

Part 2: One Lutheran's Agenda in Today's Homosexuality Discussion

Colleagues,

These comments, from good friends, continue the discussion of last week's ThTh 34.

Peace & Joy!

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I. A Lutheran pastor in mid-state Missouri writes: "Ed, you say:

Let us acknowledge that in human sexuality, some folks are 'wired different' [=the term one gay member of Bethel used for himself] from heteros, and that God is the electrician doing the wiring." Okay. Let us begin there. Let us say some folks are "wired different." Genetically, there seemingly are countless ways of getting wired. I have Type II diabetes and I suffer from petit mal epilepsy. How is it that my wiring is from God? Why is it not an expression of a fallen creation in which random bad things happen for no apparent reason—except that a fallen creation is a creation in which random bad things happen? Dominus tecum.

MY RESPONSE:

I have had Type I diabetes for now 50 years. Something like 50,000 insulin injections up till now. If I do not link this given in my life to God the creator of the allegedly healthy parts of me, to whom shall I link it?

Respondent III below raises the same question in terms of his daughter. I intend to do go into that in responding to him. So check there, please. Also check there the fact that I wasn't intending to be talking about "wiring" merely as genetics. God's "wiring" me, so I believe, started with the union of an egg and a sperm cell, but didn't stop there. In fact, hasn't stopped yet. To your alternative: "Why is it not an expression of fallen creation...a fallen creation in which random bad things happen for no apparent reason?" That sounds to me like abdicating the theology of God's "creatio continua," running headlong into the caveat of the Deuteronomist when he (I'm guessing) says: 32:39 "See now that I, even I am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand." Seems to me that the Canaanite religion being thumped here is wrong, says the writer, not only for naming the wrong god as the good god, but for thinking there was a second god behind the "bad things for no apparent reason." The Greeks had a name for this god of "random happenings," as did the Romans. When they encountered "mere chance," they divined a god, a power, behind those events of no apparent reason. Tyche and Fortuna, if I remember aright, were the names they gave respectively to their encounter with chancy power. They were half-right, I'd say.

A needed caveat in all of this, also with the "wiring" metaphor, is that God's work as creator dare not be cast in cause and effect categories. As my mentor Elert taught us:

1. God is not to be seen as the cause of the world, since cause and effect stand in a relationship of mutual necessity to each another. As first cause

God would only be the first in a series of other causes and thus only a part of the causally connected web of the world.

2. Calling God creator (Hebrew verb “bara,” which is not easily translated into English) signals author, originator, source—maybe even Tillich’s “ground of being.” It affirms that God in absolute freedom creates out of nothing.

3. Faith in God the Creator (author, source, ground, etc.) rests on my awareness of my own origin. I am, because God has called me. For by calling me God makes me his creature. The immanent causality of my physical descent is not contested by this fact.

Thanks for the Dominus tecum. My response: Et cum spiritu tuo.

II. An Anglican priest in British Columbia writes: Much appreciated was the today’s arrival of Thursday Theology. If someone leaps to fill the lacuna you decry in the Lutheran discussions & attempts to respond to your theses, please let me in on them. You’d hardly expect an Anglican to be able to discern such answers with any degree of clarity! Particularly with reference to #3 and #6. I hope it is OK that I am passing these theses on to my lesbian friend who is also on the Human Sexuality Commission.

RESPONSE: Of course.

III. A Lutheran pastor in Indiana writes: (N.B. His paragraphs are the ones with Arabic numbers.)

1. Thanks for all the Sabbathology we get over here. I have friends in the conference who read it every

week, since being introduced to Crossings at a retreat I led for them last year this time. A couple of them insist on calling it "Sabbathology." A quick follow-up to your ThTh of yesterday. Your first thesis is one I can't accept at present, with what I know. It's the one that makes the others "necessary."**RESPONSE to par.1**

"With what I know," you say. It's not so much the clinical data that prompted my first thesis, but my (and yours too, I trust) theology of creation. See below. Nevertheless some of the clinical data that I do know, plus my own associations with gay/lesbian Christians over the years, corroborates the metaphor of "wired different." Many of them, seminary students when I got to know them, wanted to be LCMS pastors. Therefore wanted to be "wired straight," couldn't imagine "choosing" to be "wired different," since that would close the LCMS pastoral vocation, the one future they dearly desired. But it wasn't that which grounded my first thesis. It is creation theology.

2. [Our youngest daughter] . . . was wired different [with a very dicey heart condition] when she was born, too. "Multi-Factorial Inheritance" they called it, and since they could correct it, they did. God did that wiring, too. But the sexual wiring of all of us is also done by our family and friends, and by ourselves, as are so many aspects of our cultural/interpersonal world. See Freud. See Social Construction of Reality. And just because one can't change something, does that make it part of creation and not any longer a part of what we have done with creation? As, for example, my lambent nervousness.

