

Say NO to *disorder* & YES to *grace*.

At our theology-discussion group of clergy **today**, the presenter (as is our custom) took a short time to review the contents of the reading assigned for today--which was on Bible/homosexuality. Also **today**, the Mass. Supreme Court heard same-sex-marriage argued for as comparable to interracial marriage, both being "natural"--i.e., natural-born, your sexual orientation being as given-&-unalterable as your race. The reply will be that "race" is a biologically-&-therefore-legally indeterminate category, & sexual orientation is indeterminately nature/nurture distributable & also flexible (e.g., some 70% of lesbians being ex-heteros).

Why does the gay lobby persist in this flawed comparison with race? Because (1) wide racial differences, esp. Caucasian/Negroid, are visible (whereas sexual orientation is not), & (2) in the U.S., all laws against interracial marriage have been struck down, an alleged pertinent precedent for expanding marriage laws beyond male/female. In no state has the lobby succeeded, though in Vermont the rights of the married two years ago were extended to same-sex unions. (On PBS:TV, two gay-lobby lawyers debated me, they pushing same-sex "marriage," I [to favor rights while protecting the word "marriage"] spoke for same-sex "union". After the "Emily Rooney" program, privately they conceded to my position; & they persuaded the Vt. Supreme Court, then the Legislature.)

Why is the gay lobby unsatisfied with Vt.'s "union" & is pushing in Mass. for "marriage"? Because the lobby, not satisfied with equal rights, is struggling for the respectability of equal social status on the basis of an alleged biological equality. The UUA & the UCC are the U.S. denominations officially agreeing with the lobby's biology & struggle. Opposing both, I cannot be (to use the UCC slogan) "Open & Affirming" but only "Open [church membership] & Accepting [of gay monogamous couples in faithful relationship]"--which rules out practicing bisexuals.

Not having the comfort of either extreme, I must nuance as follows:

1 "Biological equality" is bad biology. The telos (purpose-result) of sexuality is reproduction, which occurs because of male-&-female eros (sexual desire for the opposite sex). This *ordo naturae* (order of nature) is observable as a three-stage heterosexual process: puberty, maturity, parenthood. To be mature, one need not be a parent; but eros is telically ordered toward the opposite sex & is disordered when focused elsewhere (e.g., on children [pederasty], animals [bestiality], adults of the same sex [homosexuality]). This misfocus can be a developmental defect (i.e., underdevelopment: "born that way" or arrested development). But sexuality's telos/eros deny the status of "biological equality" to this disorder of misfocus, whether in our species or any other. Every one of God's chillun is in some way defective & in that way inferior, & all of us are to be accepted & loved ("warts and all," as the saying goes): therefore, "say no to disorder & yes to grace."

2 Note: the Bible approves only one form of human sexual union ("basar echad" [husband-wife "one flesh," Gn.2.24]), specifically condemning divergencies as disorders. Pro-gay exegetes make various moves to neutralize the Bible's anti-gay passages, & exempt "sexual orientation" from biblical condemnation on the alleged (but specious) ground that the concept did not exist in biblical times (an assertion arguable for only on the "e silentio" basis [i.e., that no biblical passage expresses the concept]; some even use "e silentio" to argue that homosexuality in toto was "a nonissue" for Jesus, since we have no record of his mentioning it).

3 Gay metaphysics denies the whole "order of nature" idea & its implicit concept of normality: gay sex is "abnormal" only as seen by the merely socially constructed (not ontologically grounded) faithful-heterosexual norm. Gay philosophy is phenomenological, nonjudgmental about whatever is (including the spectrum of sexual "lifestyles"). While this position has support from the old antiteleological materialistic science & from postmodernism (esp. antifoundationalism), the new wave in science (chaos theory, string theory, nonlinear spontaneous emergents of order in tension with entropy, the mathematics of elegance/beauty) is accumulating evidence for order-in-design (with the strengthening of the presumption that chaos is illusionary). The greater the support for ontological order, the greater also for the concept of disorder-

er. The old random/directive bio-balance is breaking down as the idea of the random weakens (& with that, the metaphysical basis of Darwin's random "natural selection"--with concomitant strengthening of the argument from design). (Because of my involvement in it, I often think of the 1956 WCC:US conference theme, "Man's Disorder and God's Design.")

