

A Response to Homosexuality and Reformation Theology

Here is Steve Albertin's response to Ed's THTH #51 about homosexuality and Ed's response to Steve's response.

Enjoy,
Robin

Ed, I never thought I would ever say this but you sound antinomian. First, in your discussion of the orders of creation, you seem to want to bless every "given" that someone has in his experience. Just because something is experienced as a "given" does not mean that it is "good." I may experience all sorts of impulses as "givens" but that does not necessarily mean that they are helpful, good or healthy.

You seem to want bless all and every change that takes place in the orders of creation. But should that necessarily be the case? Are all changes necessarily "godly", i.e., a blessing of the creator? Could not some of those changes be of the Evil One or even the judgment of God? It seems that there must be some kind of criteria for judging whether such changes in the orders of creation are a blessing from God . . . or are curses from God; God handing over the world to judgment or are just plain signs that this is a broken world, post-Genesis 3, in which evil is very real?

You cite the principles of preservation and recompense as the operative godly principles of "secular" creation. If God is up to doing something new in the orders of creation and it is taking the shape of homosexuality, then the changes ought to

enhance the principles of preservation and recompense. If they don't, then I suspect that such changes are not blessings of God, part of God's continuing creation of the world. The way I see it, the evidence for homosexuality being a gift of creation from God is ambiguous . . . at best.

Something which is significantly absent from so many of the debates about homosexuality is the whole issue of natural law. It seems that any common sense observation of creation recognizes that there are certain dimensions of creation which are pretty stable, if not immutable. I haven't seen any evolutionary change going on recently in the law/ the order . . . of gravity. I suspect that there are also some fundamental constants in human nature and especially in the area of human physiology that are pretty permanent. One is the nature of the human body. It seems that there are certain fundamental aspects of the human body which define what "healthy" sexual behavior is.

Some years ago when my wife was taking a human anatomy and physiology class in college in preparation for nursing school, we got into a conversation about homosexuality. She noted that the human rectum is simply not designed for sexual behavior. It contains some of the most sensitive tissue in the human body. Abuse it and it will bleed like hell. Of course, if homo or heterosexuals choose to abuse their bodies in this way, they had better be willing to suffer the consequences. and they do, cf. AIDS. In contrast, the female vagina contains some of the toughest tissue in the female body. Of course, why should we be surprised? I suspect that the creator designed such tough tissue for the rigors of sexual expression. It seems that homosexual behavior lacks this kind of physiological appropriateness. Homosexual sexual behavior has to resort to other kinds of bodily expressions, none of which can claim the "naturalness" of penial/vaginal sexual expression.

There has been a strange silence concerning this kind of explicit and bodily behavior in so much of the homosexual debate. Could this be some kind of prudery? Are we still so uncomfortable with our bodies? Or . . . maybe a discussion of the very "bodily" nature of human sexuality is avoided because at root we have a gnostic understanding of sexuality? We find it easy to talk about love and romance and feelings in sexuality but downplay the very bodily nature of it.

Of course, fundamental to the "preservative" function of the orders of sexuality is procreation. That function is, of course, lacking in homosexuality. And, in my humble judgment, the diminution of the procreative function in our modern understanding of sexuality has not been all positive. In some cases it has "dehumanized" sexuality.

I also sense that implicit in the homosexual perspective is a diminution of gender differences. In other words, our bodies which define us as male or female are basically irrelevant. What matters is how those bodies are used sexually. But again, this seems to be a gnostic depreciation of the body.

Our bodies are important as to who we are. And God made those bodies male and female. Implicit in the bodily structure of males and females is a complementarity which finds its fulfillment in heterosexual sex.

Perhaps homosexuality could be seen as a kind of "handicap." (I think Thielecke also talks about it this way in his Ethics of Sex.) I might compare it to the congenital deafness with which our oldest daughter, Katherine, was born. She has always experienced her deafness as a "given" in her life. There are "radicals" (that's my word) in the deaf community today who use the experience of the "givenness" of their deafness to argue that it is not a handicap at all. They are just "differently

abled." It is a blessing subject to the same uses and abuses as "hearing." In some deaf schools, ASL is considered the "native" language of the deaf and English is learned only as a second language. I find it hard to see deafness as a blessing when my daughter won't ever be able to appreciate Bach or the Beatles. I will find it hard to consider her deafness a blessing when she gets struck by a car crossing the street because she can't "hear" its approach.

You argue elsewhere that everything that is done in faith is OK. That sounds antinomian to me. And I am not arguing for a calvinist 3rd use of the law. No, I am saying that the Law still functions in the life of the believer as it does for the unbeliever. (Isn't that what the 3rd use of the law is? The first and second use all over again the life of the believer?) Isn't it the first use of the law which provides the structure and orders within which faith must be lived out? Doesn't the first use of the law still provide those structures within which the principles of God's recompense and preservation are carried out? I don't see how you or anyone else is providing a compelling case for arguing that homosexuality (even if it is a "given") is a blessing from God. How do you know that it couldn't be a curse?

