

“Welcoming but not Affirming” – Is this a Suitable Evangelical Response to Homosexual Practice?

(An exploration of Christian Same-Sex Blessings and their impact on Evangelical Gospel Witness)

Introduction

“Welcoming but not Affirming” by Stanley Grenz details a classical Evangelical position on homosexuality. As such it presents a middle road of the Evangelical spectrum, but it does not itself reflect the diversity of opinion that exists in the Evangelical church on same sex activity. Therefore, within this essay I shall explore the various strands of Evangelical thinking on homosexuality and their implications not just for issues of pastoring but also of witness to an unbelieving society.

I will focus upon the missiological use of same-sex blessings, for such a liturgical act is the obvious culmination of the acceptance of some form of homosexual behaviour by Evangelicals. In doing so, I am making the assumption that all Evangelical perspectives on this issue reject promiscuity, so it is to the practical frameworks of monogamy that we must turn. It is in the recognition and even endorsement of such monogamous relationships that the Church will witness to and engage with those who identify as homosexual.

It should be noted that since this essay is centred on the pastoral and missiological issues concerned I shall not engage with any of the exegetical and hermeneutic arguments presented for either side. Grenz himself is careful to focus his work not on

the exegetical question (though like other writers on the subject he addresses it¹) but on the implications of the traditional line upon the lives of those who would identify themselves as “homosexual”. As he rightly comments, the issue highlights “the divine call to live out our sexuality in ways that bring honor [sic] to God”² which is pertinent to both homosexual or heterosexual, if indeed it is applicable to use such exclusivist labels³.

In “Virtually Normal”, the gay catholic writer Andrew Sullivan describes four responses to homosexuality, which he categorises as Prohibitionist, Conservative, Liberationist and Liberal. The central two categories, Conservative and Liberal provide useful dimensions within which to fit differing Evangelical approaches to homosexuality, allowing us to dissect the myriad of opinion on this issue (though some may disagree as to which of these separate approaches is more Evangelical).

As Sullivan himself points out, “the terms are imperfect, the classifications artificial ... these terms are not mutually exclusive”⁴. They do however allow us to understand the varying approaches to the issue amongst those who claim a strict adherence to the Biblical witness because, as will become evident, there is a distinct difference in not only what is believed but also how it is expressed and the pastoral consequences. As we examine these distinct approaches to Christian Sexual practice, we will explore how the sexual ethic developed can speak to the wider world in witnessing and incarnating the reality of the Risen Lord. Do same-sex blessings allow the Christian

¹ Grenz, Stanley J; Welcoming but Not Affirming; pp 35-62

² Grenz, Stanley J; Welcoming but Not Affirming; p157

³ As Morton and Barbara Kelsey rightly state at the start of their essay *Homosexualities*, “Five **overlapping but different** sexual adaptations are found among human beings – heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, celibate and asexual”.

⁴ Sullivan, Andrew; Virtually Normal; p20

Community in some way to reveal Jesus to a society that may not otherwise encounter him?

I - The Conservatives – “As it was in the Beginning, is now and shall be forever”

One cannot deny the dissonance of homosexuality without denying the Gospel
Christ, Creation and Human Sexuality, John Colwell

“Perhaps the most depressing and fruitless feature of the current debate about homosexuality is to treat all versions of this argument as the equivalent of bigotry”
Virtually Normal, Andrew Sullivan, p21

The Conservative, or mainstream Evangelical position is that which is understood by many to be “the Church’s traditional teaching”, namely that same-sex acts are contrary to the will of God for human beings. This position commands the support of the overwhelming majority of Evangelicals and is taught in a large number of churches, both in this country and beyond. The most recent and most precise portrayal of its exegetical basis has been provided by Robert A Gagnon in his seminal work *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. Gagnon provides a clear summary of the Conservative position when he writes:

There is clear, strong and credible evidence that the Bible unequivocally defines same-sex intercourse as sin. Second, there exists no valid hermeneutical arguments, derived from either general principles of biblical interpretation or contemporary scientific knowledge and experience, for overriding the Bible’s authority on this matter⁵

If Gagnon is strong on exegesis in his work, he is however short on pastoral insight in this area. This is undoubtedly the book’s weak point. It is for the likes of Grenz and Schmidt⁶ to explore the pastoral ramification of the Conservative’s exegesis.

