Review of Mark D. Jordan, *Recruiting Young Love: How Christians Talk About Homosexuality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2011, 273 pp., ISBN 978-0-226-41044-9

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Mark D. Jordan is the Reverend Priscilla Wood Neaves Distinguished Professor of Religion and Politics at the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis (MO). At the time he wrote this book Jordan was the Richard Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Divinity and Professor of Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality at Harvard University. Some of Jordan's previous works include *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (University of Chicago Press, 1997); *The Ethics of Sex* (Basil Blackwell, 2002); and *Telling Truths in Church: Scandal, Flesh, and Christian Speech* (Beacon Press, 2003).

Jordan's *Recruiting Young Love* explores the history of the rhetoric and narratives used by churches to talk about 'homosexuality'. The author argues that from 'the first Kinsey Report (1948) to ex-gay programs for newly out teens, Christian rhetoric deployed a startling succession of characters for same-sex desire' (2011: xi). The church borrowed many of these characters and narratives of 'clinical terminology from modern sexology or psychiatry' (2011: xii). The church had to make this shift in language and narratives in order to stay contemporary and relevant. The author eventually finds significant patterns, language sets, and an overarching repertoire related to religion and sex, especially same-sex relations and adolescence. Jordan comes to his conclusions after pouring through pages of old church literature, interviews and archival materials.

Recruiting Young Love is comprised of an introduction, conclusion and ten chapters. Jordan introduces the basic topic of his book and his methodology in the introduction. According to the author, 'I listened through the fragmentary quotations, most of them unconscious or involuntary, for the persistence of clustered categories, images, metaphors that pointed in turn to characters who enacted purposes and plots' (2011: xv). Chapter 1 anchors Jordan's argument in

the scientific language of normalcy created in the late 1800s which the church takes as its own almost a century later. The language of 'homosexual' only comes into use by the church in the 1950s. Jordan argues that the rhetoric used to condemn same-sex acts today was used against a myriad of acts which are now treated as benign such as, 'masturbation, nocturnal emissions, and a host of sexual activities' (2011: 26). One of the reasons the church has to discuss what is 'normal' with regard to sex acts is in part due to the publication of the Kinsey Report which reveals a variety of sexual orientations and sexual practices among the US population.

Jordan spends Chapters 2 and 3 discussing how male same-sex relationships become a social problem that needs to be addressed post-Kinsey report. Not all of the churches' responses to gay men were negative. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 review the spiritual response of some gay men's groups as well as positive reaction from Christian groups such as the Religious Society of Friends and the United Church of Christ. The one major problem shared among the rhetoric of all Christian groups, whether anti-gay or liberationists, according to Jordan, is that 'it abandons teenagers, at least as objects of discourse' (2011: 128). Much of the liberationists conversation was about freeing those in their twenties. The focus of contemporary anti-gay arguments used against gay men are founded in the turn of the 20th century literature of psychiatry and places an emphasis on religion being an important force for making sure adolescence sexual desires are given heterosexual boundaries. 'The children' or pre-teens thus become a focal point of the discussion. Chapters 7 through Nine address the rhetoric and language sets of major figures in the self-proclaimed Christian Right such as Anita Bryant and Jerry Falwell. The chapters also address the role of the ex-gay movement and the Jeremiads against the gay community with regard to HIV/AIDS.

Jordan ends the book with a strong chapter entitled, 'In Search of New Youth'. Here Jordan's concern is about how churches in the past few years have discussed being queer with their youth. It is clear that some churches still strongly condemn 'homosexuality' while so-called liberal churches have been through processes to become more open and affirming to the queer community. However, Jordan is concerned with the lack of creativity found in churches in order to supply all members with 'a Christian poetics of queer desire' (2011: 209). He continues, 'They have yet to deploy religious powers for making alternate characters around sexuality' (2011: 209). He follows up these concerns in the Conclusion of the texts, 'The [communal] boundaries traced by slow church rhetoric are enforced in many ways, but they are created and sustained by ritual acts' (2011: 212). These ritual acts include liturgy, membership, rites and sacraments. He ends the book by stating, 'The only interesting future for church debates over homosexuality will come with the ritual invention, the poetic projection of a Christian character for same-sex love – I mean, for burning desire beyond the binary of sex and gender' (2011: 214).

Recruiting Young Love is a well-researched and well written book. The biggest problem with the text is the title, *Recruiting Young Love: How Christians Talk About Homosexuality*. For someone who had no working knowledge of Jordan's previous work the title is off putting because it makes the book seem like it was written for those who are anti-queer. 'Recruiting Young Love' sounds like the title of a book about how the queer community has used the church as a place to create converts. Until one reads the book there is nothing in the

title that indicates a queer-critical or queer-friendly analysis of the history of the use of 'homosexual' in the rhetoric of the church. Beyond the title this is an excellent analysis of the power of religious language in US culture. It is a text that could be used in religious studies, gender studies, queer studies, sociology, communication arts, and peace and justice studies. The book adds some much needed understanding of the history and development of the anti-queer Christian Right movement by providing a series of narratives moving through the last 100 years. The author provides a serious analysis that does not end with a great sense of hope. However, the lesson of the text is that if narratives, rhetoric and language sets have been created then there is a way to create new, celebratory church narratives that nurture love and spirituality.