So much of the pro-gay talk in the church seems to be couched in terms of "rights" and self-expression. To me this sounds an awful lot like the old Adam talking. I think the church is right to resist when the argument is cast like this.

I don't see many Lutheran churches these days making homosexuality a big issue. I don't see many of them in the grasp of homophobia. In a sense, I suspect that there is kind of "don't ask, don't tell" policy. When homosexuality does emerge as an issue in parish life, it is handled on a case by case basis subject to the freedom and privacy of pastoral care.

Individual congregations have been given the freedom to work out their own responses. I don't know of any Lutherans who are saying that you can't be gay and Christian at the same time. However, when it comes to the church "blessing" homosexual behavior, I think we are being asked to speak a clear word from God when there is no such clarity. Who are we to presume to be able to understand the mind of God and that God is indeed about doing a new wonderful thing in the ongoing management of his creation in the case of homosexuality, when no one has been able to make a compelling case for that? All of the defenses have been on the basis of personal experience. I don't think that is sufficient reason to suddenly claim to know the mind of God and call it a blessing.

When it comes to ordaining people into the ministry, I am always disturbed by those who think it is some kind of "right." "I have a right to become an ordained pastor in the church if I think God has called me." Ordination is not a "right" but a privilege bestowed by the church when it has discerned a call to ministry. We have all sorts of educational expectations for the ministry today. Given the continuing lack of clarity and downright "mystery" surrounding the "goodness" of homosexuality, I think the church is doing the right thing to be conservative here. Therefore, no non-celibate gay clergy. Such are the imperfect "left-handed" realities of institutional church life. I don't think excluding non-celibate gays from the clergy roster is calling into question their faith or somehow adding a requirement to the gospel.

I'm interested in your response.

PAX,

Steve Albertin

Steve,

Whew! That's a big load of hay! You're not far from the kingdom I'd say, but...

To your paragraphs: Referenced here by the paragraph's first words REPEATED IN CAPS and then the KEY TERM in CAPS AGAIN

Para: ED, I NEVER THOUGHT...

ANTINOMIAN in BoC lingo is one who says no to the law's first two (and only) functions. Remember the "USUS" of the law in BoC is not "our" using the law, but God's using the law.

God uses God's law;

1. to preserve creation,
2. to reward the right-doers and punish the wrong-doers.

And of course these two are linked in that by virtue of God's doing #2, #1 also happens. I don't see how you can say I'm going "anti-" here. I intend it to be the opposite. In my spiel on this topic I'm trying to pursue these very two: How might be/is God doing #1 and #2 in this whole business?

BLESS

I'm not out to bless every "given." Don't think I even used the term, though it pops up a whole bunch of times in this long piece from you. So it must be a big deal for you. You hear me "blessing" "H", and you know that should not be.

Two things. Blessing is a specific Hebrew term which does not mean "That's OK, or even that's Great." Blessing = "You are in the Right Place [with God] and therefore with others too," so a Hebrew Rabbi told me. So when TEV translates Matt. 5 "Happy is the one...", it couldn't be farther from the meaning of the word bless. If I were to bring this key Biblical term into the mix,

I'd proceed something like this: Gays are "blessed"—also in their gayness—when they are "in the Right place with God..."

IMPULSES

Don't think that was my topic either. I was talking about "wiring." Through genetics, and/or social surroundings and/or a zillion early family formative factors, G/Ls wind up with these givens. That's the playing field God gives them to play the game of faith on. In our current cultures—secular and churchly—that's not easy. There is a handicap. But you could just as readily say the culture creates the handicap, as say the H constitutes it. Our culture is but one of many—both many right now and many from history past. There are/have been other people-groups in the world where the culture didn't /doesn't handicap G/Ls.

If you insist on talking "impulse", then impulse is the electric current that flows when the switch gets turned on, but the "wiring system" already sets the pattern of where/how that current will flow.

Para. YOU SEEM TO WANT TO BLESS—changes in the orders of creation.

The bless business I spoke to above. Sounds to me that here you speak of "Orders of creation" in the way that I claim is wrong for Reformation understanding of the term. To wit: Schoepfungsordnung are not set patterns laid down in Genesis, but the ORDNUNG (gramatically a gerund) ordainings that God continually and with variety keeps on plunking down in our world.

JUDGMENT. BLESS. CURSE.

We are not left without any yardstick for measurement for checking out whether creation-changes are Good news or Bad news in left-hand terms. Once more that yardstick is the law of preservation of life and the law of retribution. Here already

I'll say that it sounds to me as though your (later) use of preservation is [only?] macro-cosmically focused, i.e., sexuality for the continued procreation of people on this planet.