⁵ Gagnon, Robert A J; *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*; p37

⁶ Schmidt, Thomas E; *Straight and Narrow*

It is when Grenz turns to examining homosexuality in the light of the general Christian Sex Ethic⁷ that he begins to correlate exegesis to the witness not just to those of a homosexual orientation but also the wider world. For Grenz, an understanding of what Scripture says about sexuality in general is vital for then discerning the pastoral response to same-sex desires and acts. What is crucial is a teleological understanding of the sexual dimension of human beings, an understanding to underpin how we respond to all issues of sexual behaviour and desire.

For the Conservative, this basis is in the creation of, and the relationship between, Adam and Eve. It is in this examination of the teleology of interpersonal sexual relations that Grenz sees the first clue to God's sexual design of humans. Human beings relate male to female not just on a sexual basis but on an emotional and intellectual one too. This male-female bond is more than just the coming together of two physical bodies. Grenz writes "our creation as male and female contributes to personal identity development as well. We discover – or construct – who we are in our embodied maleness and femaleness **in part through our interaction with the other sex** ... We discover God's intent for us to be the divine image bearers – and hence our full humanness – through our interaction with one another as male and female"⁸.

Though this interaction can occur outside of marriage, marriage presents a celebration of that interactivity, providing not just a stable monogamous framework for this interaction to take place on an emotional, intellectual and sexual level, but also "a

⁷ Grenz, Stanley J; Welcoming but not Affirming; p101ff

⁸ Grenz, Stanley J; Welcoming but not Affirming; p104

metaphor of spiritual truth”⁹. Marriage not only represents God’s faithfulness to Israel but also Christ’s seal to the Church¹⁰. This is a point that underpins Conservative opposition to same-sex blessings and one which to we will return.

How does this understanding relate to Christian witness? The Conservative approach correctly and gracefully articulated can be seen to provoke a response amongst those who simply argue from a “if its love than that’s OK” perspective. The teleological approach to sexual relationships forces an engagement for meaning in the sexual act that goes beyond the two involved and towards the divine author of the individuals involved. It stretches a partnership to look beyond itself to find meaning in their encounter, sexual or otherwise. Whilst a non-Christian gay couple may reject the axiomatic basis¹¹ of such a teleological argument, in coherently rejecting it they are forced to explain why or why not their relationship is not subject to external constraints. In doing so they engage, even unwittingly, with the inter-relatedness of human beings and the divine, an implied connection that is at the heart of the witness of the Gospel.

However, this teleological argument not only speaks to homosexual activity but also to heterosexual for it challenges natural biological and ontological assumptions about the priority of marriage, some of which are liturgically ingrained. For example, the Church of England Marriage Service exhorts the procreation of children as a “good” inside the relationship. Yet a new life procreated can be “good” even if it is created

⁹ Grenz, Stanley J; Welcoming but not Affirming; p106

¹⁰ Grenz, Stanley J; Welcoming but not Affirming; p106

¹¹ That of the divine inspiration and authority of Scripture, the defining mark of Evangelicalism

outside of marriage¹², and such children are presented and accepted at churches for blessings, christenings and baptisms every Sunday.

The symbolic teleology that Grenz presents strikes at the heart of homosexual conduct because it implies that it is intrinsically sinful and by its nature **can never** be holy. As Schmidt writes,

*On what basis is homosexual practice good? ... in the last analysis an individual discovers that it feels good. This will not do. It is unaccountable to the **implications of creation** for the body and the partner ... and it is unaccountable to the human community.¹³*

This for example is where many Evangelicals find a stumbling block when encountering the theology of those like Rowan Williams. It is not Williams' affirmation of the surrender of self within the sexual act and the discovery of the other that Evangelicals object to:

It should be clear that the discovery of joy is means something rather more than the bare facts of sexual intimacy ... such things are learned in the fabric of a whole relation of converse and cooperation ... Properly understood, sexual faithfulness is not an avoidance of risk, but the creation of a context in which grace can abound because there is a commitment not to run away from the perception of the other.¹⁴

Evangelicals do not disagree with this understanding of exploration of the other that is undertaken within sex. Jewett writes plainly that “to be human is to discover the other as a personal self, a ‘thou’, even in the sexual act”¹⁵. It is the fact that Williams does not engage with the Evangelical teleological understanding of sexual relationships

