian celebrity does or does not support us. We are loved, lovable, and loving regardless of how the laws treat us or how the haters treat us. I'm not particularly a fan of the Apostle Paul, but he got one thing right: nothing can separate us from the holy love at the heart of the universe if we show up for it and are open to it.

Now, of course, things are more complicated than that. Most of us experience God's love primarily through the love and support of other people. As Teresa of Avila said, roughly, the holy has no hands but ours. Whenever any heterosexual person speaks lovingly about LGBTQ+ people, something sacred is transpiring. I am truly grateful for Grant's comments, which are genuine good news.

But they are not Jesus's great news about the love at the core of creation. And we must not be tempted to let this moment of good news distract us. Grant's support is not in and of itself evidence of our cherished place in creation any more than the rejection so many of us have faced by Christian-identified homophobes is evidence that there is something wrong with us. If we look to popular opinion or celebrity support or how the votes go or what the Supreme Court says for evidence of our inherent worth and beauty, we are looking in the wrong place. We are doing what Paul said we should not do: conforming ourselves to this age (Romans 12:2). And we are doing what Jesus said we should not do, according to Matthew (6:24): trying to serve multiple masters. (Yes, Jesus was talking about money, but popularity fits here too.)

If every Christian celebrity came out (so to speak) tomorrow and said they were in full support of LGBTQ+ lives, rights, and well-being, that would be wonderful but it would not change how much God loves us. It would not change anything that is beautiful and compelling about Jesus's vision of the Beloved Community, which we are called to co-create. It might make our lives easier but it would not change the story to which we have staked our stories.

If every Christian celebrity came out (so to speak) tomorrow and said they were fully opposed to LGBTQ+ lives, rights, and well-being, that would be devastating but it would not change how much God loves us. It would not change anything that is beautiful and compelling about Jesus's vision of the Beloved Community, which we are called to co-create. It would definitely make our lives harder but it would not change the story to which we have staked our stories.

That is the great news. That, and that alone.

Now, having said that, I imagine that if Amy Grant somehow read this essay, she might protest that in fact she was trying to communicate the same thing I'm trying to communicate here and wonder why I'm responding with caution along with my celebration. And that response would be completely fair. The temptation here has nothing to do with Grant herself, with her celebrity status or her music or her kind, inclusive, lovely words.

The temptation has strictly to do with us.

If we are delighted that Amy Grant clarified her open-hearted welcome because we think she's cool or because her music rocks or because, let's be honest, her words might make our lives and the lives of LGBTQ+ people yet to come a little easier, that's great. No problem.

If we are delighted that Amy Grant clarified her open-hearted welcome because maybe God really loves us if Amy Grant says so, that's a problem. Or a temptation. A temptation to idolatry, to be specific. A temptation to put our trust in the wrong place, to look for the wrong reassurance, to hope for the wrong healing.

Amy Grant as a reminder of God's love and welcome is a joy and a blessing.

Amy Grant as a modern-day living proof-text? Not so much.

Writing this essay, I was reminded of one of my favorite Buddhist sayings: don't mistake the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself. The finger may help you to see the moon by directing your attention to it, but having once seen the moon, the point (so to speak) is to look at the moon rather than the finger.

By all means, let's be grateful for the finger without mistaking it for the moon. And let's be grateful for Amy Grant's hospitality. But let's be clear about why we are grateful for it, what it means, what it can do for us, and what it can't do for us. And then, let's be grateful for Jesus and his stunning vision of a love-infused universe. And then, let's give ourselves fully to love in gratitude, joy, peace, and compassion.