

Viewpoint
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"I am a heterosexual and my other habits is good"
An apologetic response to the exceptional ordination of practicing homosexuals.
By Bruce Becker

*"God is wildly, enthusiastically heterosexual!
The whole Bible is filled with God's
endorsement of heterosexuality."*

"I am not a singist. As a singist I am no good. I am saddest when I sing. So are those who hear me."

Artemus Ward, a 19th Century American humorist, wrote that. I, too, might have written that because I am not a singist either. I sing like the night watchman. I use all the keys.

While I am at it, there are some other "ists" I would like to repudiate. I am not an imperialist or a fascist. I am not a racist. I pastor an integrated church in the Philadelphia inner-city. I am not a sexist. I have been married to a strong woman for thirty years. I am not a fundamentalist. I champion the ordination of women and refuse to accept six day creationism.

However, I found out a few years ago that there is an "ist" that fits. I am a heterosexual. I prefer, prescribe, preach and promote heterosexuality. I recommend it to all my friends. Exclusively. Even to the exclusion of other forms of sexual expression: gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual. I believe in the rightness, the oughtness and the goodness of heterosexual marriage (is there any other?). I am rampantly, rabidly, irremediably heterosexual.

Yet, not to the extent that I never called heterosexuality into question. Twelve years ago I was appointed to a task force of the Presbytery of Philadelphia to study the ordination of practicing homosexual persons. We met almost twice monthly for over a year. I set aside my philosophical and theological objections to homosexuality in order to listen to the progressive side of the issue. I grew to appreciate and respect my colleagues on the other side of the argument although we never came to agreement.

The progressive side parried or ignored my biblical objections and presented the living, human side of the case. We were introduced to some homosexual individuals who lived lives of creativity, compassion and honesty. The bulk of the progressive argument was the modern professional and intellectual acceptability of homosexuality in addition to the self-evident worth of the individuals. Over and over the task force was told that if Presbyterians would just get to know some homosexuals their objections to ordination would vanish.

I discovered that this experiential argument made two false assumptions, the first being that most Presbyterians were so straight they were virtually quarantined from contact

with gays and lesbians. That is patently false. In my own case I have gay relatives. I have visited parishioners on AIDS wards and in hospice care and performed their memorial services. I have counseled gays and in one case intervened to save a gay young man from suicide. One of my mentors many years ago came out of the closet. He left his wife and kids, resigned from his ministry and after a few gay affairs, settled down with a partner in a long term relationship.

Presbyterians cross paths with gays. We already understand that these are individuals with creativity, compassion, gentleness and worth. However, their giftedness, their warmth and their laudatory public behavior are irrelevant in deciding the ordination issue. Let me explain.

A few on the task force were perplexed that I was not persuaded by the giftedness, warmth and public behavior of homosexuals. For them that settled the issue at hand, namely the election of worthy individuals, homosexual or not, to the place of Christian leadership.

I responded that sensitivity and giftedness were beside the point. The issue was being as well as performance. Being or personal congruence or integrity, whatever you call it, had to do with submission and obedience to Jesus Christ, to the Scriptures. Then I remarked quite matter-of-factly (remember, this was 1993) that the President of the United States was not qualified to be an elder in my congregation.

"Bill Clinton? Bill Clinton could not be an elder at your church?" one woman exclaimed. My statement seemed preposterous and arrogant.

"That's right. His adultery with Jennifer Flowers was far too recent to confirm his repentance and integrity. He has not demonstrated the moral trustworthiness necessary to be ordained." I said something like that, never expecting that my objections would be embarrassingly confirmed inside the White House three years later.

This leads to the second false assumption made by the progressives on the task force, the false assumption that progressive sexual standards and evangelical sexual standards were compatible, that modest immorality (an oxymoron?) is both practically synonymous with integrity and virtually harmless. For example, a serial adulterer like President Clinton would have passed muster in our task force for hypothetical Presbyterian ordination in 1993 after perhaps just a short period of rehabilitation.

Another example, my former mentor could leave his kids, divorce his wife, have promiscuous affairs, be ordained by a gay denomination and graduate to become the national poster boy, which he is, for mainline gay ordination. His unrepentant past does not bother my progressive colleagues. The perfidies and betrayals he committed in achieving an authentic sexual identity are to be considered inconsequential. Peccadilloes performed by the gifted are to be considered unfortunate, but justifiable. Progressive sexual ethics are like thrown horseshoes. Close is good enough.