¹² “It is given, that they might have children and be blessed in caring for them” – Alternative Service Book, p288

¹³ Schmidt, Thomas E; Straight and Narrow; p48

¹⁴ Williams, Rowan; The Body's Grace; p6-7

¹⁵ Jewett, Paul J; Who we are : Our dignity as Human; p195

that undermines his thesis, for when Williams writes “if we are looking for a sexual ethic that can be seriously informed by the Bible, there is a good deal to steer us away from assuming that reproductive sex is a norm”¹⁶ he presents a straw man, for Grenz’s rejection of homosexual activity lies at a much deeper, teleological level. For the Evangelical it is not the graceful giving of the body that is the deciding factor, but rather the framework for that giving.

The Conservative view therefore, whilst insisting on the traditional exegetical understanding of the key verses, delves beneath them to a deeper understanding of the nature and purpose of human sexual interaction. As such, it cannot in any sense be called affirming (if affirming is to condone homosexual behaviour), but how then is it welcoming? If the teleological argument denies those of a homosexual orientation a chance to give of themselves in a sexual intimate way to others, can this really be an open door to those who self-identify as gay and are, as yet, not part of the Christian community?

¹⁶ Williams, Rowan; *The Body’s Grace*; p11

II - The Liberals – Pushing the Boundaries of Grace

Modern gay identity ... is not about proud rebellion against God but arises from the sensitivity of certain vulnerable individuals to certain truths of creation suppressed in the wider church.

Strangers and Friends, Michael Vasey

Enforced celibacy for homosexuals is widely conducive to personal disintegration and loneliness, punctuated by more or less frequent lapses into promiscuous and furtive sex with all the spiritual damage and degradation it entails

Christian Same-Sex Partnerships, Dr Jeffrey John

Things that you're liable to read in that bible - It ain't necessarily so

It ain't Necessarily So, Bronski Beat

Not all Evangelicals see the Christian message as unwelcoming as well as unaffirming towards homosexuals. Some, whilst staying faithful to the Evangelical principles of Scriptural revelation, find alternative hermeneutics to the traditional understanding of the key texts and in doing so they support to a lesser or greater extent not just the welcoming of gay people into the life of the Church but also a condoning of certain forms of sexual expression.

The Liberal caucus on this issue is broad and hard to define, for at its edge it is hard to see where some are conservative or liberal. Indeed some leading Evangelicals like Tony Campolo¹⁷ are accused of being both at the same time and despised as such by each side. Smedes represents this group when he states: "I think that if celibacy is not possible, it is better for gays and lesbians to live together in committed monogamous relationships of love than not. Same-sex partnerships that are committed offer the best moral option available".¹⁸ Others like Vasey, Siler or Ralph Blair are firmly in the

¹⁷ See for example a transcript of Tony and Peggy Campolo speaking at <http://www.bridges-across.org/ba/campolo.htm>. Tony Campolo supports the recognition of some sort of permanent monogamous relationship for those unable to commit to a heterosexual relationship yet reject promiscuity. As such I will label him a Liberal, though he would probably agree with the teleological argument presented by Grenz described above.

¹⁸ Smedes, Lewis B; "Exploring the Morality of Homosexuality" within Homosexuality and Christian Faith, Ed Walter Wink; p82

Liberal camp¹⁹ and accept a revisionist understanding of Scripture and its pastoral consequences.

For the Liberals there is however a common defining criterion of a rejection of some or all of the exegetical assumptions of the previous 2000 years²⁰. Modern homosexual practice is seen within the light of a greater understanding of sexual orientation, behaviour and its causality. For some there is an assumption or acceptance that homosexuality has some form of biological, genetic or biochemical cause, for others there is a more subtle understanding that the psychological theories of the last 100 years, from Freud to Moberly²¹ and Payne²², may have some bearing on the emergence of homosexuality with the individual. As Sullivan rightly points out, these nurture understandings of sexual development “cannot be dismissed as an improvised rationalisation of bigotry, because its nuances are too refined and its observations too acute”²³. Whilst Sullivan would disagree with the therapists’ ultimate conclusions, he recognises that the “homosexual trajectory”²⁴ is in some sense narcissist since it is always focussed upon the same sex and not the other, therefore being attracted to similar aspects to those already inherent in the one feeling the attraction²⁵. But says Sullivan, where is the problem in this? And from an Evangelical perspective, just because homosexual relationships cannot ever demonstrate the full expression of the teleology argued by Grenz above, does that mean they are in any sense less valid? If they are not pathological but merely not as dramatic a portrayal of the nature of Christ

¹⁹ By Liberal I do not mean liberal on the Evangelical understanding of the nature of Scripture but rather to indicate their stance on same-sex behaviour. As such, my use of “Liberal” differs from that of Sullivan, but it serves to adequately distinguish the different Evangelical camps. Certainly, no disdain is intended in the labelling.

²⁰ For example Vasey, Michael; *Strangers and Friends*, pp113-140

²¹ Moberley, Elizabeth; *Homosexuality : A New Christian Ethic*

²² Payne, Leanne; *The Broken Image*

²³ Sullivan, Andrew; *Love Undetectable*; p120

²⁴ Sullivan, Andrew; *Love Undetectable*; p136

²⁵ Sullivan, Andrew; *Love Undetectable*; p146

and the Church as heterosexual marriages are, can they still in some sense be good and ordained by God?

Although Sullivan is in no sense an Evangelical he highlights the approach to gay relationships taken by some Evangelicals who fall within the Liberal camp. Perhaps Vasey presents a Christian epilogue to Sullivan when he asks:

*What counts as true healing? Is it the maturing of human personality that occurs in the intimate relationship between two gay men who commit their relationship to God? ... Healing this side of death can only be partial and occurs within a world still deeply alienated and scarred; **it should cause no surprise if different people perceive healing in different ways.***²⁶

The issue for the Liberals is not that there is disorder in the world, for that is evident from Genesis 2 and 3 and from examining the world around us. The question is whether homosexual activity is, in all aspects, part of that disorder?

The characterisation of being both welcoming and affirming then becomes dependent on what is affirmed. All Liberals would push for some form of recognition of same-sex relationships, and to framework an ethic for the carrying out of such relationships. For Vasey this is an “Uncharted Journey”²⁷ for it treads on grounds that have not been examined before. Where do we go to develop and build upon an Evangelical moral for same-sex relationships? What form of sexual expression should a relationship take at its differing points, where do same-sex blessings fit in and can we indeed speak of a thing such as “gay marriage”? Vasey can begin this by proclaiming “that gay people

²⁶ Vasey, Michael; Strangers and Friends, p158

²⁷ Vasey, Michael; Strangers and Friends, p212-237

need to begin any thinking about their way of life by gaining a sense of their inherent value as human beings and by entering into relationships based on unconditional acceptance”²⁸. But beyond this the path is vaguer, for there are very few models of same-sex coupling to base a pastoral understanding and response upon. Until 35 years ago in this country, the very activities being discussed here were to a lesser and greater extent illegal (and still are in certain parts of the Western World) and the generation and a half of gay liberation since then has only just begun to explore the nature of monogamous homosexual relationships.

Mahan Siler shows the Liberal response to this, that ceremonies for blessing (and celebrating) same-sex relationships and covenanted relationships are the framework for providing pastoral guidance to gay people exploring the meaning of being in relationship.

The blessing of same sex covenants, it seemed to me, was a place for our congregation to stand. We live by our covenants – with God and in Christ and with each other. The nature of faithful covenants, the healing of broken covenants, and the healing of those broken by broken covenants I understand to be our reason for being. Of all institutions, I concluded, churches should encourage the blessing and nurture of such covenants.

This I came to believe. I have come to appreciate this additional ritual, with all the ministries only rituals can release. In the practice of this ritual, I have discovered gay and lesbian Christians who were yearning to come to themselves, to church, and to God.²⁹

²⁸ Vasey, Michael; Strangers and Friends, p220

²⁹ M Mahan Siler Jr; “Same Gender Covenants” within Homosexuality and Christian Faith, Ed Walter Wink; p131

Whether the Liberal views same-sex relationships as an intrinsic good or as a best option, there is a common agreement that some form of liturgical and pastoral framework for such relationships provides a measure of guidance and support for the partners involved. As such it becomes a witnessing tool into the wider world, for it presents for the Liberal, however impaired, a sign of the relationship between Christ and his Church.

In opposition to this Grenz outlines in “Welcoming but not Affirming” a symbolic reasoning why homosexual activity is not a witnessing tool at all. Grenz is correct in identifying “the central significance of marriage ... is theological symbolism”, that “the exclusive bond of husband and wife forms a fitting metaphor of the exclusivity of the divine-human relationship”,³⁰ and strikes directly at the heart of the Liberal argument. This is a strong ontological and teleological case and it is the one that Liberals have to deal with, for the challenge is to provide an understanding of homosexual ontology and teleology from within Scripture to counter it. This is the same hurdle that Williams does not engage with in “The Body’s Grace”.

However, there is a second Liberal argument with greater strength, for the likes of Smedes and Campolo recognise that this teleological hurdle still exists, but they are simply content to accept that the level has not been met and that there is in some sense a failing in meeting the standards of holiness, in the same way that the baptism of a baby born outside of wedlock or a marriage of divorcees falls short of the Evangelical ideal. In both cases, the minister is seeking to work with what he/she has, not insisting

³⁰ Grenz, Stanley J; Welcoming but not Affirming; p 114

on perfection but rather dealing and moving forward optimally from the point of constraint encountered. We come back to Smedes' view that "Same-sex partnerships that are committed offer the best moral option available"³¹. But this perspective whilst being uncomfortable to Conservatives has apparent pastoral and biblical power, for it does not deny the teleological defence of heterosexual marriage presented by Grenz. It is missiologically minded, for it seeks to attempt some form of limited Incarnation of the kingdom where there has previously been none, in the same way that polygamous converts in Africa maintain their multiple as that is the preferred option to divorcing them, even though Scripture is clear in its condemnation of the practice of taking many spouses. This is surely what Vasey is talking about when he writes

The various forms of affectionate bonding that occur among gay people, whether paired domestic partnerships or in more diffuse networks of friends, are neither a denial of masculinity nor necessarily a rejection of heterosexual marriage. The recognition of affection and desire that they represent, and their harnessing into real social commitments, are not contrary to the Christian vision of human life but close to themes and instincts that are an integral part of biblical and Christian tradition ... The danger faces gay people: they may fail to hear in their experience of love and their intuitions of beauty the mysterious call of God³²

Since all aspects of human loving in this world are to a greater or lesser extent fallen, is it not better simply to love as best as one can, even if that is not a perfect modelling of the sexual teleology outlined by Grenz? In essence, are we left arguing somewhat convincingly that the church that remarries divorcees should have no

³¹ Smedes, Lewis B; "Exploring the Morality of Homosexuality" within Homosexuality and Christian Faith, Ed Walter Wink; p82

³² Vasey, Michael; Strangers and Friends; p237

problem in blessing gay covenanted relationships? Is this a model for a church that is both welcoming to all and also affirming of the best that they can offer given their circumstances?

III - The Easter Challenge - New Life and the Call to Discipleship

The resurrection of Christ is a new affirmation that goes beyond and transforms the initial gift of life ... The work of the Creator who made Adam, who brought into being an order of things in which humanity has a place, is affirmed once and for all by this conclusion

Resurrection and Moral Order, Oliver O'Donovan

*There is a day
That all creation's waiting for
A day of freedom and liberation for the earth
And on that day
The Lord will come to meet His bride
And when we see Him
In an instant we'll be changed*

There is a Day, Nathan Fellingham

If the task of the church is to discover new ways to witness to the eternal truths of God and the Gospel, then the Liberal approach to same-sex relationships seems at first to be a more amenable method of seeking to impact the gay community and those beyond it.

Are there however implications in the acceptance of same-sex blessings, even if recognised as not being ideal, that result in the Gospel being undermined? Even if one accepts a level of sinfulness within gay relationships, but one is merely trying to produce an optimal resolution to a pastoral problem, does that compromise have wider repercussions on the general Christian witness? Can one actually endorse Grenz's understanding of the teleological basis of heterosexual sexual activity within marriage and still find some room for blessing inferior forms of relationship?

