



To Be Or Not To Be

I recently read an article about the Senior Pastor of a large American congregation who, at a conference designed to be of assistance to both the parents of LGBTQI+ children and young Christians who identified as LGBTQI+, spoke about his own sexuality and his own decision to be celibate in order to comply with what he understood to be the "biblical" principles of sexuality.

I must confess that it made for rather depressing reading. Aside from repeating the old canards about the Bible's alleged condemnation of LGBTQI+ sexual identity (all of which ignore the fact that Jesus had nothing whatsoever to say on the subject), the Senior Pastor spoke about remaining single and celibate in order to avoid the "temptation" represented by the prospect of intimate relations with another human being. In other words, because of his understanding about his own sexuality, and because he believes his sexuality to contradict what he understands to be the teaching of the Bible, he has instead chosen to remain celibate rather than (as he put it) do "what the Devil says".

To begin with, his position misunderstands the nature of celibacy. Celibacy is not, as many imagine, a rational decision to refrain from sexual relations. On the contrary, celibacy, properly understood, is part of the spectrum of human sexuality in which a person does not engage in intimate relations with others precisely because that is how their sexuality expresses itself. Celibacy - or asexuality, to give it its technical term - is simply another of the many forms of

human sexual expression - it is not something that is done, it is something that is lived.

Secondly, human intimacy is not a source or ground for "temptation". Human intimacy is an aspect of what it means to be human. Yes, intimacy can be abused and utilised for manipulative or destructive purposes - but that is not a feature of intimacy itself, it is a consequence of humanity's capacity to do wrong. To regard one's own feelings of attraction toward or desire for another person as "temptation" is both to distort the nature of our own humanity as well as to dehumanise the other. We don't feel attraction toward or desire for another because they are "tempting" us - we possess these feelings because they are part of what it means to be human. And to make someone else the cause or source of "temptation" is to objectify them, to make them an "other" whom we can then regard as less than human and respond accordingly.

Thirdly, as I have said elsewhere, the alleged biblical condemnations of non-heterosexual sexuality are contested and disputed, and assertions that the Bible provides a "clear teaching" on this subject ignore the fact that biblical scholars, historians, anthropologists, theologians, and many other experts are in passionate disagreement with one another about what such texts "mean". Moreover, such claims also ignore the fact that such texts form only a tiny fraction of the Scriptural canon, and are countered by other texts that emphasise non-judgmentalism, inclusion, and love.

The rather sad conclusion I drew from this article was that the Senior Pastor in question probably doesn't like himself very much, and so "practices" celibacy not because it reflects his true sexual identity, but because it has become a crutch upon which he can lean and disguise his own self-hatred from himself. In other words, he can construct for himself an elaborate identity as a "bible believing" Christian when in fact all he is doing is hating the essence of his own humanity and denying himself the possibility of the unique joy that comes

through intimacy between human beings. It all struck me as terribly sad and deeply broken.

Jesus taught us to "love the Lord your God" and to "love your neighbour as yourself". In these two principles, Jesus declared, lay the essence of the law and the prophetic tradition. (Matthew 22: 35-40). Yet how can we love God or our neighbour if we despise our own humanity, if we regard such fundamental aspects of ourselves such as our sexuality and our capacity for intimacy as something evil or corrupting, and if instead we construct a distorted identity for ourselves based in misconceptions such as "celibacy" being enforced asexuality? Jesus came to bring us life in all its fullness - yet we seem determined to find ways to impoverish and mangle our lives.

I recently received an email from a young gay couple whom I met many years ago in my previous ministry placement, but whom I have not seen since I moved across to Heathmont. They let me know that they had become engaged while on an overseas holiday, and enquired as to whether I would be willing to preside at their wedding. With great joy and humility I answered that I would be delighted to preside at their wedding, and that it was with profound gratitude that I thanked them for according me this great honour.

I cannot even begin to tell you with what joy I look forward to this day that celebrates the blessing of human love and intimacy, and the fullness of life into which Christ invites us all.

Four U News

The October meeting of Four U will take place in the Fellowship Room at HUC on **Monday October 9 at 2pm**. Brendan Byrne will be presenting a talk entitled Iceland: Journeys Through Space and Time. Full details can be found by [clicking this link](#).

CPP Theatre News

CPP Theatre Productions will be presenting their Annual Musical Show in October with performance dates **from October 6th to 14th** at the Mahon Theatre, Aquinas College, 46 Great Ryrie Street, Ringwood,

Bringing Charles Dickens' beloved novel to life, Lionel Bart's *Oliver!* will take you on a wild adventure through Victorian England, capturing your heart as well as your handkerchief. More details from their website, cppcommunitytheatre.com.au.

Blessings,

Brendan



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