

Gay is OK. An Argument from the Lutheran Confessions. What!?

Colleagues,

In the run-up to the ELCA's assembly 4 years ago, USA TODAY's issue of July 09, 2007 carried an article with the teasing title: "When it comes to gays, 'What would Luther do?'" It was written by Mary Zeiss Stange, a professor of women's studies and religion at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Prof. Stange's opening statement is this: "Given the way he dealt with issues of his day, the father of the Protestant Reformation very well may have seen the same-sex arguments in a more accepting light."

She bases her case on Luther's theology of creation, which in my opinion is the only right place to start. Human biology, human psycho-soma stuff, is in the realm of God's left hand, God's work as creator, the turf of the first article of the creed. For Luther the theology of creation does not start at Genesis chapter one. It starts with me. Listen to his words. What does the first article of the Apostles Creed mean? First sentence: "I believe that God has made me linked together with all creatures." And then it goes on to laundry-list all the "givens" that make me ME Though not on that list, one of those God-givens is indeed my sexual self and self-consciousness.

Granted, Luther would have been surprised by Rick Gaugert's statement to me years ago that got me thinking in ways I never did before: "Ed, I'm wired different from you. God created me gay." That came once in a Crossings course I was teaching. It

was Rick's own personal conclusion after years and years of trying everything to become un-gay to he could be a pastor in the LCMS. All the way through the Missouri "system" of prep school, senior college, seminary—where Rick was a whizkid at every stage on the way. But at the end of his seminary years he did not qualify for ordination. He was "wired different."

Pious Missouri Synid kid, he too had interiorized—with a vengeance—all those killer-passages in the Bible about himself. But one day, so he told me, Christ set him free to say: "God created me this way. My gayness is God-given. I'm called to stop fighting it. I'm actually fighting against God. Whatever those abomination passages in the Bible are talking about, they are not talking about me. God made me gay."

So it's theology of creation as the place to start.

Stange grants that the question [Would Luther . . . ?] "is nonsensical, of course, because in his time the concept of 'sexual orientation,' was unknown." It was also unknown in the times of the OT and NT. [Equally unknown till modern times, for example, was the incredible baby-machine God created in a woman's body. Fathers got all the credit with the erroneous notion that it was in the male semen where the marvel/mystery lay and mothers were merely the empty field where the seed was planted. All wrong, of course, but for centuries (millennia?) that's what seemed to make sense. At least to guys.]

Who today doubts that our human understanding of God's creation evolves(!) as time rolls on. That does not damage the theology of creation: "I believe that God made me and has given me" all the specs of my personal life. In that evolving comprehension of specs of creation, the marvel, mystery, the "wow!" of the universe is not diminished. Fact is, it increases. Think of those photos from the Hubbell telescope. How might Luther, Paul,

the Psalmist have responded to light-years, galaxies, stars being born? Unthinkable for them, but thinkable for us, yet no less mysterious. The issue, of course is not their response, but ours.

Ditto for the mystery of human anatomy. My cardiologist (an orthodox Jew), tells me almost every time I'm in his office that though he is a superstar expert in the electro-muscular mechanics of this fist-sized pump, he doesn't understand the mystery of the human heart. He points at the detailed pictures on the wall, and occasionally gets doxological. "Why should it be like that? I don't know, but that's how God created it. Aren't you glad?"

Human sexuality is under that same creation-mystery umbrella. And homosexuality seems to contradict what looks like common sense. Why should it be like that?

Here's a parallel that makes sense to me. Look at the "negative-matter," and "negative-energy," "particles and anti-particles" which we now know—well, today's physicists do—infiltrate the universe, "contradicting" what we've always(?) understood to be the way things are. [Wikipedia says: "negative matter violates one or more energy conditions and shows some strange properties such as being repelled rather than attracted by gravity." And again "Can a region of space contain less than nothing? Common sense would say no; the most one could do is remove all matter and radiation and be left with vacuum. But quantum physics has a proven ability to confound intuition, and this case is no exception. A region of space, it turns out, can contain less than nothing. Its energy per unit volume – the energy density – can be less than zero."]

It "confounds our intuition" that some males and some females would not be drawn to each other "by nature.". And therefore

that male-drawn-to-male and female-drawn-to-female is indeed “contrary to nature.” Ditto for the biblical writers. But the larger picture of human “nature” that God the creator has unfolded (for us nowadays earthlings) shows that not only do opposites attract, but in some cases “sames” attract. Common sense, “our intuition,” used to say: the genitals are where the sexual “orientation” is to be found. Now we know that it’s in the human brain—a mystery mini-universe if there ever was one. And that for some people—for reasons as mysterious, as unknown, as negative energy and negative matter, as why the human heart works the way it does, yes, how such a pump ever comes into existence!—that the human brain for some of God’s human creatures gives an opposite message to what the lower anatomy proclaims.

None of this is talking about theological ethics. It’s theology of creation. God the creator’s on-going left-hand at work in the world we live in.

Stange does not elaborate on creation theology as I have above. Her article is newspaper-editorial-short. But she nudged me into going down this path. Here’s how far she herself goes:

“Luther had plenty of bad things to say about the scourge of ‘Sodomites’ in 16th century Germany. Like his role model Paul, Luther was a product of the social prejudices [EHS addendum, the biological understanding] of his time and culture: a time when the concept of homosexuality as an ‘orientation’ or a ‘lifestyle’ were still unheard of. But would the man whose break from Roman Catholicism involved a revolutionary rethinking of the role of sexuality in human relationships take such a negative view of homosexuality today? Most probably, given the way his theological mind worked, he would not.”