The flaw we find with the Liberal moral optimality argument is that it posits itself within a fallen world. It takes as axiomatic for ethical conduct the nature of world

post-Eden and thus avoids engaging with the eschatological context of Christian practice and witness. In comparison to this limitation and taking into account the missing eschatological dimension, O'Donovan in "Resurrection and Moral Order" presents us with an Evangelical Ethic that is centred in the real power and symbolism of Christ's burst from the tomb. The resurrection, O'Donovan argues, vindicates Creation, not only in its raw status but also in the order and coherence that God designed for it³³. For O'Donovan it is not simply the fact that Christ is renewed that is important, it is the fact that this renewal points towards not just the destruction of the curse of death upon sin, but also a restoration of the relationships between God and humans (and between humans and other humans) that were destroyed by the original sin. The power of the resurrection is that it not only restores the correct ontology of human beings, it also reinstates their original designed teleology. Those who trust in Christ can not only expect resurrection bodies in the new Creation, of which Christ is the first fruits, they can also entertain the relationship with the Father that they were originally designed to be within.

The resurrection also directs concepts of virtue back to God, for it declares utterly that they are non-existent without the promise of transformation that is enacted throughout Creation on Easter morning. Christ's bursting from the tomb witnesses to the world that the Creator is the agent of salvation and sanctification, for it is He and he alone who has performed the act of regeneration. The transformation of an individual sinner into an agent of love and grace is an act of sanctification reliant on the sender of the Counsellor and equipper. Human beings cannot demand any sense of being virtuous until that virtue is given to them through the power of the empty tomb, and

³³ O'Donovan, Oliver; Resurrection and Moral Order; p31

furthermore, **when that virtue is applied it invests in the one on whom it is applied a total and complete turnaround in their moral condition.**

This dynamic volte-face of the world's situation is at the heart of the Christian Witness to the Contemporary World and it presents a stumbling block to the Liberal perspective on same-sex blessings. The resurrection witnesses not to an impaired creation but to a perfected one. It speaks of humanity utterly redeemed, not left at some optimal but sub-prime ontological and moral back-water. It declares what is intrinsically and naturally good about creation, not a 90% version of perfection (which like all forms less than 100% imperfect and therefore unholy).

As such, when viewed in the light of the resurrection, the clear distinctions between liturgical and pastoral frameworks for same-sex blessings and, for example, the remarriage of divorcees or the baptism of children outside of wedlock can clearly be seen. Although the remarriage of divorcees may have arisen out of a sinful past, the marriage itself is a teleological pointer towards the relationship between Christ and the Church. Heterosexual marriage itself is intrinsically good and of virtue and can in true and loving expression be a marker for God's original intent for all humanity. In the same way, the baptism of a baby born out of wedlock is birthed in sin, but human beings in and of themselves declare the glory of God's creation. Human beings in a pre-fallen state are intrinsically good for they declare the glory of their Creator (if not their immediate procreator). The resurrection of Christ points back to that ultimate virtue and the sacramental covering of these two human acts replies back a validation of the victory of Easter Morning.

But, if we take the moral optimality approach, same-sex relationships can never achieve such a purpose. Since same-sex acts are sinful (and Smedes and Campolo, despite in some way condoning same-sex blessings would agree) the pointer in a same-sex blessing is not towards the victory of God but to the defeat of man. Within a heterosexual marriage there can be in the physical, sexual, encounter of the two, ontologically moments of perfection where neither is sinning and both are celebrating the glory of the bodies that God has given them and the full expression of humanity that is declared when they become one flesh. But within a same-sex relationship, that coming together of two as one does not point towards the resurrection but rather to the need for a cross, for at the moment of consummation the relationship is most fallen. Even if (and it may very well do so) the relationship contains love, mutual understanding and respect, operating not just between the two partners but out from them into the wider human community, it still cannot find perfection because at its heart is a kernel of rejection of the teleological order of human sexual relationships. In doing so it becomes not a celebration of the resurrection but rather a denial of it, for intrinsically the relationship cannot ever be a full representation of the renewed and reordered creation. When Rohr writes “[Jesus], like the cosmos itself is about two things: *diversity and communion*. The whole creation cannot be lying”³⁴, he accidentally demonstrates the eschatological downfall of his own argument. Christian witness exists not primarily to point to the current fallen created world (though that world, fallen as it is, does point to its Creator). Rather, if Christian ethics are to be missiological in providing not just a framework for Christian praxis but also in doing so to witness to the contemporary world, then they must be rooted eschatologically in

³⁴ Rohr, Richard; “Where the Gospel Leads us” in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*; p88

the promised new Creation. Rohr misses the point that Christian witness does say that the whole of creation is lying! That is the very basis of the message it brings.

This teleological and eschatological rejection of homosexual activity and its blessing within an ecclesiastical framework are therefore ultimately an endorsement of the Gospel, for the enacting of a same-sex blessing is to symbolically deny the full power of the resurrection and in its place present an “almost-resurrect”. Surely this robs the empty tomb of its vacant body and instead leaves the bones of Jesus in some way still present on the stone slab?

Sub-optimal ethics are zero-optimal mission tools, for they portray a false Christ and a fallacious gospel. Compromised moral praxis within constraints does not meet a society half way on the road to conversion where no journey may have previously been made, but rather leaves the straight and narrow path of discipleship that leads to Christ. In this light a rejection of any form of same-sex blessing is a missiological step forward, for in the explanation of the dismissal of the blessing a light is shone to the power of the resurrection.

Epilogue – Welcoming the broken, Affirming the Resurrection

*You leave in the morning with everything you own in a little black case
Alone on a platform the wind and the rain on a sad and lonely face
Mother will never understand why you had to leave
For the love that you need will never be found at home
And the answer you seek will never be found at home
Pushed around and kicked around always a lonely boy
You were the one that they'd talk about around town as they put you down
And as hard as they would try they'd hurt to make you cry
But you'd never cry to them just to your soul
No you'd never cry to them just to your soul*

Smalltown Boy, Bronski Beat

The Resurrection cries to the world of a new beginning, one not partially trapped in the fallen world of sin but utterly liberated from the sub-optimality it now exhibits. A Christian homosexual ethic has to be a witness to that eschatological vision in a way that same-sex blessings cannot do. It is the resurrected Christ who dwells in the lives of believers who brings about a transformation, not just in their soteriological state but also sanctificationally in their every aspect of their present lives.

It is such a coming together with Christ that leads the former homosexual Mario Bergner to write:

*In every Christian there is **a healthy place within**, that internal place where he is in union with Christ ... This mystical union between the believer and God is the reality that empowers us to be transformed from the inside out ... this reality was key to my healing from homosexuality and it is key to the healing of all persons³⁵*

³⁵ Bergner, Mario; Setting Love in Order; pp98-99

Christian mission should attempt to engage with and facilitate the appropriate expression of the kind of pain that Jimmy Sommerville expresses in the lyric above, but it should do so in the context of the unguarded sepulchre, not the guarded and fallen Eden³⁶. An ethic that encourages homosexuals to surrender sexual desires to Christ and then to seek the transforming power of Christ into their sexual being, whatever extent or form that may take, is an ethic that points to Easter Morning and the totality of Jesus' achievement. Such an eschatological perspective speaks vitality and new life into a fallen community in a way that we have seen a same-sex blessing cannot.

The Christian church remains, as always, welcoming to the broken and rejected and fallen as it has done so for the past 2000 years, for that is its mission, to engage with and bring encouragement and ultimately salvation to the despised and outcast. In doing so it can make cultural concessions and acquiescences, but it must not by that surrender the teleological and ontological truth of the divine nature of the Risen Christ, for to do so would be to have no Gospel at all. In providing a safe environment for all to meet at the foot of the cross, the Church affirms that Jesus is not only the friend of sinners, but it signals an expectant welcome of the New Heaven and Earth that will one day come.

³⁶ Genesis 3:24

There is a Day

Nathan Fellingham

There is a day
That all creation's waiting for
A day of freedom and liberation for the earth
And on that day
The Lord will come to meet His bride
And when we see Him
In an instant we'll be changed

The trumpet sounds
And the dead will then be raised
By His power
Never to perish again
Once only flesh
Now clothed with immortality
Death had now been
Swallowed up in victory

We will meet Him in the air
And then we will be like Him
For we will see Him, as He is
Oh Yeah!
Then all hurt and pain will cease
And we will be with Him forever
And in His Glory we will live
Oh yeah! Oh yeah!

So lift your eyes
To the things as yet unseen
That will remain now
For all eternity
Though trouble's hard
It's only momentary
And it's achieving
Our future Glory

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