4 While homosexual orientation/behavior is an objective disorder of nature, a faithful homosexual (gay-or-lesbian) couple are living in a subjective order of common grace (under the leal[loyal]-love of OT "chesed" & NT "agape"). In the Bible, God's faithfulness models for our faithfulness to him--& to each other in all committed relationships, including hetero- & homo-sex. The church (in my opinion) should (1) say **yes** to the homo couple by being "open & accepting" (in honor of grace) & (2) say **no** to ritualizing the homo relationship as parallel-&-equal with the church's ritualizing of marriage (this not honoring nature & Scripture).

5 **Jesus** was both rigorist (vis-a-vis law) & gracious (vis-a-vis persons)--so much the latter that he was accused of being antinomian, immoral. His action prevented the punishing of the woman caught in adultery (Jn.7.53-8.11), but verbally he condemned her lifestyle/behavior as "sin" (last verse). (Though the pericope was added to the Fourth Gospel, I consider it authentic to Jesus: it fits what else we know about him.) He could have been expected to say no to adultery as a disorder condemned in the Decalog: he could not have been expected to say yes to a gracious (grace-ful) intervention between a crime & its Torah-specified punishment (Lev.20.10; Deut.22.22: death to the adulterous couple).

Jesus' hearers were surprised, even shocked, by both his intensification/radicalization of law (as in the Sermon on the Mount) & his extravagance of grace (as in the Prodigal Father, who--seeing his prodigal son return--forgets his patriarchal dignity & runs to embrace the sinner & (instead of laying down the law on him) throws a party for him).

6 Reversing the cultural emphasis then & now, Jesus bore down harder on sins of the spirit & of the rich & powerful than on the sins of the flesh; but he was no latitudinarian on the latter. E.g., he expanded a sin of the flesh (**adultery**) to include a sin of the spirit (lust: Mt.5.28, an intensification of the Decalog stricture [vs.27])--the sin Jimmy Carter famously found himself unable to avoid. Was Jesus here being hyperbolic, as perhaps also in his expansion of no-divorce into no-marriage-after-divorce (vv.31-32; L.16.18)? Always, Jesus' rigorism is not legalistic but kerygmatic, pointing proleptically to the ideal life in Kingdom to Come, the life whose obligations (not laws!) obtain in Kingdom now Come. And he supports this rhetorical rigorism by appeal to Kingdom then Come, the Edenic husband/wife order (Mt.19.4 quoting Gn.1.27; cp.5.2)--in response to the Pharisees' "Does our law allow a man to divorce his wife for whatever reason he wishes [vs.3 TEV]?" Jesus doubly tightened Torah on divorce: no divorce (since [vv.5-6 TEV] "they are no longer two, but one. Man must not separate, then, what God has joined together" in creation). The Pharisees then use Moses (who allows divorce) against Jesus, who replies [vs.8] that Moses' permission of divorce was "because you are so hard to teach. But it was not like that at the time of creation." The second tightening is no marriage after divorce (vs.9); but of the tightenings he says (to the perplexed disciples) "This teaching does not apply to everyone [vs.11]."

Marriage being an order-of-society based on the male/female order-of-nature, Jesus (unlike the Jews, like the Romans) allowed for no gender difference of treatment: *neither was to initiate divorce proceedings; & the remarriage of either is adultery (M.10.11-12; & [L.16.18] "the man who marries a divorced woman [presumably true also of reversed roles] commits adultery"). (The Mt.5.31-32 strictures differ only in allowing divorce in the case of an adulterous wife [or, presumably, husband]). (Paul follows Jesus' rigorism: Ro.7.2--assumes no divorce [remarriage only after one's spouse's death]; & 1Cor.7.10-13 says husband/wife are to live together, a spouse's unbelief being no grounds for divorce.)

7 Why §6? Because some argue for gay marriage thus: since (against Jesus) we allow for divorce & remarriage, why not (against Lev. & Paul [esp. Ro.1]) allow gay marriage? But Jesus & Paul ask us to be serious about **both orders**, of nature & of society: let's strengthen marriage by tightening divorce & refusing gay "marriage."