So it is claimed.**RESPONSE to par.2:**

“Multi-factorial Inheritances” that you and your spouse passed on to your daughter, as well as the “cultural/interpersonal” stuff that shapes each of us after our birthings, are still all creation stuff, aren’t they? Stuff with THE creator’s hand definitely in the mix. What else is “creatio continua,” which is always predicated to God in Christian theology? If these are not linked back to God, then we run afoul of the condemnation of Augsburg Confession Art I “God” where the Manichaen heresy is scored because it had to have a second deity to explain all the bad stuff. Ditto the condemnation of the Deuteronomist (32:39) cited above. All of your daughter, her original wiring plus the reparative re-wiring must come from the only God there is. If not, the di-theist Canaanites were right. There is Baal and there is Muth, two powers in the cosmos, one for good stuff and the other for the other stuff. The same is true about your “lambent nervousness” (and maybe even a coupla other things I’ve noticed about you!) Either the “one God creator” is at work here, or Erasmus was right and Luther wrong in their epic wrestling match on God’s all-pervasive hand in the mix of human freedom and bondage.

3. This month’s Atlantic Monthly has an article about an evolutionary biologist who claims to be showing that all major chronic diseases are the result of infection, not of genetic problems, because if they were genetic they couldn’t be so common. See the author’s paragraph on homosexuality (which he doesn’t exactly label a disease, but, well, his

logic makes it one). Since homosexuality reduces one's (Darwinian) "fitness" for reproduction by 80% (males) or 50% (females), there shouldn't be more than about one homosexual male in 50,000 if it were due to a genetic fault. Oops, he says, people don't want to hear this.**REPONSE to par.3:**

I was not in ThTh 34, nor am I here in ThTh 35, asserting simply the genetic realities, "wired different genetically." 'Fact is, I didn't even mention that. My pitch was for God's overall engineering, for God's overall wiring (via heredity and environment, via nature and nurture, via genes and Sitz-im-Leben) in the lives of homos and heteros. Thus the A.M. article initially doesn't seem to be germane. But I haven't read it, so I might be mistaken and change my mind later.

4. The question of "legitimizing" homosexual relationships will really have to be resolved without using the Bible, which usually just presumes those people have it right who think it is an abomination for people to use for this what is meant for that. Romans 1 argues from, not to, the cathexis of improper object.**RESPONSE to par.4:**

No matter how many times I read these lines, they come out sounding snippy. Was "cathexis of improper object" some lingo you picked up at U. of Chicago? Apropos of Romans 1: For alternate readings of the NT texts often rendered "homosexual" in English translations, see Fred Danker's now-in-the-press new edition—umpteen years in the making—of Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker-Danker: Lexicon to the Greek N.T. Fred's hardly the one, as you well know, to say "Oops, people don't want to hear this." One

thing, for sure, that the Bible can help us “resolve,” unless it’s read Biblicistically (which I hope you’re not doing in par. 4) is the following, a new appropriation of the Reformation take on the orders of creation. To wit: first of all they are historical, i.e., malleable, so that what was once the case in some time and place is not necessarily the case at this time and place. Same God and creator, different products from his creative hand. Easiest example is the “order of marriage” from polygamy, concubinage, etc. in ancient Biblical days to the (well, sort of) monogamy of our world today. Same thing is true of the “order” of the state, which never ceases metamorphosing.

Why not the same with something as patently creaturely, as much reality of God’s left-hand regime, as gender consciousness? Suppose for a moment that there really weren’t any folks “wired” as homosexuals in the Biblical world. I imagine that this can no longer be proved or disproved. But suppose there weren’t any at all, at least not in the Hellenistic world of NT times. If so, then those who did what Paul abominates were really living counter to God’s “ordaining” (=the “order” God had placed them in), as Paul maintains. But is it impossible to envision that God could be “wiring different” than once he did, wiring via chromosomes and contexts that are not the same pattern they once were in days gone by? God’s wirings in political governance have changed, economic orders ditto, legal systems and family configurations likewise.

The ones “wired different” whom I know best, who like you have imbibed and thrived on Augsburg catholicism, claim that one element of their manifold God-ordained locations is homosexual. How can anyone operating with the same Reformation theology of God the creator refute that? Remember in this talk about orders of creation, I’m taking Luther’s angle that these orders are not boxes where God puts us, but specific locations in the world where God plops each one of us down in his creation to live out our biography imaging him. It’s like being placed at shortstop in baseball. The agenda is: play the game as God’s team member at shortstop. Homosexuality for me—for about 60-plus years—was no place where God could possibly put anybody to play shortstop on his team. But I was mistaken. And Rick and Mary and Tom and Alice and more, Christ’s teammates all of them, have made that plain to me.

Now back to Paul. It could also be that Paul was wrong, if in those several spots he did excoriate people who today understand themselves as homosexual. He was not exactly on target about slavery. And at best he’s a mixed-bag about women. And then Luther was wrong about the Jews. None of which diminishes the power, wisdom, glory, to use the terms of last Sunday’s second lesson, of the theology of the cross that both of them pass on to us.

5. The case for “beatification” will rest with the Beatitudes, which give us not a technique for acquiring happiness (pace the whole damned self-

improvement section at Barnes and Noble) but an offer of blessedness to those who will quit fighting for felicity, look up, and open their mouths. And ears.**RESPONSE TO par.5.**

I too preached on the Beatitudes last Sunday. My take was: Our addiction to Superbowl Theology