Nor—possibly surprise! surprise!—would the Augsburg Confession.

Remember, neither Stange nor I are claiming that Luther or the Augsburg Confession were pro-gay. That would simply “confound their intuition.” But their theological understanding of human sexuality, which surfaces when they unload their critique of coerced celibacy in the church of their day, is the same as Rick Gaugert’s words “God wired me this way.” Granted, ML/Augsburg’s intuition saw only one sort of wiring. They didn’t know that the Master Electrician “wired” with two different kinds of circuits. Let’s say God wired some humans “AC” and some “DC,” namely, “Alternates-Connect” and “Dittos-Connect.”

Their intuition about biology was that God wired in only one way, AC. But they were insistent that coerced celibacy for humans whom God has so wired, and never permitting them to turn on the switch, was contradicting the Creator. Coerced celibacy = clear act of unfaith in the first article of the Christian Creed. Well, then how about those whom God has wired DC? Why not?

Listen to the prose in the Augsburg Confession:

∴.

First off, that teasing line from the very end of the very last article of the confession (28):

“The apostles commanded that one should abstain from blood, etc. Who observes this prohibition now? Imagine author Philip Melanchthon possibly munching on a Blutwurst sandwich as he wrote this!] Those who do not observe it commit no sin, for the apostles did now wish to burden consciences with such bondage, but forbade such eating for a time to avoid offense. In connection with the decree one must consider what the PERPETUAL AIM OF THE GOSPEL is.”

[Question: Do the “apostles’ commands,” those stern words about

DC-wired humans (appearing only a few times in the NT, never from Jesus' mouth, only in St. Paul's epistles) come under this same Augsburg rubric: "Those who do not observe it commit no sin"? If not, why not?

For the following Augsburg Confession reasons, I think they do. Once more, remember that this is all about AC-wiring, the operating "intuition" about human sexuality in the Middle Ages.

Art. 27 on Monastic Vows:

"God's creation . . . drive(s) people into marriage. Consequently those who comply with this command and institution of God do not sin." The constant thesis is: God created humans with AC sexuality. Marriage is the place for the switch to be turned on. Sexual intimacy is God's engineering.

Celibacy is never commended—unless the Creator has bestowed a "special gift" (itself a case of anti-matter?) as the Creator occasionally does. If this is valid for people whom God has created AC, why not for those created DC?

The Roman Catholic response to this Augsburg claim in article 27 went pyrotechnic. So does Melancthon in his replay thereto. So the Apology (=defense) for article 27 has a few of its own bursting shells. But apart from the fireworks, listen to these lines;

First off, they distinguish between sex and sin. Not the same stuff. "Genesis teaches that human beings were created to be fruitful and that one sex should desire the other sex in a proper way. Now we are not speaking about concupiscence, which is sin, but about the desire which was to have been in our primal nature . . . call[ed] natural affection. This love of one sex for the other is truly a divine ordinance. However, since the order of God cannot be suspended without an extraordinary

act of God, it follows that the right to contract marriage cannot be removed by statutes."

"Just as the nature of the earth [example given is Gen1:11 – "plants bearing seeds"] cannot be changed by human laws, so neither can human nature be changed by vows or by human law. . . ."

"This creation [humans as sexual] in the human creature is . . . a matter of natural law. Since natural law cannot be changed, the right to contract marriage cannot be removed by human laws. .[Male-female attraction] is a structure divinely stamped upon [human] nature."

"We are not speaking about concupiscence (which is sin), but about that desire which they call natural affection and which concupiscence has not removed from [human] nature."

"God wants us to use the common law of nature which he has instituted. For God does not want what he has ordained and what he has created to be despised."

For both virginity and for those "married persons [engaging] in conjugal duties . . . all are taught to serve faithfully with their own gift while maintaining that by faith they receive forgiveness of sins on account of Christ and that by faith they are accounted righteous before God."

"Superstitious opinions about celibacy must be constantly resisted in the church."

Turning the "gift" of celibacy into a "law of celibacy . . . is 'the teaching of demons.'"

Because of this view of sex "we know we are laying ourselves open to schism. ...But our consciences are very much at ease since we know that while we most earnestly want to establish harmony,

it is not possible to please our opponents without casting aside the clear truth.”

“The pontifical law concerning perpetual celibacy . . . conflicts with divine and natural law It is superstitious and very dangerous, and finally, the entire thing is a fraud. The real purpose of the law is not religion, but domination, for which religion is just a wicked pretext. Neither can sane people bring anything forward against these very firmly established arguments. The gospel allows marriage for those who need it. Nevertheless, it does not compel those to marry who can be continent, provided they are truly continent. We believe this freedom should also be conceded to priests.”

What about those grim passages in the book of Leviticus? “The Levitical regulations about uncleanness must not be transferred to us. The Gospel frees us from these Levitical regulations.”

Now then, re-read all the citations above and substitute “wired DC” for all the “AC-wirings” that these texts are working with. And what do you get?

If/when you can grant that Rick Gaugert was speaking the truth: “Ed, I’m wired different from you. God made me gay,” doesn’t he have the primal Lutheran confessional document on his side?

I think so.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder