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The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion - In Crisis - Part VI

The General Convention has stepped out of the Light. Whether or not God in his grace will go after them remains to be seen. We continue to pray, but we find ourselves in a time for which courage, deliberation, and action are essential to our faith. There is no middle road here. We simply cannot accept and indeed must reject General Convention's confirmation of a man as a Bishop who practices homosexuality and speaks as an advocate for the same. This issue is a matter that cuts across the spectrum of Christian Theology, from the authority of Scripture to Moral Theology to Sacramental Theology to the very mind of the church in her formative Constitution. We cannot ignore this or stick our heads in the warm Chatham County sand. We stand at a crossroad. I will have something to say about this in my sermon for this week and next week, after the Convention is over, I will be able to say something about its results in our Paper.

In the meantime I continue with Paul's teaching on the practice of homosexuality. We have looked at the relevant passage in the Epistle to the Romans. The main argument made by advocates for the practice of homosexuality in relation to Romans is similar to that which is raised against the passages of I Corinthians and I Timothy. But before we consider that argument, we need to look at the language Paul uses.

In I Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul lists various sins which, in their habitual and unrepentant form, exclude those who practice them from the Kingdom of God. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." A sobering list indeed.

The word translated "effeminate" in the King James Version is translated "male prostitutes" in the New International Version, "catamites" in the Jerusalem Bible, and is combined with the following word in the text and rendered in the New English Version as one notion, "homosexual perversion."

Strictly speaking the word *malakos* meant "soft one" and it was used in Greek literature to describe such things as soft clothing or a soft grassy field, or even someone acting cowardly. It came, however, to

mean those who took the role of the female in homosexual intercourse. As the various translations show, the shades of meaning associated with malakos have been interpreted differently. Interpretations range from heterosexual men who act in an effeminate manner (for which Paul would surely not utter such condemnation), to homosexual prostitutes and voluntary homosexual acts. Hence the translation of the New International Version – “male prostitutes,” that of the Jerusalem Bible – “catamites,” and that of the New English Version – “homosexual perversion.”

The best interpretation of malakos lies within the more general meaning, ranging from homosexual prostitute to homosexual perversion. The reason for this broad interpretation is threefold. First, the context of I Corinthians places malakos between adulterers and abusers of themselves with mankind, meaning certainly that it is sexual in idea. Second, in Romans, St. Paul understands homosexual practice to be voluntary and reciprocal, that of men who “leaving the natural use of the woman...burned in their lust one toward another...” Hence, while malakos may refer to prostitution, it may also simply extend to those who take the female role in voluntary homosexual relationships. And third, we know that Philo, the Jewish philosopher and exegete of the first century, who was a contemporary of St. Paul, wrote against the sexual perversion of the malakos as one who wore make-up, and acted in an effeminate manner, and took the voluntary role of the female in a homosexual relationship, but not as a prostitute. Given this threefold reason, the best understanding for the word malakos is that of one who took the passive feminine role in homosexual intercourse. (It should be said here that part of the sinful deception that exists in the practice of homosexuality is just this fact of the use of a perverse technique that poorly mimics the created anatomical structure of male and female.)

The second word, which appears just after malakos, is arsenokoites. It appears also in I Timothy 1:10, and means, literally, a man who lies in bed with a man, that is, a man who has intercourse with a man. It is a neologism, which occurs as far as we know first in the writings of St. Paul, but may have been used earlier.

The very interesting thing about this word is its origin. Arsenokoites is the composition of two words, arsen meaning man, and koites meaning bed, or intercourse. Both of these words appear in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint. It is these passages that explicitly condemn homosexual intercourse between men as an abomination. Scholars believe that the word Paul uses - arsenokoites - is a composition derived from the two words used in the Greek translation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Hence, Paul has in mind the same universal prohibition of homosexual acts that is given in the Holiness Code of Leviticus.

In I Timothy 1:10, (see verses 8-10), arsenokoites follows “whoremongers” and precedes “menstealers,” and is translated “them that defile themselves with mankind” in the King James Bible. The New International Version renders arsenokoites “perverts.” The Jerusalem Bible ties this to the previous word (whoremongers) and speaks of the entire notion as “those who are immoral with women or with boys or with men...” The New English Bible uses the same translation as the NIV, “perverts.”

In the context of this passage, Paul is again reflecting on various habits of sin, but this time from the point of view of the law. Law is used here, not as a means of salvation, but as moral form and definition - that which exposes sinful behavior. The law condemns arsenokoites along with other sins, so that men might repent, come to a better mind, and find their true happiness in God's moral will.

Advocates for the practice of homosexuality argue against all these passages in this way. Paul, they say, is referring to abusive homosexual acts, of men with boys, or of a kind of exploitation or rape. He is not, they say, intending to speak of committed loving homosexual relationships, if indeed he knows about such relationships.

But this will not do. The point is not whether these acts extend from those who are committed to each other in doing them. The same kind of commitment could be found among thieves or liars. The point is whether they are voluntary and approved by God. The context of Romans is clearly one that speaks to voluntary sin. It is evidence of the fall of man's sexuality. I Corinthians is also voluntary, as is evidenced by Paul's language, which echoes Leviticus, and is corroborated in idea by Philo. The continuity of language with that of the Old Testament shows that Paul considers this voluntary behavior blameworthy before God. And I Timothy shows clearly that God cannot have any relation to such behavior except to reform it by law.

To sum this up succinctly, Paul agrees with the teaching of the Old Testament, and with Jesus, on the integrity of human sexuality as it is given by God in his originative and creative will. The vote of the General Convention this week has disobeyed and repudiated this consistent theme of the Word of God written.

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

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