To this two things: 1) two respondents last week allowed as how with the planet blowing apart from too many humans on it, NON-procreation of humans sounds much more preservational than the continued production of babies. Secondly. Preservation needs to be fundamentally focused on the micro-cosm of individual people and samllish human communities. Thus you and Ann have been "preserving/care-taking" each other—also sexually—for many years. And your "preserving" work with you kids—as you well know—was not at all finished when you produced them. That was merely take beginning of the (ugh!) beeeeg job of preservation that followed, and has not yet stopped. G/L couples are not exempt from this very same kind of preserving work, as God uses God's law of preservation in their lives.

BLESS AND CURSE

Just as "bless" does not mean "you're OK," so does "curse" mean "go to hell." Curse means "you're in the wrong place in your relationship with God, self, and others.

Para: YOU CITE THE PRINCIPLES

Whether G/L people can land do carry out these 2 usus of the creator's law? Whether they even can? You will have to ask them—Christ-confessing ones, of course? I have posed such questions. I've seen it happening in lots of cases. Just as within the Christian community they may ask you: How are you doing on thse two in your own life of relationships?

Para: SOMETHING WHICH IS SIGNIFICANTLY ABSENT

NATURAL LAW. Dicey topic. I'm Elertian on this one, ala the Christian Ethos book. Elert critiques the "standard" western

notion (also RC) on nat. law. And you give hints that the one you're working with is the one he critiques. But maybe not. Here are some thoughts: Natural law is an unknown thing in the Bible. Just as "Nature" is unknown in the scriptures. When Lutherans do (if constrained) talk about nat. law, they are constrained to frame the discussion into Usus #1 and #2 lingo.

So also if you want to talk about **HUMAN PHYSIOLOGY** and the tissue facts of anal and vaginal linings. Once more, talk with the G/Ls themselves on this one. I'm told that there are quite a few alternates to anal sex, just as heteros have alternates to the vaginal format.

Para: OF COURSE FUNDAMENTAL TO PRESERVATION

I've referred to this above. Right now, seems to me, "Fundamental" to the preservation of the planet is that straights stop having so many babies. And maybe even promote the pattern of G/Ls adopting the millions of unwanted/discarded kids that get thrown away in our time.

Para: I ALSO SENSE...

Term: "GNOSTIC DEPRECIATION".

Not at all obvious to me that homos depreciate bodies anymore than heteros do. Sounds to me that in your (almost) telling G/Ls not to value their homo bodies with all its wiring as it de facto is, YOU are the one using them to be gnostic, to be anti-body, to imagine something else, about themselves.

Para: YOU ARGUE ELSEWHERE...

Term: EVERYTHING DONE IN FAITH IS OK.

I didn't say "OK" (or if I did, I shouldn't have). If "Everything that does not proceed from faith is sin," ala Paul, then the obverse must be true: "Everything done in faith is RIGHTEOUSNESS [non-peccatum]." If that's anti-nomian, then Paul—of all folks—is one such. But that is not anti-nomian, I'd

say, in the sense of the technical term used in the FC. At least it's no more anti-nomian than the Gospel itself. Which is "the end of the law for those in Christ Jesus."

Your reference later in this para. to **STRUCTURES AND ORDERS** sounds to me as though it's sliding away from the notion of "ordaining" that I claim is the "echt" Lutheran take on creation. And, of course, there are new ordainings that come with the new creation that do indeed over turn and replace those of the godly given ordainings in the first creation. Elert points to a whole bunch of these (without short-changing the old ones) in chapters 6 to 10 in *The Christian Ethos*—even using the term "New Ordnungen."

Para: SO MUCH OF THE PRO-GAY TALK...

I'm glad you do not associate me with that, cause that's hardly what I'm promoting. Although sometimes your rhetoric does make me pause for a moment, as though you really do hear me to be a "gay-lib."

Final big para: WHEN IT COMES TO ORDAINING PEOPLE...

Correct. I agree: ordaining into the ministry is not a "right." But the fundamentally ignored fact at the center of the whole ordination "gefuffel" (Aussie term), even on the ordination of straights, is that ordained clergy as we now have them is itself one of those "Creator's ordainings" [=a left-hand phenomenon!] that is itself like all of God's ordainings in creation a sometime thing. It changes as church history changes.

Example: I'm sure it's safe to say that most of Africa's mucho millions of Christians get nourished on word and sacrament without "ordained" clergy. To say nothing of the "historic episcopate." In terms of the (possible) historical mutability of all God's ordainings, even if it could be established that there was an hist. episcopate, that would be like saying Constantine

was the one who called the Council of Nicea. Great. But times change. Given what's happened in the churches of the "hist. episc." especially in Europe—the whole continent is now a mission field—it seems clear to me that hist. episc. is passe. Maybe ordained clergy too. Has God not rendered it passe, by generating all sorts of other "ordainings" for getting word and sacrament to people and for promoting mission therewith.

Pax et Gaudium!

Ed