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Foundations of Sand and Shadows of Love (Part VI)

With this article, I begin to put my response to the notion of same-sex unions in perspective, and then I want to make some pastoral observations. I knew from the beginning that this would be a long response, and it has proven to be so. But I believe it is necessary, indeed an obligation. I would suggest that you take the time to read these articles again in order.

Some have argued, within the Church and without, either from a biological, or psychological, or existentialist point of view. My argument has been theological. I believe that if we are to consider the notion of same-sex unions within the Christian Church, then we must reason within the content of her own self-understanding, her theological mind.

It is after all by the renewing of the mind that our hearts are guided away from deception into the clear path of charity. The truth is not very popular today. It really never has been! Our culture would prefer a mindless tolerance of everything and everyone so long as we are not bothered and it does not cost us anything. But the freedom our culture advocates, which says, "Follow your heart!" is committed to folly. As Jeremiah wrote, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" Whenever the Church is brought an issue of the world, she must think it within the context of revealed truth and articulated theology.

We have looked at the meaning of Holy Matrimony as given in the basic texts of the Scriptures, and in the wisdom of tradition as presented by Augustine and Cranmer. I am fully aware that this has not been an exhaustive presentation. I have made an attempt to cover only the essentials. A larger presentation of this argument, which would cover a much greater length, would develop the same essentials.

For some, theology plays no part in the life of the Church, and therefore my argument will mean nothing. For others the "issue" of same-sex unions is a matter of sheer indifference, thinking that true spirituality is really only a matter of common sense, plus a little religion, but not too much. Their answer is "live and let live." Still others cannot think about the moral problem of homosexual practice at all because of a loyalty to particular persons who advocate and live this lifestyle. I sympathize especially with this last group.

The fact remains that the proposal to solemnize same-sex unions is made within a theological context. It falls under distinctions that include the Doctrine of Man, Moral Theology, and Sacramental Theology. The Doctrine of Man says what and who man is in relation to God. Moral Theology distinguishes moral conduct, what is good from evil and right from wrong. Sacramental Theology articulates the ways and means of saving grace. If the Church is to devise a rite for the union of homosexuals, it must establish a rationale for it that claims the authority of Scripture and is informed by the wisdom of her theological teaching and reflection, all of which is the result of the labor of study and of prayer over the centuries. To do otherwise is to leave the province of the Church altogether. And to leave the province of the Church is to withdraw not only from a true understanding but also from the very possibility of truth, mercy, forgiveness, and hope. What the Diocese of New Westminster has done to her own communion is profoundly divisive and injurious. Their action is the result of a politicized convention, not of a theological persuasion. Indeed their action is contrary to the pronouncements of the Church of Canada, as well as to the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Most arguments that advocate homosexual practice can be put into one of three categories, each of which falls outside of Christian theological reasoning. First is the biological argument, second the psychological, and third, the existentialist. All of these seek to account for why people live active homosexual lifestyles. None of these, however, offers a theory of causation that is compelling enough to disprove the others.

The biological argument claims that in some way the orientation of homosexuality is due to certain genetics, or brain structures, or hormones. The research in these areas is relatively new, and none of it conclusive, or proven, in any definitive sense. Those who use this argument to justify their behavior claim simply, "This is the way I am." Their orientation, or tendencies, is claimed therefore to be natural, by which they mean what nature has given them, and they feel they should be permitted to live their lives accordingly.

The Christian response to this argument must be careful and compassionate. If it is true, which is not yet certain, that there are biological causes for homosexual tendencies, then the question becomes how do we think of it. The Scripture clearly condemns homosexual activity, and indeed uses it as an example of our fallen nature. (See Romans 1: 26-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:9,10. Be sure to read all the verses to see how this kind of sin is listed along with other kinds.) We claim that there are predisposed tendencies toward alcoholism, and depression, and anxiety disorder, and schizophrenia, and other illnesses for which there are various treatments and medications. If the biological cause is true, does homosexuality constitute an illness?

What remains, even if there is a biological cause, is the element of will and moral act. I may have a tendency toward any of the above illnesses, but whether I act on them, or whether I act to counter them, is my choice. At the very least I must have the will to take whatever medication is needed to regulate my behavior. A bio-logical causation would mean a most difficult struggle and heartache for homosexual individuals. But in the Christian understanding of redemption through the cross of Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, even a

biological predisposition can be overcome. Next week I will briefly consider the psychological and existential arguments, and a final pastoral word.

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

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