Another example. In our task force we had an ex-officio member who was a gay Presbyterian elder. He was a very, very nice man, divorced and with joint custody of his children. He was also living with a much younger, gay partner. He worked with our task force after we made assurances that he would not be prosecuted for his self-disclosure, assurances we were glad to give. Nobody was eager for a witch hunt.

He was a sweet and helpful man. He dutifully fulfilled his church responsibilities. To his credit he and his partner had been faithful for a few years, a virtue not very common in the larger homosexual community.

Nevertheless, this elder and his partner still went to gay bars, not for reasons of promiscuity but for entertainment. They enjoyed watching the outrageous posing, posturing and badinage of other gay men on the prowl. Other members of the task force appeared unaffected by this admission, but I was stunned. I could not imagine a heterosexual, divorced, Presbyterian elder with her new and younger husband continuing to go to date clubs just for the entertainment value of watching promiscuous women and men try to pick up one another. I had always imagined that mating was an escape from, not a license for, the randy and duplicitous bar scene. Voyeurism, which would have repulsed me in a heterosexual couple, was represented as wholesome fun for a homosexual pair and was accepted uncritically by our task force, which had been charged with investigating these very standards of behavior for ordination. Our committee's situation and adjustable standard of modest immorality is the pragmatic sexual ethic with which progressives would replace "fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness."

At the end of the task force's work, as I recall, nearly everyone retreated to his or her original position, and we came to no consensus conclusions or recommendations. In October 1994 we sponsored and carried out a study day for the presbytery, which also came to no conclusions. But conclusive for me, apart from the many persuasive, intellectual, biblical arguments, was my own visceral, heterosexual experience.

On Sundays after worship I like to watch the married couples in our congregation assert their faithfulness in small, public displays of affection. I enjoy seeing the hugs, the draped arms, the pecks, the modest wrestling and playfulness that proclaims loyalty and love between wives and husbands. Happy marriages produce both happy adults and happy children, who grow up to become faithful believers and world changers. Who would ever want a gospel that changes the world but abandons families to be miserable at home?

Even more than I have enjoyed watching Christians love their spouses and families, I am heartened by Christian leaders who can balance their commitment for work, their compassion for dysfunctional churches (there are no functional churches, only semi-functional ones), and their passion for their families. There is a prowess, a poetic heroism to Christian leadership. I want to point it out to my kids. "There is a pastor and her husband kissing. I would love for you to grow up to be like that."

Here is where my heterosexism kicks in. At the end of the work of the task force when I

imagined homosexual Christian leaders in the same scenario, my stomach wrenched. I imagined wanting to avert my eyes and turn my kids around. No. I do not want my kids to grow up to be like that.

So, you see, the compassion and giftedness of gays has nothing to do with the issue of ordination. The question is one of being and integrity, not giftedness. They are homosexual. They are the same gender. They are not complementary sexes. They do not reproduce children. They don't have families naturally. They are images of one another. They are the same. This is love of the same, not love for an opposite, not love for an other. This is narcissism.

This is not to deny nor to gainsay the heroism and sacrificial love displayed by gays in AIDS communities. Some gays could teach a whole lot of straight folks a thing or two about love and wisdom and faithfulness. But, again, that is not the issue. The biblical prohibitions against homosexuality aside, could I point to gay Christian leaders and say to my kids, "I wish you would grow up to be just like that?" No. The answer is, "No."

The issue is not about relative integrity or inclusiveness or somebody's fear of strangers. The issue is not about making adjustments and exceptions in order for a square peg to fit into a round hole. There is no hole there at all. The issue is about two square pegs. The issue is about humans demanding that God accept them on their own terms. The issue is about humans declaring compatible what nature declares incompatible and God declares wrong. The issue is about humans attempting to conform reality and truth to the fashion that suits them at the moment.

Let's make the issue simple. Is homosexual practice a human good? Do you recommend it to your children? If homosexual practice were declared virtuous and practiced universally, the human race would be extinct in one generation. This is as plain as sunlight. Homosexual practice is acceptable to the human race only to the extent that it is practiced by a minority. Homosexual practice has little virtue in and of itself. Even faithful, mono-partner homosexuality, though laudable and at times even heroic, is of itself not virtuous. It is making the best of a bad situation.

