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"OPEN AND NONAFFIRMING"

Officially, my denomination, the United Church of Christ, urges our churches to be open-membership to gays/lesbians/bisexuals who've "come out," gone pubic with their sexual orientation. I agree. But the UCC phrase ends with "and affirming": I must demur. Accepting, yes: the only sexual orientations I cannot accept are pederasty & incest. But affirming? How can I affirm any defect? Blind Mary in our congregation I accept & sometimes hug, but I cannot affirm her blindness. Of course I affirm her **in spite of** her blindness. That is the force of "open": congregations should accept gays/lesbians/bisexuals into membership **in spite of** their non-"straight" sexual orientations. But the official phrase adds "and affirming" to cancel the "in spite of" & substitute "**in**": these non-heteros are to be affirmed in their sexual orientations. The basic objection to this, as an instance of hypertrophied compassion, is not biblical but biological. How can we be honest to God if we are dishonest to biology?

1 In mammals, including us, sexual development is **three-stage**:

(1) Predifferentiation. Small children at play show fe/male behavioral differences, but these do not include sexual preference. Adults whose sexual development was arrested at this stage are called **bisexual.**

(2) Homosexuality. Almost all older children self-segregate both positively & negatively by gender: girls prefer girls (& have some negative feelings about boys), boys prefer boys (and have some negative feelings about girls). Fixation at this stage is called **homosexual.**

(3) Heterosexuality. In all but 1%-2% of adolescent (Latin, "becoming-adult") populations, the androgens direct boys' sexual interest to girls & the estrogens direct girls' sexual interest to boys. This full-development is what "sex" means: the term is incorporated into "bisexual" & "homosexual" only by analogy, since these two categories are only behavioral (i.e., like heterosexuality in being genital), not biological (since "sex" is limited, biologically, to the reproductive process, as the very words "gender" & "genital" etymologically state). (The transbiological meanings of "sex" are not denotative but only connotative.)

2 Organizations, such as churches & synagogues, claiming to believe in God as "Creator of...earth" cannot honor him by obscuring earthly, biological facts. "The issue that divides us most fiercely" in the mainline denominations at the present time (the phrase occurring in a recent UCC publication) can be put many ways, depending on the direction the putter intends to direct attention to. But the political impulse toward **equality** is what has raised the issue: are(n't) we all equals, whatever our sexual orientations? Liberal church leaders add, to this American/French political motif, the theological sanction: are we not all equal vis-a-vis God the Creator/Redeemer? But all philosophy-become-policy grounds itself in ontology: are(n't) non-heteros **only "other"** in sexual orientation, among the varieties of biologically equal sexual orientations? Biology answers no: human beings vary (though only marginally) in sexual orientation, but the variations are bio-stage, not (a political term) "equal."

3 A fact of **psychobiology**: third-stage (i.e., heterosexual) human beings are wary of their two former stages, the wariness a psychobiological hedge against regression: heteros harbor almost-always-unconscious fears of sliding back into the homo or even into the bi stage. This wariness gets, by the "only-other" promoters, the psychiatric terms "homophobia" & "biphobia"--the effect being to smear a natural tendency with ascription of illness: if you're wary of homos & bis, there must be something wrong with you, & we know what it is. When pressed thus, heteros may move into "homomisia" & "bimisia," i.e., hatred of gays/lesbians/bisexuals. Because of aggressive gay-campaigning, this "gay-bashing" is on the increase.

4 This is the atmosphere in which Clinton, stupidly, began his presidency by trying to impose "gay rights" on the military. Almost all the people became so wary

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of him that, in my opinion, in spite of what people say in poles, his presidency can never recover: the alienation is permanent. Same for liberal church leaders who've been trying to impose the "gay rights" mentality on their mainline churches: they cannot recover from the congregations' alienation. When I tried to impress this on UCC president Paul Sherry, he responded that it's just part of the price that must be paid for faithfulness to the gospel. But what is the gospel in this matter: what is good news, & to whom, & for whom?

5 STORY #1: I hired, to work in the New Your Theological Seminary Library, an out-of-the-closet homo who agreed, as a condition of his employment, not to be sexually on the make on the job. But he violated the agreement, & even tried to make it with my sons as they came to the library. Once burned, twice cautious: I'm wary of hiring homos who take the no-solicitation-on-the-job pledge. Gay wrongs cannot promote gay rights. I'm for "gay rights" in general, but my own experience forbids my being naive & doctrinaire about it--despite gay-rights legislation. ...Well, aren't heteros on the make on the job? Yes, within self- & employer-set limits. But heteros do not trigger the psychobiological wariness of the 99%-98% of the population: that fact has enormous weight in the calculus of the people's mental/spiritual/social health. Unfair? Yes. It's base is the irreducible biological unfairness of underdevelopment (in my case, the arrested development of my eyes, which never matured into binocularity). "We must be kind, for God is not," said Camus; substitute "nature" for "God," & I concur. Whatever theological explanation we advance, the truth is that humans beings are created vastly UNequal (though Jefferson was right to say, in political [international & national] context, "All men are created equal")....My denomination also calls itself a J&P ("justice & peace") church, & now nationally is into M&M ("multiracial & multicultural"). As a trendy church, the UCC quickly picks up & uncritically promotes emerging political & social causes. Historically, we have sufficient biblical-theological grounding to be critical as we face power (politics) & society (culture). But our sense of identity is rather more in the movements our leaders become enthusiastic about.

6 STORY #2: An "open & affirming" UCC congregation welcomed into its membership, & on its churchschool staff, a known "other," a non-hetero whose sexual preference was for children but who agreed to be "inactive," nonpracticing. But he wasn't, & the church was long torn up & even in legal process. Some sought my advice, so the tragedy was for me more than a news item. The church should have been "open," accepting a known pederast into membership; but not "affirming."

7 STORY #3: A few days ago, a frequent visitor to Provincetown's "other" community told me that I was, though unconsciously, sexually attracted to him. He wrote me thus: "The age of sexual religious repression is now ending....holy sexual freedom....free every repressed religionist and repressed viewpoint." He says he's a bi & has "had sex" with "hundreds" both of males & of females. I hope he's not against all sexual repression: I hope he represses lust for members of his family & for children, though he speaks of freedom from "every repressed viewpoint." Society, & church-in-society, require repression of incest & pederasty: you can be a UCC member if you at least implicitly agree to practice neither; & in some liberal churches a homo pledged to be nonpracticing can be ordained (though Story #1 would question the wisdom of that).

8 The bi in Story #3 is profoundly sad: most of his friends have died of AIDS. Yet he rages against "repression" as though it were an evil that true holiness would deliver us from! Yes, an extreme case. But an extreme sexual **predator** stabs us awake to our present permissive culture's sexual latitudinarianism. "Predation pressure" is a scientific term for the situation of a species in danger of extinction by predators: virginity & chastity (as faithful monogamy) are threatened by the "open and affirming" attitude & by situationalistic individualism (no absolute "no" in sex, which should be "by love & not by law"). The man in Story #3 scoffs at my being, except in marriage, a virgin with no homo or hetero genital experience. To me it's repression unto joyful freedom, one expression of the Bible's call for liberative, not oppressive, obedience. To this sexual ideal the church should hold firm.