Look at it another way. Open a Bible. Ignore the prohibitions against homosexuality, and ask this question, "Is God heterosexual?" Answer? Yes. Cover to cover God is a champion for heterosexuality.

Look at the introduction of Eve (Genesis 2.22-23). The Lord God brought her to Adam like a father simultaneously making introductions and giving away the bride.

Look at Adam's response. "This!" The Hebrew word for "this" is "zeh!" "Zeh!" both begins and ends Adam's exclamation. "Zeh!" is my favorite Hebrew word, a far more expressive, enthusiastic and vigorous word than the hissing English "this."

"This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh! This!" "Bone of bones and flesh of flesh" are examples of Hebrew superlatives, Hebrew superlatives which George Handel

put to good use in the Hallelujah Chorus: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords..." Now put Handel's tune to work in Genesis 2.23. It is fitting. "Bone of Bones! And Flesh of Flesh!" That rendition expresses the ecstatic heterosexuality of Adam and the wondrous creativity of the Lord God. No wonder that the first thing in the Bible that the Lord God declared not good was solitary and uncomplemented masculinity (Genesis 2.18).

Is God heterosexist? Look at Genesis 1.27. Complementary sexes are the expression of the likeness of God. Male and female. Not a human created in solitude, but complementary sexes in relationship express the community of the One God. Even though genders implicitly exist in the previously created animals, there is no mention of gender until the creation of humans because human heterosexuality is crucial to what it means to be human and crucial to the will of God. Heterosexuality is God's great invention! Vive la difference!

Look at the temptation story (Genesis 3). Even though the Lord God is rampantly heterosexual, God cannot prevent the second consequence of sin, the distortion of sexual relationships. Discordant sexual relationships are the result of sin, not alternative lifestyles, not the will of God, not inherent sexual preferences.

Look at the patriarchs in the rest of Genesis. Abraham and Sarah. Isaac and Rebekah. Leah and Rachel and Jacob. It is not an exaggeration to say that among the patriarchs the covenantal love of God was expressed almost exclusively through God's faithfulness within these heterosexual relationships.

Look at the prophets, among them Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea. Through them the Lord God pleads his love to the people of Israel and Judah repeatedly as a heartworn, faithful, caring husband..

Look at the gospels. Jesus tells wedding stories, endorses marriage, and repeatedly enjoins exclusive faithfulness within marriage.

Look at the epistles where marriages are boosted and built up and Christians are reminded to continue "honoring marriage and to keep the marriage bed exclusive" (Hebrews 13.4).

Look at the last book of the Bible, in the last two chapters. There the culmination of all salvation history is described in the image of a celestial wedding between Christ the Lamb and the bride, his people.

Finally, read the Song of Songs, lush, erotic, love poetry devoted to the exclusive, monogamous, covenantal love between a woman and a man. Heterosexuality has its own book of the Bible. An ancient rabbi said that the whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was written. "If a man were to offer all the wealth of his house to try to buy passionate, loyal, heterosexual love, he would get laughed out of the village." (Song of Songs 8.7b, my paraphrase) That kind of heterosexual love is the greatest song of all. That is why the book properly is titled not the Song of Solomon, but

the Song of Songs. The *Sher Hasherim* in Hebrew. Another Hebrew superlative! Play the Hallelujah Chorus again! Let's stand up and cheer!

Now, let's ask the question again. Is God heterosexual? Heterosexuality is the second greatest idea God ever had. The greatest idea was the cross, to love us to death (Revelation 13.8). The second greatest idea was to create an opposite sex, a complementary human other, who is like ourselves yet not like ourselves, to whom we must submit, whom we must love. Thus we humans portray both likeness to the Trinity (Genesis 1.27) and the sacrificial love of Jesus (Ephesians 5.29-32).

Is God heterosexual? More than Justin Rinaldi is Catholic. God is wildly, enthusiastically heterosexual! The whole Bible is filled with God's endorsement of heterosexuality. Marriage is the will of God for human happiness and fulfillment. Marriage is the passion play where God's identity is portrayed. Marriage is the relationship that was intended to produce new generations and disciple new believers. Marriage is the foundation of church life. And marriage is the language of Jesus' everlasting love for his bride. Is God heterosexual? God is overwhelmingly, eternally heterosexual.

But does God ever endorse homosexuality, homosexual practice or homosexual marriage? Never. Not once in the Bible. Silence. Not a peep.

Who would ever suggest to another human being that she or he has no share of God's great idea? What evidence is there to suggest that God might be having second thoughts after the Bible overwhelmingly expresses God's wonderful heterosexual plan? Does our God have a split personality? Is God human that he should change his mind? And who would tell God that God is unjust or sexist for mandating this unimaginably good gift?

Consequently, what can we conclude regarding the advocacy of Christian (I am speaking to Christians) homosexual marriage? It is not God's will. It is a mutiny against the overwhelmingly heterosexual will of God. It is a monstrous lie. It claims that God blesses that very behavior God never advocates, but condemns. Homosexual marriage is a contradiction in terms. Advocating homosexual marriage is calling "evil good and good evil, putting darkness for light and light for darkness, putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." Such folks are "those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight" (Isaiah 5.20-21).

The same can be said for those who advocate homosexual ordination. They oppose God. They thwart the heterosexual plan of a great God who expressly created complementary sexes for human enjoyment and his glory. In Scripture did God ever allow or establish other options and alternatives to his conjugal plan? Only singleness by commission or circumstance.

Advocates of homosexual ordination teach our children the lies that there is no difference before God between heterosexual and homosexual practice, no difference between marriages and partnerships, no difference between families and childlessness, no difference between having same sex parents on the one hand and both a mommy and a

daddy on the other because ordination confers God's approval as well as God's commission.(I Timothy 3.1-15; 5.21-22).

Ordained homosexuals can never be just an exception. The granting of ordination upon practicing homosexuals confers upon their lives and sexual practice the mantle of normative Christian discipleship. Ordination equates homosexual practice and marriage. Ordination of practicing homosexuals tells every Christian boy and girl, "I wish you would grow up and be like them," implicitly destining the PC(USA) to extinction in the next generation. The ordination of practicing homosexuals puts words of approval into the silent and closed mouth of a heterosexist God and proclaims, "Peace," where there is no shalom, only pretense. The ordination of homosexuals tells lies using the mouth of God.

When practicing homosexuals are ordained, the matter will conclude like this. The ordinations will continue until the practice is normative and universal in the denomination. Homosexual ordinations must continue and spread by force of logic because the issue is perceived by the progressives as a justice issue. Half an injustice is still an injustice. There are no halfway measures.

Those who stand to oppose gay ordination will be pressured, oppressed and removed. Right or wrong, this is how the Kenyon case was conducted. This is how matters are proceeding around gay ordination in the Episcopal Church. Why should we expect the outcome to be different this time in the PC(USA).

Advocacy of the holiness and exclusivity of marriage will be discouraged and suppressed throughout the PC(USA) on the grounds that such advocacy is heterosexist, prejudiced and offends homosexuals. We already hear accusations of heterosexism in the secular world. It will enter the church.

Not only that, why should we not see the suppression of heterosexism in the church when we are already witnessing the suppression of other "offensive" language or doctrines? The doctrine of the Father is rejected for specious reasons of patriarchalism. Prayer to the Father is virtually nonexistent. For twenty-five years I have listened to Presbyterians across the country prefer to pray in worship a generic "Almighty God" despite the instruction of Jesus himself and his suffering on the cross which purchased for us intimate access to the Father.

The Sonship of Jesus himself is considered sexist. Many churches avow Trinitarianism, but practice instead a generic deism ("God this...and God that...") for fear of offending pluralist sensibilities. The Name of Jesus is that "Name which is above every name" and the Name of incomparable power, but we dare not pronounce "Jesus" in Presbyterian circles for fear of sounding Southern or Baptist or both. Presbyterians prefer "Christ," an emptier title which we can redefine to suit our purposes. References to "king" are avoided because they are imperialist and present us with terms of discipleship that are nonnegotiable.

The blood atonement is considered too violent by the elitists (but not by the poor in my city whose own suffering are given dignity and significance by fellowship with a bloodied Savior). The bodily resurrection and physical return of Jesus are avoided for being too simplistic and naively literalist.

The ordination of homosexuals is one more vote against "the gospel once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3) in favor of the vapid and impotent homogenization of religious sentiment and the ecclesiastical practice of the sin of Jereboam (I Kings 12.28-33; Jeremiah 5.30-31).

Rev. Bruce Becker is pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Olney in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania